History

Given its tendency towards colour and vibrancy, it's no surprise that the history of China's Southwest comes at you like an action-packed flick, full of brazen, unpredictable characters and dramatic, untamed scenery. With ruthless warlords, shifting dynasties, foreign intruders and civil turmoil, the Southwest has often served as China's frying pan – the hotbed of many fiery scenes with consequences that sputter out across the country. There's never a dull moment.

Stephan Haw squeezes a very concise and readable account of China's past into 300 pages in *A Traveller's History of China*.

TRADITIONALLY DIVERSE

One of China's earliest settlements was founded in Sìchuān and populated by settlers from the Yellow River basin, the oldest cradle of Chinese civilisation. It was in these very early days that the Southwest was established as a multi-ethnic domain; the whole of the region was inhabited by Thai-related tribes, who were joined by Miao and other migrating tribes around 2000 to 3000 years ago. Much of the west of the region was inhabited by Qiang tribes, ancestors of the Tibetans. By 3000 BC, a distinct culture had evolved in modern day Sìchuān, based on the kingdoms of Shu (which took in Chéngdū, parts of northwest Yúnnán and northwest Guìzhōu) and Ba (centred on the region between Yíbīn and the Three Gorges). By 1200 BC these kingdoms were joined by the agriculturally suave Dian culture around Kūnmíng.

Han Chinese settlers started to trickle into the area in the 5th century BC. As time went by, waves of Han migrants fleeing war, famine and the barbarian invasions of the north slowly shifted the demography of the region and brought it into the Chinese fold. Nevertheless, the region is still home to at least 26 different ethnic groups and, particularly in rural areas, many of their traditions are still very much a part of life. See Minority Cultures (p51) for more information.

IN THE BEGINNING

With each new discovery, archaeologists have continued to push back the year that humans first set up camp in China's Southwest. Some of the earliest multi-celled organisms ever discovered were unearthed in Guìzhōu, with one fossil encasing what is believed to be a 580-million-year-old embryo. The mind boggles. The Chéngjiāng region of Yúnnán has also been fertile ground for soft-bodied fossils, some of which have revealed so much about the evolutionary process that they have been listed as world cultural relics by Unesco. In fact, Yúnnán has established itself as one of Asia's earliest human hangouts, with an eight-million-year-old anthropoid skull dug up from its soil.

TIMELINE

c 3000 BC

A civilisation is well-established in modern-day Sìchuān, incorporating a number of minority, tribal cultures. It is a period of major advances, including the construction of the Dujiangyan Irrigation System near Chéngdū, still in use today.

604 BC

Laotzu, the founder of Taoism, is reputedly born. Aged 80, disillusioned, he leaves his job as keeper of the archives at the imperial court, to write his seminal text *The Way and its Power*.

551 BC

Confucius is born. Within half a century his teachings are deep-seated in Chinese society; however, they also remain at odds with many of the Southwest's minority cultures.

CHINESE DYNASTIES

Dynasty	Period	Site of capital
Xia	**2200–1700 BC**	
Shang	**1700–1100 BC**	Ānyáng
Zhou	**1100–221 BC**	
Western Zhou	1100–771 BC	Hào (near Xī'ān)
Eastern Zhou	770–221 BC	Luòyáng
Qin	**221–207 BC**	Xiányáng
Han	**206 BC–AD 220**	
Western Han	206 BC–AD 9	Xī'ān
Xin	AD 9–23	Xī'ān
Eastern Han	AD 25–220	Luòyáng
Three Kingdoms	**AD 220–80**	
Wei	AD 220–65	Luòyáng
Shu (Shu Han)	AD 221–63	Chéngdū
Wu	AD 229–80	Nánjīng
Jin	**AD 265–420**	
Western Jin	AD 265–317	Luòyáng
Eastern Jin	AD 317–420	Nánjīng
Southern & Northern Dynasties	**AD 420–589**	
Southern Dynasties		
Song	AD 420–79	Nánjīng
Qi	AD 479–502	Nánjīng
Liang	AD 502–57	Nánjīng
Chen	AD 557–89	Nánjīng
Northern Dynasties		
Northern Wei	AD 386–534	Dàtóng, Luòyáng
Eastern Wei	AD 534–50	Linzhang
Northern Qi	AD 550–77	Linzhang
Western Wei	AD 535–56	Xī'ān
Northern Zhou	AD 557–81	Xī'ān
Sui	**AD 581–618**	Xī'ān
Tang	**AD 618–907**	Xī'ān
Five Dynasties & Ten Kingdoms	**AD 907–60**	
Later Liang	AD 907–23	Kāifēng
Later Tang	AD 923–36	Luòyáng
Later Jin	AD 936–47	Kāifēng
Later Han	AD 947–50	Kāifēng
Later Zhou	AD 951–60	Kāifēng
Liao	**AD 907–1125**	
Song	**AD 960–1279**	
Northern Song	AD 960–1127	Kāifēng
Southern Song	AD 1127–1279	Hángzhōu
Jin	**AD 1115–1234**	Kāifēng, Běijīng
Yuan	**AD 1206–1368**	Běijīng
Ming	**AD 1368–1644**	Nánjīng, Běijīng
Qing	**AD 1644–1911**	Běijīng
Republic of China	**AD 1911–49**	Běijīng, Chóngqìng, Nánjīng
People's Republic of China (PRC)	**AD 1949–**	Běijīng

SPIRIT OF REBELLION

Home to dissidents, rebels and exiled officials, the final stomping ground of empires on their last legs and the breeding ground of rising empires, the Southwest has nurtured a fierce independent streak since its earliest days. When Chinese dynasties to the north were strong, they expanded and conquered, but whenever they grew weak and withdrew, independent kingdoms sprang up in their wake. Chinese emperors saw the region as a barbarian and pestilent borderland populated by wild and uncivilised tribes who were the first to rebel and the last to be brought back in line. However, it's this rebellious spirit that is the glue that binds the Southwest's history together. Today, while very much a part of China, the Southwest continues to maintain a distinctiveness. This comes from the remaining strength of the region's minority cultures, but is also a result of being so far from the say-so of Běijīng.

Nanzhao Kingdom

Throughout history, Yúnnán has been the most independent region of the Southwest and while the Chinese Tang dynasty took control of most of China in 619, Yúnnán remained divided into six independent kingdoms. Nanzhao, the most powerful of these, was established by the Bai people and based at Dàlǐ.

Initially allied with the Tang against the Tibetans, the Tang began to feel that the Bai were getting a little big for their britches and so, in the 8th century, a Tang squad of 80,000 troupes swept south to Dàlǐ to establish control. The Tang were soundly whipped (60,000 of them were massacred) by the Bai.

In the aftermath, the Nanzhao Kingdom established itself as a fully independent entity and took control of a large slice of the Southwest, reaching as far as Hanoi in the southeast, Sìchuān in the north, Zūnyì in the northeast

221 BC

Qin Shi Huang becomes China's first emperor after integrating the Southwest and unifying the country. He runs a brutal, tightly centralised government. The Qin dynasty falls after just 15 years.

206 BC–AD 220

Born into a peasant family, Liu Bang conquers China from his base in Sìchuān. The new emperor establishes the Han dynasty which rules for more than four centuries, during which the Sìchuān irrigation system is further developed.

c 100 BC

Chinese traders and explorers follow the Silk Road through the Southwest and all the way to Rome. The two empires become major trading partners.

c 50 BC

Some two and a half centuries after it was discovered by Emperor Shennong, China is the first country to document tea-drinking, primarily for its medicinal benefits.

AD 221

After the fall of the Han, the Sìchuān warlord Shu Han proclaims himself emperor. One of three claimants to the throne (the Three Kingdoms period), he is eventually defeated by northerners.

581–618

Nobleman Yang Jian reunifies China under the Sui dynasty. Under his successor, Sui Yangdi, the dynasty goes into rapid decline. Sui Yangdi is assassinated in 618 by one of his own high officials.

and Nánníng in the east, and during this time they dominated trade routes to India and Burma. They later joined forces with the Tibetans to sack Chéngdū in 829, transported tens of thousands of scholars and artisans back to Dàlǐ, and ruled as the most important kingdom in the Southwest for the next six centuries.

As time went on, Nanzhao rulers were wowed by the glories of the northern Tang, and Chinese culture began to spread like wildfire into the region. In the 10th century, the Nanzhao kingdom was deposed by ethnic Chinese rulers, however the independent kingdom of Dàlǐ continued right up until the Mongol invasion in 1252, when it was finally incorporated into the Yuan dynasty.

The Emperor and the Assassin (1999) is the epic tale of the first emperor of Qin and his lust for power. Woven with murder, love and political intrigue, this film is beautifully shot and a must-see whether you're a history buff or not.

Christ's Kid Brother & Other Rebels

By the mid-19th century, secret societies resisting the ruling Qing dynasty were forced inland by the British. These pirates took to shipping opium up and down the waterways of Guǎngxī and Guìzhōu (p29).

