



China: Land of Dragons and Emperors

Adeline Yen Mah

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A fascinating book about the history and culture of China.

The history of China spans thousands of years. Journey through China in this fascinating and absorbing book: discover the land of dragons and emperors, and learn about the significance of its ancient dynasties. Countless tools and materials that people have used every day for centuries—paper, gunpowder, cast iron, matches, and silk, to name just a few—were first made in China. Chinese society has progressed through major changes, but lucky numbers, festivals, beliefs about colors, the practice of footbinding, the building of the Great Wall, and the larger-than-life people of China are all integral parts of this ancient civilization and still have an impact on life today.

Bestselling author Adeline Yen Mah explores an extraordinary view of the great story of China over the last two millennia in this nonfiction work, which also includes black-and-white photographs.

Book Details: Format: Hardcover Publication Date: 6/9/2009 Pages: 256 Reading Level: Age 12 and Up

China: Land of Dragons and Emperors Details

Date : Published June 9th 2009 by Delacorte Books for Young Readers (first published January 1st 2009)

ISBN : 9780385737487

Author : Adeline Yen Mah

Format : Hardcover 240 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Cultural, China, Childrens, Travel, Historical

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Kathy says

Great little book on Chinese history. I was amazed how much was packed into this little book. A great introduction to the most populous country in the world. Interesting stories, interesting pictures, well-done. The only fault I find with the book is what some others have said: The textual editing is atrocious! The text is right- and left-justified, but sometimes you end up with a line with no spaces at all! I highly recommend the book, however, for the content.

Heather says

This book was fascinating and made me want to learn more. My only complaint has nothing to do with the author or the book, but with the copy editor. The tracking in multiple lines throughout the book was so overly condensed that words blended together and were hard to read. Very annoying, especially because the book itself is top-notch.

Erin Reilly-Sanders says

I really enjoyed this brief little history of China. I felt that the topics and people it focused within the different time periods were relevant, interesting, and consequently well-chosen. I would have really liked more constructed visuals that imparted information like more maps over time, city maps, buildings, and something that showed how long each dynasty lasted since the numbers are hard to relate to each other. While I really appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the book (nice size, good paper quality, lots of illustrations, different sections etc), I did find that many of the images were not well captioned (some were) and often seemed like they were a handy image rather than the best image. As a Chinese immigrant, the author seems to be a reliable source who can also translate ideas to western audiences. Overall it was rather decent and I would consider teaching as part of a non-fiction unit.

Jinbin says

In this book, Adeline Yen Mah leads the readers thousands of years back to the history of China. She starts the book telling the story of China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang. In chronological order, she goes on with the dynasties following the first and their significant roles in China's history. From this book, I learned that the Chinese first invented matches, paper, gunpowder and many other tools that people used. However, they were not smart enough to greatly utilize those tools. For example, the Chinese invented gunpowder which was later brought to Europe. While they used it for fireworks, the Europeans used it to make weapons. I think it was a little biased to say that Mao Ze Dong is a "bad" person. Even though the Cultural Revolution was a disaster to the Chinese, he did contribute positive things to China.

Helen Kang says

China is a country that carries thousand of histories that make it mysterious and ancient. Spanning 2,000 years of strife and victories, the book mainly focuses on China's six dynasties, which are introduced in chronological order and are followed by brief portraits of post-dynasty leaders. Straightforward narrative sheds light on the rise and fall of each empire, defining leaders' accomplishments as well as their acts of tyranny. Adeline Yen Mah, the author of the book, cleverly introduced China's significant events and the emperors. The emperor that I remember the best is Qin-shi-huang, he is a sensible leader who began to built The Great Wall of China. To him, Mah states: "Hard-working and disciplined, he read 55 kilograms (120 pounds) of reports written on bamboo slips every day." (And because he wanted Chinese history to begin with his rule: "He ordered all books written before him to be burned. Any scholar who dared to object was buried alive.")

