

ATO 3M: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CHINA AND YANGGE DANCE*Country full name*

中国 [Zhong Guo]
The People's Republic of China

Language

Mandarin, also known as [Hanyu](#), or [Putonghua](#), is the literal translation of common language. Although ethnic groups in China speak different dialects, they usually can communicate in Mandarin. More than 90% of the Chinese population belongs to the Han ethnic group. In total there are more than 1 billion people who speak Mandarin, which makes it the most spoken language in the world.

Physical Geography

China is located in East Asia on the western shore of the Pacific Ocean. The map of China is similar to a shape of a rooster. It has a land area of about 9.6 million square kilometers, the third largest country in the world after Russia and Canada. A total of 5,400 islands can be found in China's vast territorial waters. China has a border of 22,117 kilometers and shares it with 15 counties:

Korea to the east;

The People's Republic of Mongolia to the north;

Russia to the northeast;

Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, and Tajikistan to the northwest;

Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan to the west and southwest;

Vietnam, Lao and Myanmar to the south.

Across the seas to the east and southwest are the Republic of Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

National flag

The national flag of the People's Republic of China is a red rectangle emblazoned with five stars. The color red symbolizes revolution and communism. Of the five stars, the big one stands for the communist party of China and the four small stars signifies the ethnic groups in China.

National anthem

[义勇军进行曲](#) or Yi Yong Jun Jin Xing Qu. The Chinese national anthem was written in 1935. Lyrics were written by the poet Tian Han and the music was composed by [Nie Er](#). It officially became the national anthem on December 4, 1982.

History

The history of China dates back several thousand years. After centuries of migration and amalgamation, China has developed a distinctive system of

writing, philosophy, art, and political organization that is recognized as Chinese civilization(*Chinese history introduction*.2009). It stands out in world history because of its continuity through over 4,000 years to the present day.

Chronology of Chinese History
Time

Xia Dynasty		2070-1600 B.C.	
Shang Dynasty		1600-1046 B.C.	
Zhou Dynasty	Western Zhou	1046-771 B.C.	
	Eastern Zhou	770-256 B.C.	
	Spring and Autumn Period Warring States Period	770-476 B.C. 475-221 B.C.	
Qin Dynasty		221-206 B.C.	
Han Dynasty	Western Han	206 B.C.-A.D. 25	
	Eastern Han	25-220	
Three Kingdoms	Wei	220-265	
	Shu Han	221-263	
	Wu	222-280	
Western Jin Dynasty		265-317	
Eastern Jin Dynasty		317-420	
Northern and Southern Dynasties	Southern Dynasties	Song	420-479
		Qi	479-502
		Liang	502-557
		Chen	557-589
	Northern Dynasties	Northern Wei	386-534
		Eastern Wei	534-550
		Northern Qi	550-577
		Western Wei	535-556
		Northern Zhou	557-581
Sui Dynasty		581-618	
Tang Dynasty		618-907	
Five Dynasties	Later Liang	907-923	
	Later Tang	923-936	
	Later Jin	936-947	
	Later Han	947-950	
	Later Zhou	951-960	
Song Dynasty	Northern Song	960-1127	
	Southern Song	1127-1279	
Liao Dynasty		907-1125	
Jin Dynasty		1115-1234	
Yuan Dynasty		1206-1368	
Ming Dynasty		1368-1644	
Qing Dynasty		1616-1911	
Republic of China		1912-1949	
People's Republic of China		Founded on October 1, 1949	

Population

China is the most populous country on the planet. According to Google Population, there are approximately 1.4 billion people in China, which accounts to almost 20% of the world's population(*Chinese population.2009*).

Ethnic Groups

China is the home of 56 ethnic groups. Among them, the Han people dominate 92% of the entire Chinese population. In other words, more than one billion people or one out of every six people in the world belongs to the Han ethnic group. The remaining 8% is comprised of 55 ethnic groups (Lou, 2009). Since the majority of the population is of the Han ethnic group, China's other ethnic groups are customarily referred to as the national minorities.

Chinese characters

Sample writing

人 = people	水 = water	伞 = umbrella 傘	中国 = China 中國
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Chinese is considered as one of the most challenging languages to learn and use in the world. It contains complicated characters—simplified and traditional characters; most of China uses simplified characters. Mandarin has four intonations. However, there are many words that can sound the same but have different meanings. According to Kang Xi (equivalent to the Oxford dictionary in the West) and Hanyu Da Cidian (Chinese Lexicon), Chinese has approximately 50,000 characters. However, there are only about 3,000 characters that are commonly used at present.

Festivals

Chinese major traditional festivals are:

- New year's day (January 1st)
- Spring festival (or commonly described as Chinese Lunar New Year)

This is the biggest festival in China and usually takes place in the month of January or February, depending on the traditional calendar

- Lantern festival (also called [Yuanxiao Jie](#))
The fifth day of the first month of the year
- Dragon boat festival (also called [Duanwu Jie](#))
The fifth day of the fifth month of the year
- [Qixi festival](#) (also described as Chinese Valentine's day)
Seventh day of the seventh month of the year
- Children' day festival
First day of June

- Double ninth festival (a festival for seniors)
Ninth day of the ninth month of the year(*Chinese festivals.2009*)

There are many political and cultural festivals such as Chinese Liberation Day (October 1st), Communist Party's birthday (July 1st), and others. Chinese citizens usually get one or more day(s) off for these public holidays.