Increasing Han migration continued to force many of the local minority peoples off the best lands. Faced with such extreme hardship and humiliation, exacerbated by crippling taxes, rebellions sparked and spread through the region.

The first major revolt was the Taiping Rebellion, which burst out of Jīntián village (near Guìpíng in Guǎngxī, see p198) in 1851 and swept through Guìzhōu. Comprising forces of 600,000 men and 500,000 women, the Taipings eventually took Nánjīng three years later. The Taipings were led by Hong Xiuquan, a failed examination candidate whose encounters with Western missionaries had led him to believe he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ.

The Taipings forbade gambling, opium, tobacco and alcohol, advocated agricultural reform, and outlawed prostitution, slavery and foot binding. The rebellion took tens of millions of lives before being suppressed in 1864 by a coalition of Qing and Western forces – the Europeans preferring to deal with a corrupt and weak Qing government than a powerful, united China governed by the Taipings.

Before being squashed, the Taipings also hooked up with a large Miao rebellion in Guìzhōu. This rebellious group was led by Zhang Xumei and gained many military victories. By the time it was defeated by the Qing in 1871, it had cost several million deaths.

Another further rebellion to rock Yúnnán was sparked by rivalries between the Muslim and Chinese tin miners. A Muslim army (armed by the British) rose up in 1855 and was led by Sultan Suleiman. It quickly took on an anti-government nature when the Qing authorities sided with the Chinese. The Chinese army (armed by the French) slaughtered tens of thousands of Muslims and crushed the rebellion.

DYNASTIC-BOMBASTIC

In 221 BC, the rule of Qin Shi Huang trickled down into China's Southwest, pulling the area into China's dynastic rule and, for the first time, uniting the Chinese into a single empire. The Qin conquered parts of the Baiyu kingdom in eastern Guǎngxī along with the kingdom of Shu in present-day Sìchuān, where the dynasty's capital was established. While they didn't manage to spread into Yúnnán or Guìzhōu, sovereignty was acknowledged and Qin Shi Huang celebrated by honouring himself with the newly coined title of *huángdì,* or emperor. And thus began a string of dynastic rule that would try again and again (with varying success) to contain the Southwest.

www.chinaknowledge.de/History/history.htm has seemingly bottomless coverage of China's various dynasties and eras, with links to more specific information on everything from the religion to technology and economy of each period.

What did dynastic rule mean for China's Southwest? Dynasties often had a difficult time extending their rule into the Southwest, with its rebellious minority groups and rugged terrain. Many didn't even try, while others threw a loose noose around the territory but then turned a blind eye. Very few actually tried to rope the region in.

During the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), the *tǔsī* system was established, whereby a hereditary imperial title was bestowed onto local chieftains or headmen. The Chinese saw this as 'ruling barbarians with barbarians' and as long as local rulers maintained peace and paid their taxes they were largely left to their own devices. This system dominated imperial China's relations with the Southwest for two millennia.

Nevertheless, dynastic rule brought huge changes to China and these often impacted the Southwest in very real ways. The Qin dynasty (221–207 BC) introduced uniform currency, standardised script, weights and measurements, and by digging the Ling Canal in Guǎngxī, created a north–south waterway that was the linchpin in linking the region with the rest of the empire.

The Han dynasty sent exploratory missions through the Southwest to India, establishing the Silk Routes and opening channels of trade that would eventually provide a path for the introduction of Hinayana Buddhism from Burma. The short-lived Sui dynasty (581–618) brought administrative and land reform, a strengthened civil service at the expense of aristocratic privilege, and revisions in law code. The Tang dynasty (618–907) divided the empire into 300 prefectures (州; *zhōu*) and 1500 counties (县; *xiàn*), establishing a pattern of territorial jurisdiction that persists, with some modifications, to this day.

The Song dynasty (960–1279) is remembered for its advances in archaeology, mathematics, astronomy, geography, medicine and the arts. Brought on by the spread of rice cultivation, agricultural productivity boomed and eventually left a surplus of labour that was used to develop secondary industries, such as mining, ceramics and silk manufacture.

The introduction of paper money facilitated the growth of more urban centres and was the turning point in China's development of an urban culture. An educated class of high social standing became a distinguishing

618–907

Li Yuan establishes the Tang dynasty. It develops links with Persia, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan; Buddhism flourishes; and the plethora of literature produced earns this era the nickname 'Golden Age'.

690–705

Wu Zhao is China's first and only empress. Under her often cruel leadership the empire flourishes. She promotes Confucian scholars, but they force her to abdicate when she advocates Buddhism.

880–907

Rebels take the capital of Chang'an in 880, forcing the ruler to flee to Sìchuān. The Tang dynasty survives another 27 years, but is fatally weakened. Smaller, weaker kingdoms fill the political vacuum.

960–1279

Zhao Kuangyin begins conquering kingdoms – including Sìchuān – and reunifies China under the Song dynasty. The dynasty coexists with non-Chinese powers who eventually drive it south for its final 50 years, and it falls in 1279.

c AD 1000

The major inventions of the premodern world – paper, printing, gunpowder and the compass – are all commonly used in China. Under the Song dynasty, significant advances are also made in natural sciences, medicine, mechanics and mathematics.

1211

Mongol ruler Genghis Khan penetrates the Great Wall and two years later conquers Běijīng to establish the Yuan dynasty. It controls China for less than a century before it is convulsed with rebellion.

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feature of Chinese society as Confucianism achieved the dominance it was to retain until the 19th century.

The Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) brought shock waves of refugees to the Southwest as Han Chinese fled from the wrath of Genghis Khan and the Mongols. In addition to this, as many as one million Muslim mercenaries settled in Yúnnán to control and repopulate the devastated countryside. The population boom of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), brought on by the introduction of New World crops and increasingly efficient famine relief and flood control, also prompted mass migration to the Southwest as land-hungry Han took over aboriginal lands.

Marco Polo traipsed through the Southwest during the Yuan dynasty (1206–1368), travelling from Chéngdū to Kūnmíng and scribbling notes about crocodiles, rice wine and tattooed tribespeople.

Some of these changes, such as migration, had immediate effects. Others, like the introduction of standardised script, took longer to take root in the Southwest, but their effects have been equally pronounced on the cultures of the local people.

A Juggling Game

Dynastic rule was often tyrannical and forceful and, given the strong cultures of the region, it's not surprising that Chinese rule often clashed with independent groups in the Southwest. As their spheres of influence grew or dwindled, the dynasties were continually redrawing the map to include or rub out the Southwest.

The Qin conquered only eastern Guǎngxī and Sìchuān while the Han dynasty swept many of the far-flung vassal states under its skirts, including present-day Guǎngxī and Guìzhōu. Nevertheless, independent kingdoms still held sway in some of the Southwest: the Shu and Ba in Sìchuān, the Dian in Yúnnán and the Nanue around Guǎngxī. During the Three Kingdoms, the Han Shu controlled much of Guìzhōu and Yúnnán, but the region's clan-based settlements were largely left undisturbed. The strong Tang dynasty surged towards the Southwest and built garrison towns like Guìyáng and Ānlóng in the Guìzhōu and Guǎngxī region. Chinese control resumed all the way down to Annan ('the pacified south') in northern Vietnam.

While the Song's strong influence on Chinese culture influenced the Southwest, it had little direct involvement in the region. The Song emperor incorporated Sìchuān into the empire but supposedly drew a line across the Dàdū River on a map of Sìchuān and told his generals to forget about the lands to the south. The Song had few dealings with Yúnnán and, for a while, Zhuang rebels set up a short-lived kingdom in Guǎngxī.

It was during the Yuan dynasty, under the Mongol rule of Kublai Khan, that much of the Southwest was included into the empire. Khan reached Yúnnán (via Lugu Lake) and set up ruling centres at Kūnmíng and Dàlǐ. Both Yúnnán and Guǎngxī were formally brought into the imperial fold and the latter received its modern name for the first time. The China ruled by Kublai was the largest empire the world has ever known, stretching from the Ukraine and Persia to the northern limits of Vietnam.

The Ming dynasty saw the formal incorporation of the rest of the Southwest into the Chinese empire as political and military control of the region tightened. In reality though, semi-independent local fiefdoms still commanded their own armies and raised their own taxes throughout much of the Southwest.

Imperial rule was propped up by agricultural garrison-communities run by governors-general whose thankless job was to extend the control of the empire. They did this through various 'pacification campaigns' among the local minorities. One of the bloodiest battles in Guǎngxī's history was fought between imperial troops and Yao tribesmen near Guìpíng in 1465. Yúnnán was equally rebellious and Guìzhōu grew as a heavily garrisoned base for incursions into both provinces. When the Ming finally did fall, the remnants of the declining dynasty clung desperately to power in the Southwest, as the Song had done before them. The last Ming prince made a hopeless last stand in Gāolígòng Shān near the current border with Burma before finally fleeing to Mandalay.