Countless tools and materials that people have used every day for centuries—paper, gunpowder, cast iron, matches, and silk, to name just a few—were first made in China. After reading this book you will find that China is a brilliant country with brilliant people! Chinese society has progressed through major changes, but lucky numbers, festivals, beliefs about colors, the practice of footbinding, the building of the Great Wall, and the larger-than-life people of China are all integral parts of this ancient civilization and still have an impact on life today.

Due to the language that the author used and the history background of this book, this accessible book will be an invaluable resource for students and young history buffs. Ages 12–up.

Shirley Lee says

fabulous summary of the what's most important in China's history. would definitely recommend this book for someone who has little knowledge of the dynasties. most importantly, it's not boring or dense but indicates the importance of the 6 major dynasties. a lot of other books, list all the dynasties and it's way too confusing and complicated to comprehend especially with over 5000 years of history involved. what inventions did the chinese made? paper, wheelbarrow, crossbow, matches, silk, seismograph, gunpowder, cast iron, stirrups for horses, porcelain, printing and many more wonderful inventions. read this book to find out :)

Heidi says

I processed this book into the library collection last week but never really considered reading it until this year when the students began working on an Ancient China assignment and our collection was coming up rather short. Mah's book was catalogued as modern Chinese history, and I wanted to work out whether it was miscatalogued, and whether it could be helpful to kids in their ancient China assignment.

It is a *very* basic introduction to Chinese history; very much an overview. It (allied with some Avatar-related posts I've been reading around LJ, and IBARW stuff) has made me realise how much I don't understand about China, and how I do tend to view the entire Imperial era as some sort of pretty fantasy "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" world. Which is a major failing on my part, and something I would like to try to rectify in the future.

It was also fascinating to be in the middle of this book when watching the first of Tony ("Baldrick") Robinson's programs on the history of the British Legal system. There he was, talking about pre-1066 law in Britain, and I was comparing the dates he was talking about to where I was in the book and being flabbergasted by the difference.

Mah's description of the Qing dynasty provides an explanation of how China went from being so amazingly advanced to being considered "backwards". It also says nothing good about the Victorian-era Brits who seem to have been as narrow-minded as most white colonists and explorers (geeze, we can be dumb-as. ~sigh~)

This book really is a very good simple introduction to China.

Jana says

Informative and quite educational, this really helped a lot with some of my confusion about China's history and made me more curious to get a history book that would tackle this subject more thoroughly. Though I have to add, the edition I read was riddled with errors—thankfully, not typographical, but just the spacing wherethewordswouldgolikethis for some reason: a small error, to be sure, but annoying, nonetheless.

Emily says

Finished this book as a light reading in attempt to reconnect myself with my ancestry. The book was, honestly, a little dry but with interesting little nuggets smuggled in between. Very concise and easy to understand, but is not enough to feed the curious mind of a history student. It prompted me to re-watch Princess Pearl (Huanzhu Princess) series and taken my interest on old imperial chinese culture a little deeper. Refreshing.

Kristi says

Fantastically depicted history of China, informative and enjoyable without really feeling like you were in a classroom. I'm not really sure how to go about reviewing this novel, since I don't usually review nonfiction. I can't judge characters or plot..... since there aren't any.

I'm not usually a nonfiction fan, but I actually enjoyed reading this one. It didn't take me too long and it was actually interesting. The novel breaks down the book by Dynastys and explains what happened during that period of time. It also includes interesting tidbits, such as the Chinese Moon Festival or the invention of block printing.

Overall an interesting look into the history of China. I was very surprised by how much I didn't know.

Heidi says

Mah, author of the memoirs, Falling Leaves and Chinese Cinderella, has attempted to span 2200 years of

CHinese history in this one small book. Without a doubt, she succeeds, as she draws the readers into the world of silk, warlords, and dynasties. The text is well organized, mainly by dynasty, and anecdotal information is describe on pages printed with gray scrolls. Black and white photos, illustrations, and maps supplement the text. One item which detracted from the book was the lack of pagination references for maps. An example is the discussion of the Silk Road on pages 48-49; it would've been helpful to have a mention of "see map on pages 14-15." A caution for upper elementary and schools with moral issues to consider: a mention is made of an emperor's son forcing concubines to have abortions and also of attempting to rape one of his father's concubines.