Ethnic dance

Ethnic dance in China is also described as folk dance or national dance. Each of the 56 ethnic groups has its own variations in terms of the details of the dance and the way it is presented. Ethnic dance is considered as a major part of the Chinese traditional culture and it represents China's long history and diverse ethnic groups.

This project focuses on one ethnic dance style, *Yangge*. Since Han people occupies more than 90% of the Chinese population, *Yangge*, is seen as one of the most dominant Han ethnic dance style in China. *Yangge* has a long historical and cultural background and it has always been closely connected with the Chinese people's ideas, labor and daily life.

Yangge

Location

Yangge originated in central and northern China, which includes [Liaoning](#), [Heilongjiang](#), [Jilin](#), and [Hebei](#) provinces. Geographically, *Yangge* is widely spread out from [Beijing](#) (central China) all the way to [Songhua](#) River in northeast China. It is a popular ethnic dance style and it is recognized both formally and informally.

Formal

Many fine arts schools and colleges have *Yangge* as a subject to learn because it is recognized as one of the most influential ethnic dance styles in China. For instance, in Beijing Dance Academy, a student can major in *Yangge* for the entire university stay until graduation. There are annual *Yangge* festivals and symposiums in different cities across China. There are even some *Yangge* competitions in the cities of northeastern China.

Informal

Basic *Yangge* steps are simple and many movements are systematically patterned. Because of its informality and easy-to-learn styles, it has been accepted and practised by citizens all over China for decades. It is especially popular in northeastern cities. In general, *Yangge* takes place on streets in the summer, especially starting at sunset till evening. In the winter when it is cold, people dance *Yangge* in community centers, schools, and factory halls.

History background

According to historians, *Yangge* was first recorded in the Song dynasty (A.D. 960 – 1279). People, mostly farmers, danced *Yangge* during breaks or after work. After hundred years of development, *Yangge* developed into a self-taught form of entertainment in many rural villages and small counties. Later on, farmers migrated into the city and *Yangge* followed. *Yangge* was a popular dance form among the People's Liberation Army of China, as most of its members were originally farmers and poor people (*Yangge history in china*.2008; Pan, 2001). They helped spread *Yangge* during the internal war between 1940s and 1950s. It became one of the most well known ethnic dance forms in China thereafter.

Regional background

Yangge has a long history, beginning in Northern Chinese cities (Liao Ning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang provinces). For centuries, this land has been the most important agricultural base for the whole country because of its massive land and fertile soil.

Fall is the busiest season for northern farmers with the harvest from a year of hard work. Around this time of year, hundreds of people celebrate their harvest by dancing *Yangge* and drinking wine. During the non-farming seasons, they gather around after dinner and dance *Yangge* to express their excitement and joy.

Yangge originated in the working life shared by farmers and villagers. While planting and harvesting, these people dance *Yangge* as an ancient way to worship God for the harvests and to pray against disasters. There are many

forms of *Yangge*; examples include singing, martial arts, acrobatics, folk opera, and concerts. One of the most common styles is *Yangge* dance, which is usually accompanied with folk songs and music. In recent years, *Yangge* has become a well-known ethnic dance form in China.

Five Ws about Chinese dance (who, what, where, when, and why)

In many Chinese cities, for almost every major holiday, people spontaneously organize *Yangge* performances and competitions. People of all ages dance *Yangge* for different purposes. Young children dance *Yangge* for fun. They often congregate at a local market or an open public venue in the morning or in the early evening with their parents or grandparents to dance *Yangge*. Some young adults dance *Yangge* for entertainment and others do it to make new friends. These events are often organized and promoted locally by a “middle person” (a matchmaker). Seniors dance *Yangge* to socialize as well as to maintain a healthy lifestyle. In recent years, *Yangge* has become modified and incorporated into some aerobic exercise sequences.

Yangge costume

Professional *Yangge* dancers or teams wear bright color costumes (mostly red, blue, and yellow). Colors usually contrast each other to highlight the energetic spirit and dramatic styles of the dance. Dancers put on different costumes to show characters or tell stories.

Yangge props

People usually dance *Yangge* with props. Fans and handkerchiefs are the most common props. Professional *Yangge* dancers manipulate these props in their hands and show off different tricks such as *Shai Hua*, in which they throw a handkerchief away in the air and it flies back on its own. *Tuan Juan* is another traditional technique in which a *Yangge* dancer flips a handkerchief in a circular motion and it spins so fast that it looks as if it was standing on its own.

Yangge musical instruments

Yangge dancers are usually accompanied by luos, drums, and suona. On the street or in the market, live musicians play loud and cheerful tunes to enrich the atmosphere and encourage more people to participate. During the performance, *Yangge* dancers usually dance to pre-recorded music.