'The Ming dynasty saw the formal incorporation of the rest of the Southwest into the Chinese empire.'

The reign of the Qing was a period of great prosperity, although it was four decades before the dynasty finally stamped out the Ming loyalist forces from the south. A mass migration of Han Chinese into the region took the Qing administration with it.

Oertai, a Manchu nobleman, was made governor-general of Guìzhōu, Yúnnán and Guǎngxī and given a mission to bring the local tribes under imperial control. To accomplish this, he was to abolish the powerful local *tǔsī* (土司; p27) headmen who had been effectively ruling the region for centuries.

Oertai soon had ethnic conflict on his shoulders. An uprising in 1726 led to the beheading of 10,000 Miao tribespeople; a further 400,000 starved to death in an ensuing famine. A similar rebellion is believed to have taken place in 1797 among the Bouyi. Suppressing these rebellions placed an enormous strain on the imperial treasury, ultimately contributing to the end of dynastic rule in China.

WHEN THINGS GOT HAIRY

In the mid-18th century China remained inward-looking and seemingly oblivious to the technological and scientific revolutions taking place in Europe. Before long, the 'hairy barbarians' (Westerners) were landing on their shores and by 1760 they were banging at the gate.

Up in Smoke

The early Qing emperors showed a relatively open attitude towards Europeans in China, but by the 18th century this had changed. Qianlong, ruler

1368

Zhu Yuanzhang, an orphan, leads a peasant revolution. He reunifies China and establishes the Ming dynasty, conquering Sìchuān from Mongol rule in 1371 and then pushing south to take Yúnnán.

1406

Ming Emperor Yongle begins construction of the 800 buildings of the Forbidden City. The Imperial Palace takes 14 years to complete by an estimated 200,000 workers.

1557

The Portugese establish a permanent trading post in Macau, after paying a tribute to Běijīng. The next 100 years are considered Macau's golden age, as trade booms between Portugal and China.

1644

The northern Manchus march into Běijīng and proclaim the Qing dynasty. Shunzhi is installed as its first emperor on 30 October. The Qing dynasty lasts until the end of China's dynastic rule in 1911.

1661–1735

The emperor Kangxi extends Qing rule to the Southwest and leads two major expeditions in the far west. Kangxi's 61-year reign makes him the longest-serving emperor in China's history.

1751

Tibet becomes a Chinese colony. With the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, Tibet enters a period of de facto independence until 1950 when China invades (or, from the Chinese perspective, 'liberates').

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from 1736 to 1795, imposed strict controls on maritime trade, which from 1757 was limited to the single river port of Guǎngzhōu.

Nevertheless, as the British, Dutch and Spanish pried open the Chinese markets from Guǎngzhōu, trade began to flourish – in China's favour. The British couldn't get enough of China's tea, silk and porcelain, and their shopping far outweighed the Chinese purchases of wool and spices. In 1773 the British decided to balance the books with sales of opium. Opium had long been a popular drug in China, but had been outlawed in the early 18th century.

Despite strong Chinese prohibitions, opium addiction in China skyrocketed and, with it, so did sales. Anti-drug laws were far from effective as many officials were opium addicts and therefore assisted in smuggling the drug into China.

'By the early 19th century the opium trade had grown to the point of shifting the trade balance in favour of the Westerners.'

By the early 19th century the opium trade had grown to the point of shifting the trade balance in favour of the Westerners. Opium had become the main crop among the warlords and minorities of the Southwest; the land and its people were saturated in it. Opium was even used as local currency in some places.

The Chinese Government's attempt to halt the illegal traffic in 1839 brought about the famous Opium Wars. The result was the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, which left Hong Kong in the hands of the British 'in perpetuity'. This was soon followed by the British leasing the New Territories and adjoining Kowloon for 99 years, with the promise that the entire colony would be returned to Chinese control at the end of the lease. This handover took place with much fanfare in 1997.

An Unexpected Dinner Date

As imperial control loosened, the Western powers began moving in. A war with France in 1858 (to avenge the murder of a French missionary in Guǎngxī) and another from 1883 to 1885 allowed the French to maintain control of Indochina and carve out Yúnnán and Guǎngxī as their designated sphere of influence. Wúzhōu to the east was prised open to foreign trade in 1897 and Nánníng followed 10 years later. In 1903 France started to build the railway line from Haiphong and Hanoi to Kūnmíng, a line which would soon become the province's main link to the outside world. By 1911 one million Chinese were riding the train every year.

In the latter half of the 19th century, the British were also creeping closer to China's Southwest. Occupying the Kachin state of northern Burma, they persuaded one of Yúnnán's local *tǔsī* headman to defect to the British cause and thereby snatched a strategic section of land. In 1891, 500 British troops briefly occupied Jǐnghóng and began to toy with the idea of building a railway line from Burma to Yúnnán. When a British commercial agent was killed during an exploratory mission to the Yúnnán–Burma border, the British used his murder as a means to extract more trade concessions from the Qing. In 1900 a British gunboat docked in Chóngqìng for the first time.

By the turn of the century, the European powers were on the verge of carving up China for dinner, a feast that was thwarted only by a US proposal for an open-door policy that would leave China open to trade with any foreign power.

Japanese Invasion

The early 1930s saw a great deal of political upheaval in China, namely between the communists and the Kuomintang (KMT; Nationalist Party). This gave the Japanese the opportunity they'd been waiting for. In September 1931 they invaded and occupied Manchuria, setting up a puppet state with Puyi, the last Manchu emperor. So obsessed were the KMT with the threat of the communists, they did nothing to resist Japan's invasion. The KMT was bitterly criticised for not defending China against the Japanese and eventually the party's leader, Chiang Kaishek, was taken hostage by his own generals in an attempt to force an anti-Japanese alliance with the communists. This did little to halt the advance of the Japanese.

'The early 1930s saw a great deal of political upheaval in China, namely between the communists and the Kuomintang.'

Japan launched an all-out invasion in 1937, taking most of eastern China and advancing as far as Nánníng in central Guǎngxī. Human experiments in biological warfare factories and 'burn all, loot all, kill all' campaigns quickly made it one of the most brutal occupations of the 20th century. By 1939 the Japanese had overrun most of eastern China and had reached Nánníng in central Guǎngxī. China experienced massive internal migrations and was subjected to a process of divide and rule through the establishment of puppet governments.

Ironically, the war proved to be a huge boost to the economy and industrialisation of the Southwest. The KMT was forced into retreat by the Japanese occupation and, from 1938 to 1945, Chóngqìng (p436) became the new seat of the Nationalist government. Then a higgledy-piggledy town piled up on mountains in the upper reaches of the Yangzi River, the city was subjected to heavy Japanese bombardments, but logistical difficulties prevented it being approached by land. Entire factories were shifted upstream and China's best universities relocated to Kūnmíng and Chéngdū, along with an estimated 60 to 80 million Chinese. Guìlín (p154) became a major air-force base.

In 1942 the Japanese overran Burma and cut off the Burma Road. The allies were forced to build another road, this time from Ledo in northeast India. An allied plane service began operating from British India over the Himalayas into the airfields of Kūnmíng and Lìjiāng. The route was extremely hazardous (an average of 13 planes were lost each month) but it ensured supplies until the new road opened in 1944. The Japanese eventually reached Téngchōng in Yúnnán and even got as far as taking Guìlín and Wúzhōu in 1944 before their surrender in 1945.

1839

China confiscates and destroys 20,000 chests of opium smuggled into the country by Britain, setting off the first of two Opium Wars. Britain's superior military power overwhelms Qing forces.

1842

Following its defeat in the first Opium War, China gives favourable trading terms to Britain, hands over Hong Kong in 'perpetuity', and allows British missionaries to work in China.

1850

The anti-Qing Taiping Rebellion erupts in Guǎngxī province, but ultimately fails to establish its Christian ideology throughout China. An estimated 20 million civilians and soldiers die in the conflict. Major revolts are defeated elsewhere, including Yúnnán.

1894–1931

China and Japan go to war, initially over Korea and then in Manchuria. Japan wins an overwhelming victory and establishes a concession in Manchuria. Modernisers in China begin to work for reform.

1908

Two-year-old Puyi ascends the throne as China's last emperor. In 1911 a revolt led by Sun Yatsen establishes a republic. Puyi is forced to abdicate and is eventually expelled from Běijīng in 1924.

1912–27

Sun Yatsen hands over the presidency to general Yuan Shikai, who tries to impose centralised rule on the divided nation, and then declares himself emperor. The move fails, and China is divided among regional warlords.