Melissa says

This book blew me away. It think it was mostly the scope and subject that was so fascinating (though clean, clear writing helps). I honestly can't believe how little I've known about Chinese history. It was a "Hey, listen to this," sort of book for me. Some of those emperors were downright brutal. I even found myself ranting out of the blue at a family party about the heartless British opium trade. I only regret that much of this information was so new to me that I've already forgotten a great deal of it. Hopefully, it will provide me with reference points I can use as I learn more about China.

Why only four stars? The text formatting of this book needed some major help. The way the book was set, the word spacing shrunk in some places as to be virtual useless. So you ended up with lines that read like this. Ack.

Candy Mickelson says

This books is a very interesting young adult non-fiction book about China. It is very informative, but Yen Mah tends to take the standard history book approach and focus on imperial history and writes little about the everyday people. She states at the beginning of the book that China recorded history more precisely than other countries such as those in Europe, but she only seems to use that of the Emperors, which doesn't seem very impressive for the records, because most royalty information is kept very well. Still, she offers readers a rich look into Chinese culture by explaining proverbs, colors, and famous landmarks. She writes it in a way that is a good level for adolescents, yet her writing is not very engaging. Although she condenses the information well and explains sufficiently she does seem to do it in a very informative way and not in a "let me tell you about this awesome Chinese story." This is too bad because, China has such an interesting history and it could be such a great novel to inform adolescent about China. Yen Mah does show her deep pride in China through this book and expresses her desire to expose the world to the Eastern history in order to unite east and west. She wants to do this because she believes that China will be a great power in the 21st century and wants to help people understand it a little better.

Matt says

This book was quite useful as a quick introduction to Chinese history. Of course, given its length and nature as young-adult nonfiction, it lacked some detail and complexity. I particularly liked the few glimpses into Chinese culture (the meaning of colors, the inventions, etc.), but mostly the book was about the various emperors and the intrigues surrounding them. If that got repetitive, I suppose that says more about the human

lust for power than Mah's writing. It was interesting (and sad) to read about how advanced Chinese culture became at certain points in time, coming up with useful inventions and far exceeding the West, only to lose that emphasis on science and advancement. It's a reminder of the rise and fall of civilizations, when they get off-track.

Victoria says

China: Land of Dragons and Emperors, by Adeline Yen Mah, is a Nonfiction book about the history of China. It starts off with an author's note to the reader and then the author writes about meaningful Chinese symbols. Examples of those symbols are the primary Chinese colors and unlucky numbers. After this introduction, the author then writes about several Chinese dynasties until there was a Communist government. The six dynasties mentioned in this book were the Han dynasty, Tang Dynasty, Song Dynasty, Yuan Dynasty, Ming Dynasty, and Qing Dynasty. Everything was in chronological order and you learn many interesting things about Chinese history.

I liked this book because I learned a lot about Chinese history and the inventions created as time passes. Chinese inventions that were stated in the book were paper, the wheelbarrow, crossbow, matches, silk, seismograph, gunpowder, cast iron, porcelain, and printing. The events flow smoothly and they are never boring. The author did a good job describing this thoroughly and in a concise manner. She shortens history into small but detailed descriptions so the reader wouldn't get bored easily.

I would recommend this book to people who like history and want to learn more about China. Chinese history was recorded better than the history of some other countries. From the Han dynasty, historians kept a diary of the major events happening in China. They were then collected to form China's ancient and national history. Some Chinese people had changed the world dramatically with the inventions of printing, gunpowder, and the compass. Today, one-fifth of the world population is Chinese. China is an English-speaking nation and it could might become the world's largest manufacturer and consumer. It would be a good idea to start reading about China and this book would help you greatly because it already describes some Chinese history and symbols.