THE EMERGENCE OF A REPUBLIC

China's final dynasty, the Qing, managed to cling to power until 1911. The short-lived Boxer Rebellion, led by a xenophobic group who violently attacked foreigners with the support of secret charms, martial arts and the support of the Qing Court, was defeated in 1900 by a combined British, US, French, Japanese and Russian force. This resulted in the foreign forces levying yet another massive indemnity on the Qing government and the ruling empress finally admitting the reality that China was too weak to survive without reform.

The civil service examinations (based on irrelevant 1000-year-old Confucian doctrines) were abolished, but other reforms proved to be a sham and little changed. Meanwhile, secret societies were in league to bring down the dynasty. To make matters worse for the Qing, the empress died in 1908 and left two-year-old Puyi to take over the throne. The Qing was now rudderless and teetered on the brink of collapse.

Mr China's Son: A Villager's Life is an autobiography written by He Liyi, an English-language teacher. The story chronicles how events of the 20th century played out in a small, Bai minority village in remote Yúnnán. The language is slightly halting but the story is captivating.

As an increasing number of new railways were financed and built by foreigners, public anger grew and gave birth to the Railway Protection Movement that spread and quickly took on an anti-Qing nature. The movement turned increasingly violent, especially in Sìchuān. In 1911 republican revolutionaries saw the large-scale Railway Protection Movement as a vehicle to victory over the Qing and hopped on the back of it. The Republicans soon gained support throughout China and rose to power. Two months later, representatives from 17 provinces throughout China gathered in Nánjīng to establish the Provisional Republican Government of China. China's long dynastic rule had reached its end.

China's Provisional Republican Government was led by Sun Yatsen, a Christian and trained medical practitioner educated in Hawaii and Hong Kong. Sun developed a political programme based on 'Three Principles of the People': nationalism, popular sovereignty and livelihood, and his revolution was supported by Chinese communities abroad, as well as by disaffected members of the Qing army. Following early republican uprisings, Sun had fled China in 1895 and watched his campaign succeed from abroad. In 1911 he returned to his homeland and was named president.

Lacking the power to force a Manchu abdication, Sun had no choice but to call on the assistance of Yuan Shikai, the head of the imperial army. The republicans promised Yuan Shikai presidency if he could negotiate the abdication of the emperor, which he achieved. The favour cost the republicans dearly. Yuan Shikai placed himself at the head of the republican movement and forced Sun Yatsen to stand down.

Yuan lost no time in dissolving the Republican Government and amending the constitution to make himself president for life. When this met with regional opposition, he pronounced himself China's newest emperor in 1915. Yúnnán seceded, taking Guǎngxī, Guìzhōu and much of the Southwest with it. Forces were sent to bring the breakaway provinces back into the imperial ambit, and in the midst of it all, Yuan died.

Between 1916 and 1927, the government in Běijīng lost power over the far-flung provinces and China was effectively fragmented into semi-autonomous regions governed by warlords.

COMMUNISM

Communism is a word quickly associated with China. For Westerners it often conjures up images of navy blue Mao suits, poverty and colourless cities. However, communism in China has taken many forms and has been far from stagnant. At times flourishing and at times horrific (see boxed text, p196), the influence of the communists has been far-reaching. Like their dynastic predecessors, the communists have struggled in their efforts to 'tame' the Southwest, however their success in bringing the region into the Chinese fold can hardly be denied. Regardless of whether one sees it as positive or negative, the communist impact has doubtlessly been profound.

Li Zhisui, Mao's personal physician, tells us everything from the sexual habits to political views of his patient in *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*. An equally disturbing biography is found in *Mao: The Unknown Story* by Jung Chang (author of *Wild Swans*) and Jon Halliday.

Soldiers Marching

By the 1920s the KMT had emerged as the dominant political force in eastern China. Headed by Chiang Kaishek (1887–1975), the party had direct control over only about half of the country; the rest, including the entire Southwest, was still ruled by local warlords. The main opposition to the KMT came from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), made up of Chinese Marxist groups who had joined together in 1921.

At the time, China was heavily laden with social problems: child slave labour, domestic slavery and prostitution, the destitute starving in the streets, and strikes suppressed ruthlessly by foreign and Chinese factory owners. The CCP proposed solutions to these problems, namely the removal of the KMT. Not surprisingly, Chiang became obsessed with stamping out the influence of the CCP. He attempted to expand his own power base by wringing power from the remaining warlords and then, in 1927, he took more direct action and ordered the massacre of over 5000 Shanghai communists and trade union representatives.

In this same year, the CCP became divided in their views of where to base their rebellion against the KMT – in large urban centres or in the countryside. After costly urban defeats, the tide of opinion started to shift towards Mao Zedong (1893–1976), who advocated rural-based revolt and guerrilla warfare. While the campaign met with some success, particularly in Guǎngxī, the communist armies remained small and hampered by limited resources. It wasn't until 1930 that the ragged forces had turned into an army of around 40,000, which presented such a serious challenge to the KMT that Chiang waged extermination campaigns against them. He was defeated each time, and the communist army continued to expand its territory.

1926
Chiang Kai-shek rises to power and leads the Northern Expedition out of Guangdong defeating major warlords one by one and proclaiming the Republic of China with its capital in Nánjīng.

1931
From their concession in Manchuria, Japanese troops conquer China's three northeastern provinces. They proclaim it the new nation of Manchukuo under Puyi as emperor.

1934
Close to defeat in their base in Jiāngxī, the communists stage the year-long Long March, which covers 6000 miles through the Southwest and into Sìchuān. On the way Mao Zedong asserts himself as the communist leader.

1937
Japan launches full-scale war on China in the north. A second front opens up in Shānghǎi. The Nationalists retreat. Chiang moves his capital to Chóngqìng in Sìchuān. Yúnnán becomes a major route for American aid supplies.

1945–9
A full-scale civil war erupts between Nationalists and communists. At first the Nationalists do well, backed with heavy US aid. But the communists fight back to first take Manchuria and Běijīng, and then Nánjīng.

1949
On 1 October Mao Zedong proclaims the People's Republic of China. Having taken refuge in Sìchuān, Chiang Kai-shek flees to Taiwan. The US places a protective naval blockade around the island to prevent a communist attack.

Chiang's fifth extermination campaign began in October 1933. Many of the communist troops had begun disregarding Mao's authority and instead began meeting Chiang's troops in pitched battles. This strategy proved disastrous. Within a year the communists had suffered heavy losses and were hemmed into a small area in Jiāngxī.

On the brink of defeat, the communists decided to retreat from Jiāngxī and march north through the Southwest to Shaanxi to join up with other CCP armies. Rather than one long march, there were several, as various armies in the south made their way north. En route, the communists confiscated the property of officials, landlords and tax collectors, and redistributed land to the peasants whom they armed by the thousands with weapons captured from the KMT. Soldiers were left behind to organise guerrilla groups that would harass the enemy.

The marches brought together many people who held top positions after 1949, including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Lin Biao, Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi. It also established Mao as the paramount leader of the Chinese communist movement. Along the way, the posse took a breather in Zūnyì (p145), Guìzhōu; if you're in the neighbourhood, you can take in some of the sights. Serious Long March history buffs might also check out Lúdìng (p391) in Sìchuān.

The communists' early strategy was summed up in their four-line slogan: *The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.*

The People's Republic

The People's Republic of China (PRC) began as a bankrupt nation in October 1949. Unbridled inflation and a KMT legacy of economic mismanagement left the economy in chaos. The country had just 19,300km of railways and 76,800km of useable roads – all in bad condition. Irrigation works had broken down and livestock and animal populations were dwindling. Agricultural output plummeted and industrial production was half that of the prewar period.

In the Southwest, the KMT leader Ding Zuoshou was still very much at large in southern Yúnnán and it wasn't until two months after the official takeover that the PRC managed to push through to Kūnmíng, at which point Ding fled to Burma and northern Thailand with 1000 of his best troops. Taiwanese supply planes, aided by the CIA, started to fly arms and ammunition into this small base to prepare for a counter-attack on Yúnnán and soon the KMT troops numbered 12,000.

The KMT made a total of seven attempts to retake Yúnnán between 1951 and 1953 but was never successful. Thousands of KMT troops remained in the region until 1961 when 20,000 PRC troops crossed into Burma and finally overthrew the remaining KMT.

With the communist takeover, China seemed to become a different country. Unified by the elation of victory and the immensity of the tasks before them, the communists made the 1950s a dynamic period. They embarked upon land reform, recognised the role of women and attempted to restore the economy. By 1953 inflation had been halted, industrial production was back to prewar levels, and land had been confiscated from landlords and redistributed to peasants. On the basis of earlier Soviet models, the Chinese embarked on a massive five-year plan that was fairly successful in lifting production. The government also increased its social control by organising people according to work units (单位; *dānwèi*) and dividing the country in 21 provinces, five autonomous regions and two municipalities (Běijīng and Shànghǎi). Around 2200 county governments held jurisdiction over nearly one million party sub-branches. In the Southwest, the province of Xikang was incorporated in Sìchuān (1955) and Guǎngxī became an autonomous region (1958). The Southwest borderlands saw an intriguing and often tense mixture of traditional tribal culture and Soviet-inspired reform.

Relentless Reforms

'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.' Mao Zedong

Despite its initial triumphs, the early decades of the PRC saw the introduction of severe policies which resulted in suffering and growing distrust throughout the country. The Hundred Flowers Campaign showed the population the repercussions of criticising the government (opposite). The Great Leap Forward pushed the country into catastrophic poverty as people followed unquestionable production orders from above (opposite). Undoubtedly, the most ill-contrived reforms came with the Cultural Revolution (1966–76; p36), a purge of the arts, religion and culture that left neighbours and family members attacking one another, cultural relics levelled and a thick layer of fear draped across the populace. The Tiananmen Massacre of 1989, where peaceful pro-democracy protestors were flattened by the PLA's army, erased what moral authority the government still held. Captured by Western media, the CCP had bared its teeth for the world to see.

Like the rest of China, the Southwest was severely impacted by the enforcement of these policies. In addition to this, those Chinese who were condemned and persecuted through the various campaigns were often sent for thought reform and hard labour in the Southwest's remote reaches. These camps served not only to increase Han presence in the region but also reinforced the widespread belief that the Southwest was backward and that living there was a form of punishment. In some regions of China, this is still a commonly held opinion.

Despite the hardships it has brought (or perhaps because of them), the Chinese populace continues to declare strong support for the CCP. Particularly in rural areas, Han Chinese tow the party line with a mighty heave-ho and it's not uncommon to see Mao's portrait in rural households in the Southwest. Minorities, on the other hand, generally show a definite disinterest. Rarely will you find someone willing to question or criticise the government; the results have been shown to be far too severe.

1957

Mao Zedong launches the Hundred Flowers Campaign, encouraging open debate and criticism. But when he and the Communist Party come in for bitter criticism, the liberalisation is replaced by a major 'anti-rightist' purge.

1958–60

Mao's Great Leap Forward abolishes private property, establishes massive agricultural communes and ramps up steel production through enforced backyard furnaces. The result is disastrous. A famine follows that kills tens of millions.

1960

Mao frowns on the USSR's détente with the USA and Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation. When the Kremlin refuses to give China a prototype atomic bomb and sides with India in a border dispute, Sino–Soviet relations sink.

1966–76

Mao launches the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guards are directed to stamp out the four 'Olds': of customs, habits, culture and ideas. In Yúnnán, half of the temples are destroyed and 14,000 people are killed.

1971

The US table-tennis team becomes the first American delegation to set foot in China in 49 years. The following year, President Richard Nixon visits, meeting Mao and paving the way for a normalisation of bilateral relations.

1973

Having fallen out of favour during the Cultural Revolution, Sìchuān native and Long March veteran Deng Xiaoping is called back as senior vice-premier. By the end of the decade he emerges as China's de facto leader.

RUNNING (A) RIOT

Mao's extreme views, disastrous Great Leap Forward and opposition to bureaucratisation left him feeling isolated within the Party. To get back into the limelight of leadership, he set about cultivating a personality cult. Evidence of his mammoth success can still easily be found in market stalls across the nation, where Mao-embossed lighters, ashtrays and other random memorabilia continue to be sold. In the early 1960s a collection of Mao's selected thoughts were compiled into the 'little red book'. Studied by People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops and introduced into the general education system, this was to become one of the symbols of the era.

Around this time a play was released criticising Mao and a campaign began against it. The purge of the arts that followed led to the unfathomable Cultural Revolution (文化大革命; Wénhuà Dà Gémìng; 1966–76). Sanctioned by Mao, posters went up at Beijing University attacking its administration and Mao's opposition within the CCP. Before long students were issued red armbands and took to the streets. The Red Guards (红卫兵; Hóngwèibīng) were born. By August 1966 Mao was reviewing mass parades of the Red Guards in Tiananmen Sq, chanting and waving copies of his little red book.

Nothing was sacred in the brutal onslaught of the Red Guards as they rampaged through the country. The 'four olds' – old customs, old habits, old culture and old thinking – were all to be eliminated. Schools were shut down; intellectuals, writers and artists were dismissed, killed, persecuted or sent to labour in the countryside; scientific, artistic, literary and cultural publications ceased; temples were ransacked and monasteries disbanded. Physical reminders of China's 'feudal', 'exploitative' or 'capitalist' past – everything from monuments to musical instruments – were destroyed.

Sometimes for fear of being accused, neighbours and even family members turned on one another in the search for 'capitalist roaders'. Millions of people are estimated to have died through beatings, executions, suicide or denial of medical care. Violence, social disorder and economic upheaval were rife. Dress codes were as strict as under the most rigid religious regime; cropped hair and the blue 'Mao suit' were obligatory. Minority areas were worst affected because they were the most traditional.

By 1967 even Mao had begun to feel that enough was enough, especially in the sensitive border regions of Guǎngxī and Yúnnán, and 'ultra-left tendencies' were condemned. The PLA was championed as the sole agent of 'proletarian dictatorship' and began its own reign of terror. Anyone with a remotely suspect background – from having a college education to a distant cousin living overseas – was sent to the countryside, often in remote areas of Yúnnán or Guìzhōu, for re-education and hard labour.

For Mao, the Cultural Revolution succeeded in re-establishing his power. Some measure of political stability returned during the closing years of the Cultural Revolution. Zhou Enlai, who had supported Mao from the sidelines, exercised the most influence in the day-to-day governing of China. Among other things, he worked towards restoring China's trade and diplomatic contacts with the outside world. In the 1970s China was admitted into the UN, re-establishing formal diplomatic relations with the USA in 1979.

The true legacy of the Cultural Revolution has been an underlying element of fear that continues to run through Chinese society, particularly in those generations that lived through it. Even today, following the party line appears infinitely safer than exposing one's own opinions.

Capitalism with Chinese Characters

The final two decades of the 20th century saw a grand reversal of the traditional knee-jerk curtsy to Marxist-Leninist ideology. With the death of Mao Zedong, the celebrated Deng Xiaoping era commenced as he came to power as vice-premier, vice-chairman of the party and chief of staff. Aiming to undo the damage inflicted on China by the Cultural Revolution and decades of post-revolutionary economic mismanagement, Deng unveiled his programme of the 'Four Modernisations' (agriculture, industry, science and defence). In the process, China increased contact with the capitalist economies of the West and opened its doors to foreign visitors.

In rural China the 'Responsibility System' allowed people to sell their agricultural surpluses on the open market and this greatly changed life for the better in the Southwest. In 1993 Deng Xiaoping famously proclaimed that 'to get rich is glorious' as the government began to trim down capital-squandering, state-owned industries. The new 'ideology' was declared: 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Deng was hardly an economic guru, but his tinkering unleashed the long-repressed capitalist instincts of the Chinese.

Rival gangs of Red Guards fought each other to prove their revolutionary purity. In Guǎngxī, rival groups robbed an ammunition train en route to Vietnam and fought each other with machine guns, bazookas and anti-aircraft guns.

Despite its very real successes, one of the lasting failures of the Deng reform era was its dearth of political evolution. The era directly paved the way to the China of today, with all of its massive impetus and glaring social and political contradictions. Aware of its struggle for its own survival, the Communist Party has increasingly relaxed controls preventing the creation of private wealth. The result is a land of opportunity pumped up by astonishing growth in GDP. While many of the poorer, rural areas of the Southwest are undeniably and uniformly poor, China is also a land marked by a growing divide between the haves and have-nots, a spectacular defeat of the most basic axiom of Marxist and CCP orthodoxy. The supreme irony has been that the very force communism arose to overturn (capitalism) gave the CCP a new lease of life. Even the Southwest is not the land of austerity and starkness that many in the West envisage; urban centres like Chóngqìng and Chéngdū are instead overflowing with shopping centres, fast-food outlets and increasing class divisions. This is communism like you've never imagined it.

THE 21ST CENTURY

Overall, China has made some astonishing achievements in recent years, putting its first man in space in 2003 (a feat it repeated in 2005), completing the Three Gorges Dam in 2006 – ahead of schedule – and, in the same year, putting finishing touches to a railway to Lhasa in Tibet, a technically challenging feat that some said was impossible. Also in the pipeline are plans for a further 48 airports to meet the massive surge in air travel. How China sees the world, and how the world sees China, has also altered drastically in recent decades as the government's political policies and views maintain their rollercoaster of inconsistencies.

1976

Mao dies, aged 83. The official line surfaces that Mao was 70 percent right and just 30 percent wrong (namely the Cultural Revolution) in his leadership of China. This official verdict still applies today.

1978

Deng opens China up. He first launches market-angled economic reform. The following year he makes a successful visit to the United States. Full diplomatic relations are established.

1980

The one-child policy is introduced to slow China's growing population. It creates an ageing society, and the 'bachelor bomb': 23 million young men who will never find a Chinese wife, due to the practice of female-specific abortions.

1989

Reform-minded Party Secretary-General Hu Yaobang's memorial turns into a pro-democracy demonstration. Nearly one million people gather in Běijīng's Tiananmen Sq. Martial law is imposed. Hundreds are killed as demonstrators are forcibly dispersed.

1997

On 1 July Hong Kong returns to Chinese sovereignty, followed by the nearby Portuguese colony of Macau two years later. Shipping magnate Tung Chee-hwa is chosen as Hong Kong's first chief executive in a Běijīng-controlled vote.

1999

In April, Falun Gong practitioners protest silently in Běijīng, prompting a crackdown. By July the movement is banned, labelled an ideological and political threat to the Communist Party and State.

The Great Divide

As China grew in stature at the dawn of the 21st century, Deng Xiaoping's successor, Jiang Zemin, claimed popular success on the world stage. During his tenure, Hong Kong and Macau returned to China, Běijīng was successful in its Olympics bid for 2008 and China was steered into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Nevertheless, China's economic picture remained hazy at best, with the lumbering state sector an unresolved burden on the economy.

Groomed to take the seat of power since the early 1990s, Hu Jintao – who became president in 2003 – is China's first modern leader to come into the communist fold post-1949. Hopes that Hu was a reformer were quietly suffocated as the president committed himself to unbending controls over the political opposition and resolved to tighten the management of information. In Hu's bid to purge society of 'liberal elements', the policing of the internet was even more rigorously enforced and many publications were shut down.

Nevertheless, Hu's greatest challenge has been an attempt to rectify the inequalities between the flourishing southeast provinces and the inland provinces, including the land-locked Southwest. Rural protests have increased in recent years, sparked by land confiscations, unemployment, environmental pollution, high taxes and corrupt officials.

According to Chinese government figures, 74,000 riots or demonstrations took place during 2004, up from 58,000 the previous year. To redress the economic imbalance, the government has launched an ambitious Develop the West campaign to lure businesses, investment and graduates to China's poorer western regions.

For a positive take on the effects of a shrinking world, check out *China's Ethnic Minorities & Globalisation* by Colin Mackerras. The book, though fairly academic, offers an in-depth examination of minority peoples' place in the world and their interaction with the Chinese Government.

Going Global

China's growing international profile sits uneasily with its policies of non-intervention. Pragmatically business-minded, Běijīng takes little interest in human-rights abuses in countries it does or does not do business with. For instance, China has befriended nations such as North Korea, Myanmar and Zimbabwe, states widely shunned by the rest of the international community.

In an effort to diversify its sources of oil, China has also invested heavily in Africa and then protected these investments by supporting suspect governments (for instance China opposed UN efforts to impose sanctions on Sudan for the massacres in Darfur). Critics argue that for China to take a leading role in international affairs, it will need to be seen as more than a purely opportunistic player. Sino-US relations continue to be of primary strategic importance, especially as China grows in regional and global importance. Optimists point to the growing interdependence of Chinese and American economic ties, and the more cordial atmosphere of cooperation since the Al-Qaeda attacks of 9/11. Pessimists see Taiwan as a potential flashpoint between the two powers (the US has pledged military support to the island in the event of a Chinese invasion).

In the midst of this sits China's Southwest – where international affairs may seem worlds away. Nevertheless, the effects are strongly felt as China's ever-opening doors allow increasing freedom to foreign travellers; minority cultures, not long ago repressed, are now promoted to encourage cultural tourism. The reclusive spirit of the Southwest has nurtured the growing interest of independent travellers who are, in turn, impacting the region's economy, culture and window on the world.

2001

After more than 15 years of negotiations (the longest in international trade history) China joins the World Trade Organization, opening up its markets to foreign companies and capital.

2002

Jiang Zemin passes the leadership of the Communist Party and the presidency to the 'Fourth Generation', headed by Politburo member Hu Jintao.

2003

China sends its first astronaut, Yang Liwei, into space aboard the *Shenzhou 5* spacecraft. He returns to earth a day later, having completed 14 orbits.

2006

China completes the Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydroelectric power station, providing electric power and flood control to millions. However, 1.5 million people are displaced and environmentalists seriously question long-term ecological effects.

2006

On 1 July the first railway to Lhasa in Tibet begins operation. The line includes the highest track in the world (5072m) and the world's longest tunnel (1338 km).

2008

Běijīng hosts the Summer Olympic Games under a watchful global eye. The opening ceremony is on 8/8/2008, at 8.08pm and eight seconds – in Mandarin, the number eight sounds similar to 'wealth' and 'fortune'.

The Culture

REGIONAL IDENTITY

China's Southwest harbours extremes: the headfirst dive towards modernity that you find in cities such as Chóngqìng, Kūnmíng or Chéngdū, alongside some of the country's most remote, rural communities. The Southwest has traditionally been seen by the rest of China as an outback – full of bandits and backwardness. During Mao Zedong's days in power, it was here that the persecuted were sent as punishment, which seemed to only heighten the rest of the country's disdain for the region. Nevertheless, like most Chinese, the people of the Southwest are fiercely proud of their heritage and homeland. The region's ever-burgeoning tourism industry has recently made it a hot spot for foreign visitors and, increasingly, with Chinese tourists from Shànghǎi, Běijīng and Hong Kong. One of the results has been an increase in the region's national reputation as the people of the Southwest place themselves proudly on the world map.

One-fifth of China's population is learning English. It's estimated that within two decades, the total number of Chinese English speakers in China will outnumber native English speakers in the rest of the world.

Most Chinese are passionately nationalist, despite disillusionment with Communist Party policies. They're proud of China's heritage and accomplishments and are none too shy about saying so. This attitude often sits uneasily with their desire to embrace many things Western, from the English language to pop culture to business ideas. There's worry that Western values may destroy the heart of traditional Chinese culture but there's also a strong drive to transform the insularity that has defined China for hundreds of years. In urban centres, more and more Chinese citizens want to be seen as participants in a global world, progressive and open to new ideas. In rural and minority regions, there's often a strong gap between older generations holding on staunchly to traditional ways and younger people eager for a taste of modernity.

Even with so many changes taking place, traditional values persist, particularly in rural, minority regions (see p51). Many Han Chinese beliefs derive largely from the pervasive influence of Confucian philosophy, which forms the very core of Chinese identity. The Chinese value the importance of the family, the cultivation of morality and self-restraint, with the emphasis on hard work and achievement. It's assumed that the family as a whole will thrive and prosper if harmony prevails at home. Strong family connections and community ties are what keep the Chinese going, even in times of difficulty.

ETIQUETTE DOS & DON'TS

- Always take your shoes off when entering a Chinese home.
- When meeting a Chinese family, greet the eldest person first as a sign of respect.
- Always present things to people with both hands, showing that what you are offering is the fullest extent of yourself.
- When beckoning to someone, wave them over to you with your palm down, motioning to yourself.
- If someone gives you a gift, put it aside to open later to avoid appearing greedy.
- Never write anything in red ink; it's reserved for letters of protest.
- If you blow your nose into a tissue or hanky, don't let people see you pocketing it. The Chinese find this infinitely disgusting and prefer to spit their phlegm out onto the pavement.

LIFESTYLE

The rapid development of the past three decades has raised the living standard for many Chinese, especially the urban population. 'You are what you have' has become the motto for China's new 30-somethings, who see a car and a large apartment as the symbols of success. Also at the forefront of a changing China is the computer-savvy younger generation, who are not only downloading the latest pop songs, games and movies, but engaging in heated debates on blogs and internet chat sites about everything from education to premarital sex.

China has around 123 million internet users.

China's Southwest is largely rural and many people continue to eke out a meagre living on diminishing plots of land. The ability to sell their goods on the open market, however, has generally meant a significant rise in income. An increasing number of rural families are now able to send their children to school, although the cost of tuition and healthcare remain huge and often unsurmountable hurdles for many.

Chinese culture has always revolved around the family, considered the bedrock of a stable and harmonious society and, with some modifications, this remains true today. The traditional family structure of many generations living together is changing, with younger generations moving out to pursue new career and educational opportunities, and urban Chinese increasingly living in tiny apartments. Even so, parents enjoy a very tight bond with their children, and extended family remains important, with grandparents commonly acting as caretakers for grandchildren. Every member of the family has a clear set of responsibilities.

The communists' 'iron rice bowl' meant that, up until the early 1990s, the government employed everyone – regardless of whether there was enough money (or work) to go around.

In rural areas, and to a lesser extent in the cities, arranged marriages are still very common. In minority areas, the oldest son often moves out after marrying while the second son remains at home. A women often doesn't live with her husband until she becomes pregnant, although when she does move house, she shifts her responsibilities and allegiances to her new family and, in particular, her mother-in-law. This is partly why daughters are traditionally seen as a financial liability. Divorce, customarily looked down upon in Chinese society, is on the rise, and in urban areas more young people are living together before tying the knot. Nevertheless, marriage is still seen as a union of families rather than individuals.

The one-child policy (see p42) has greatly changed the make-up of the family, and of society overall. Having only one child and greater wealth has meant parents are able provide their children with better education, healthcare, food and clothing. It's also meant that children are often doted upon in a big way, and China's siblingless children are often referred to by outsiders as 'little emperors'. As they grow up, these children bear the responsibility of single-handedly carrying on the family name and traditions, and of caring for their ageing parents and grandparents.

ECONOMY

China's economic advances over recent years have continued to dazzle. In the early 1980s, the government introduced market-oriented reforms and today only a third of China's economy is directly controlled by the state. While this has meant huge state-owned factory shutdowns and mass unemployment, it has vastly reduced waste, increased earnings and improved the standard of living for many. China's economy now sees some of the fastest growth in the world and is the second largest after the US; however, with a vast landmass and a humungous population, the resulting wealth is spread very thin.

Employing over 40% of its workforce, China's agricultural sector is the largest in the world. Its service sector is slowly catching up, accounting for 32.5% of the economy. China's cheap labour costs have turned the country

YOUR FACE OR MINE?

Loosely defined as status, ego or self-respect, the concept of face is not unfamiliar to most foreigners. Essentially it's about avoiding being made to look stupid or wrong. What you may find unfamiliar is the lengths Chinese people will go to in order to save face. Displays of anger and emotion are great losses of face; however, if a conflict arises, opponents dig in their heels – screaming matches on the streets or in shops are not uncommon. Chinese will assume that you also want to save face and will hand over one of their ready-to-wear excuses should they feel you need it. Try never to accuse someone directly; unless you love to argue, outright confrontation should be reserved as a last resort.

into 'the world's factory', manufacturing most of the world's clothing, electronics and household items. China is also one of the largest importers in the world, buying cars, high-tech products, raw minerals, machineries and equipment, chemicals and petroleum, and is also now a net-importer of food.

Within these statistics, you'll find the reality of life for average Chinese citizens – namely a growing gap between the rich and poor. While this disparity is extremely prevalent in the Southwest, particularly between urban and rural communities, there is also a vast disparity between incomes in the China's poorer west and wealthier east. China's GDP per capita is US$7600 (PPP), US$2001 (nominal); however, the wealth is very much concentrated on the east coast. Covering over 70% of China's landmass, the western reaches of the country sees less then 17% of the total economic output.

While some predict that the Chinese economy will be the world's largest by 2020, this wouldn't necessarily equate to a particularly wealthy nation. As there are around four Chinese for every American, the Chinese would only need a salary of 25% of the average US citizen for China to have the same spending power as the USA. It's often difficult to really know what the true Chinese economic picture is; mass corruption leads to catastrophically inaccurate statistics and also sends as much as 2% of China's GDP into unlawful ends.

POPULATION

The one-child policy and consequential preference for male babies is creating a serious imbalance of the sexes. By 2020, over 40 million men may be unable to find spouses.

China is home to 56 ethnic groups, with Han Chinese making up 92% of the population. While China's minority groups are found throughout the country, the borderland of the Southwest is traditionally home to a greater percentage. (See p51 for more).

China faces enormous population pressures, despite comprehensive programmes to curb its growth. Over one-third of China's 1.3 billion live in urban centres, putting great strain on land and water resources. It's estimated that China's total population will continue to grow at a speed of 10 million each year, even with population programmes such as the one-child policy. Brought into effect in 1979, the policy's aim is to reduce the population to 700 million by 2050. While the government officially opposes forced abortion and sterilisation, allegations of coercion continue as local officials strive to meet population targets. Rural families are now allowed to have two children if the first child is a girl, but some have upwards of three or four kids. Families who do abide by the one-child policy will often go to great lengths to make sure their child is male; females are often aborted or abandoned to overflowing orphanages. All non-Han minorities are exempt from the one-child policy and consequently in many minority regions of the Southwest you will encounter many more babies and children.

SPORT

The Chinese have a very long, rich sports history, and began stretching and breathing taichi-style over 4000 years ago (see below and p170). From as early as 1066 BC, wealthy Chinese have known the delights of archery, acrobatics, martial arts and wrestling – or at least games that come fairly close to these modern-day incarnations. Polo became the height of fashion around AD 650, along with long-distance running, hunting and a board game similar to contemporary mah jong (麻将; *májiàng*).

In 2004 the All China Sports Federation recognised video games as a legitimate sport.

During the Song dynasty one of the most well-liked sports involved kicking around a leather ball stuffed with hair. In 2003 the international football association FIFA officially recognised that China was the birthplace of football and, in turn, China turned football crazy. Golf is another sport with a long history – as far back as AD 1200, Chinese were hitting balls into holes in the ground with sticks. The national sport is of course table tennis, which you would assume was discovered by the Chinese, but was in fact an invention of the Victorians.

Modern sports, such as basketball, gymnastics, volleyball and swimming, came to China early in the 20th century when Chinese athletes began participating in international sporting events such as the Olympics and the Asian Games. Today Chinese excel in table tennis, volleyball, gymnastics and women's wrestling, though in the Southwest you're more likely to hear the clicking of mah jong pieces than stadium cheers.

China's latest addition to its sports repertoire is cricket, with a five-year plan to introduce it into schools and universities and the hope of qualifying for the 2019 World Cup.

MEDIA

Since the communists took power, China's media has been largely controlled by the government. More recent decades have seen reduced government subsidies to media, bringing an increasing reliance on advertisers. The resulting drive for audiences has brought about more opinionated, open and interesting coverage. Media are increasingly willing to report bold and nearly critical commentary (often focusing on local issues and officials rather than those at a national level) as the government has less financial leverage to wield.

All media in China must be associated with a government body and there remain certain lines that cannot be crossed; questioning the legalities of China's incursion into Tibet or the legitimacy of the Communist Party in general, for example, is not tolerated and can lead to publications being shut down at a moment's notice. Self-censorship is expected in all forms of media and you still come across Western publications being sold with 'sensitive' articles simply torn out. Despite an obsessive desire by the government to control information in state media, this control is being challenged by the rise of text messaging and

A SPORTING PHILOSOPHY

Martial arts combine discipline, flexibility, spirituality and defence. Practised in China for centuries, the four most common types are *tàijíquán* (太极拳; usually called taiji or taichi), *gōngfu* (功夫; kung fu) and *qìgōng* (气功). In all forms, respect and responsibility is considered paramount, and fighting is seen as a last resort. *Tàijíquán* is very slow and fluid and its motions mirror everyday actions like gathering water. *Gōngfu* has been made popular through Hong Kong films, is much faster than *tàijíquán* and focuses on self-defence. *Qìgōng* is a form of energy management aimed at maintaining good mental and physical health. *Qìgōng* masters have been known to project their *qì* (energy) in miraculous ways – from healing others to driving nails through boards with their bare fingers.

To catch a glimpse of martial arts in action, head to any green space in the early morning. Practitioners are not likely to be the brazen lads and femme fatales you may be expecting. Instead they're likely to be 90-year-old grannies with their ankles up around their noses.

For details on *gōngfu* and *tàijíquán* schools in Yángshuò, Southwest China, see p169.

GŌNGFŪ

One of China's most potent and popular exports, the art of *gōngfu* has its arcane origins in Hénán province's legendary Shaolin Temple. Popularised by Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Jet Li and other exponents of the flying sidekick, *gōngfu* has captivated generations of eager Western aspirants.

The term *gōngfu* is frequently misconstrued in the West. It actually means 'skill', generally in an artistic field. A pianist can be said to have *gōngfu*, as can a calligrapher or a water colourist. In the Western imagination, it is more commonly perceived as the ability to drive one's index finger through the windpipe of an unfortunate assailant, leap onto high rafters with a single bound, or send opponents sprawling with a mere shrug.

China's fighting arts generally divide into hard ('external'; (外家; wàijiā) and soft ('internal'; 内家; nèijiā) camps. It's an oversimplification to see hard styles as training physical strength and soft styles as developing pliancy and internal power by using *qì*, but it's pointing in the right direction. In reality, an immense crossover between hard and soft schools blurs the distinction. The most insubstantial of all the soft schools, taichi or *tàijíquán* (太极拳) – which concentrates its skills on yielding to attacks – is only genuinely soft after years, if not decades, of study; and even then physicality can be hard to fully shake off. Many of the ostensibly harder martial arts – Five Ancestors Boxing (五祖拳; wǔzǔquán) for example – are powered by internal energies that require a heightened state of physical relaxation and serious bouts of *qìgōng*.

Gōngfu – both hard and soft – is closely linked to the practice of *qìgōng* (气功) and the nurturing of *gōng* (skill). A veritable taxonomic system of *gōng* exists. Naturally there is hard *gōng* (硬功; yìng gōng), an essential ingredient if you want snapping iron bars or boulder-smashing with your forehead on your CV, but there's also light *gōng* (轻功; qīnggōng) for featherweight dancing on crushed glass or leaping to astonishing heights. Gecko *gōng* (壁虎功; bìhǔ gōng) is for climbing walls with little effort, tortoise-back *gōng* (龟背功; guībèi gōng) develops a solid back, toad *gōng* (蛤蟆功; hámá gōng) strengthens muscles and flying *gōng* (飞行功; fēixíng gōng) helps with sword routines high up among the bamboo fronds.

For unputdownable reading on martial arts goings-on, grab a copy of the tongue-in-cheek *Way of a Warrior: A Journey into Secret Worlds of Martial Arts*, by John F. Gilbey, find a comfy sofa and prepare to be thoroughly entertained.

internet use. The government's reduced resources to oversee and edit media content has also played a role in somewhat controversial stories (such as the AIDS epidemic in Hénán) making it to press.

Rainclouds over Wushan (1995) was filmed in a town near Chóngqìng, along the Yangzi. An oddly funny drama with little dialogue, beautiful photography and a rather unsettling tone, it won awards at various film festivals around the globe but lost support from the Chinese government.

Access to TV has exploded in China; around a billion Chinese have access to more than 700 local channels and another 3000 cable channels are available. While the government owns and operates the largest network (CCTV), it garners only 30% of China's audience share.

The internet has also made huge waves in China. Despite the government's attempt to built the 'Great Firewall of China', attempts at monitoring and restricting access have proved largely ineffectual. Chinese internet users can access uncensored news via the China News Digest website, which is produced and maintained by overseas Chinese volunteers. Talk radio has also opened the doors to debate in Chinese cities, as callers air their ideas and debate hot topics without having to reveal their identity; the result has been hugely popular programmes which local government officials are weary to do battle with.

RELIGION

In recent decades, the Chinese have been returning to restored temples with armfuls of incense. Perhaps in reaction to the spiritual vacuum created by the Mao years and the materialism of the 1990s, religious followings in all their forms seems to be on the rise. Most minority groups in the Southwest have traditional animist or shamanistic belief systems, which have been

subsequently overlaid with Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian and even Christian elements; for more on these, see p54.

In 1982 the Chinese government amended its constitution to allow freedom of religion; however, many would contend that this is really only the case with traditional Chinese beliefs. It also remains true that only atheists are permitted to be members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In general, the government is not overly concerned with religious groups unless they are believed to challenge state doctrine, as did the quasi-Buddhist health system, Falun Gong, whose thousands of practitioners have been menaced into obscurity.

It's often said that many Chinese are Confucianists during their education, Taoists in retirement and Buddhists as they approach death.

Taoism

It is said that Taoism (道教; Dàojiào) is the only true 'home-grown' Chinese religion. The founder of Taoism was a man known as Laotzu (老子; Lǎozǐ), who is believed to have been born around 604 BC. At the end of his life Laotzu is said to have climbed onto a water buffalo and ridden west towards what is now Tibet, in search of solitude. En route he was asked by a gatekeeper to leave behind a record of his beliefs. The product was a slim volume of only 5000 characters: the *Tao Te Ching* (道德经; *Dào Dé Jīng;* The Book of the Way).

At the centre of Taoism is the concept of Tao (道; Dào). Tao cannot be perceived because it exceeds senses, thoughts and imagination; it can be known only through mystical insight. Tao is the way of the universe, the driving power in nature, the order behind all life and the spirit that cannot be exhausted. Tao is the way people should order their lives to keep in harmony with the natural order of the universe. Today, the most famous Taoist notion is that of the duality of the universe divided into Yin (阴; feminine, dark, passive) and Yang (阳; masculine, bright, busy).

I Ching (易经; *Yìjīng*), or *Book of Changes,* is the oldest Chinese classical text and dates back to antiquity. Stemming from an ancient system of cosmology, it expresses the wisdom and philosophy of early China.

Buddhism

Buddhism (佛教; Fó Jiào) was founded in India. The cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy is that happiness can only be achieved by following the 'eight-fold path' to nirvana: a state of complete freedom from greed, anger, ignorance and the various other fetters of existence. When Buddhism entered China from India, its exotic nature was an attraction for many Chinese disillusioned with the formalism of Confucianism. With its elaborate explanations of karma, Buddhism offered answers to the afterlife that neither Taoism nor Confucianism could address. Buddhism also had its share of critics, who saw it as a threat to the Chinese identity. The growth of Buddhism was slowed by persecutions and outright abolishment by various emperors.

Most Buddhists in China follow Mahayana Buddhism – but the Dai of Xīshuāngbǎnnà (see p326) are Theravada Buddhists – like Buddhists in Thailand and Myanmar. Buddhists in the Tibetan areas of western Sìchuān and northwestern Yúnnán practice a unique form of Buddhism called Tantric or Lamaist (喇嘛教; Lǎma Jiào). It's heavily influenced by Tibet's pre-Buddhist Bon religion and is much more mystical than other forms of Buddhism, relying heavily on *mudras* (ritual postures), mantras (sacred speech), *yantras* (sacred art) and secret initiation rites. Priests called 'lamas' are believed to be reincarnations of highly evolved beings and are split into two orders: the Red Hat (Kagyupa) or Yellow Hat (Gelugpa) sects. The Dalai Lama is the supreme patriarch of Tibetan Buddhism.

Confucianism

While Buddhism and Taoism give reverence to gods and goddesses who preside over earth and the after life, Confucianism (儒家思想; Rújiā Sīxiǎng)

deals with the affairs of life but not death. More a philosophy than a religion, Confucianism defines codes of conduct and a patriarchal pattern of obedience for the attainment of harmony and overall good; respect flows upwards from child to adult, woman to man and subject to ruler. Not surprisingly, it was adopted by the state for two millennia.

Confucius was born of a poor family around 551 BC. His ambition was to hold a high government office and to reorder society through the administrative apparatus. At most he seems to have had several insignificant government posts, a few followers and a permanently blocked career. At the age of 50 he perceived his divine mission, and for the next 13 years tramped from state to state offering unsolicited advice to rulers on how to improve their governing. The opportunity to put his own ideas into practice never came, and he returned home to spend his last years teaching and editing classical literature. He died in 479 BC, aged 72. The glorification of Confucius began after his death. Mencius (372–289 BC) helped raise Confucian ideals into the national consciousness with the publication of *The Book of Mencius*. Eventually Confucian philosophy permeated every level of Chinese society.

The website www.confucius.org offers a look at the philosophy that changed the course of China. The grand sage's *Lun Yu* (论语; *Classic Sayings*) is available on the site in 21 languages, along with photos of his calligraphy, speeches and a biography.

Islam

Islam (伊斯兰教; Yīsīlán Jiào) was founded by the Arab prophet Mohammed. Its followers, Muslims, believe there is only one God, Allah, and seek universal brotherhood. Islam was brought to China peacefully by Arab traders and Muslim merchants travelling the Silk Road to China and today it is estimated that Islam is followed by 3% to 5% of China's population. The Southwest has a prominent community of ethnic Chinese Muslims, known as Hui (p227), who settled in the region in the wake of the 13th-century Mongol invasion of Kublai Khan. They are set apart from the Han Chinese by their white skullcaps and avoidance of pork (China's main source of meat). China's Muslims suffered greatly during the Cultural Revolution when many were forced to eat pork and mosques were turned into pigsties. These days you'll encounter mosques and Muslim restaurants throughout the Southwest.

Around 90% of organ transplants in China come from executed prisoners, because Confucian ethics deter most Chinese from donating organs.

Christianity

Christianity arrived in China with the Nestorians in the 7th century; although their influence later died out, they made a considerable impact at the time. The religion later took root when large numbers of Catholic and Protestant missionaries established themselves in the Southwest, following the invasion of China by the Western powers in the 19th century. French Catholics were prevalent in northwest Yúnnán and western Sìchuān and Methodist missions were popular among the Miao of Guìzhōu. You'll find Christian churches in Guìyáng, Móxī (p391), Kāngdìng and elsewhere, including Cizhong Catholic Church in Yúnnán (see p297).

Today Christianity is the fastest growing religion in China, with an estimated following of 3% to 5% of the population (40 to 65 million people). It is estimated that over 200,000 Chinese convert to Christianity each year, a statistic that is thought to reflect an overall religious awakening throughout China. This strong shift away from China's traditional religions may be largely due to Mao's razing of religious practices, leaving people with a clean slate from which many pursued different religions. Christianity's increasing toehold has got the attention of authorities, some of whom see the Western religion as a potential threat. Human rights groups have regularly reported cases of priests and followers suffering harassment and detention. Consequently, many Chinese Christians are practising their faith in small groups in residential houses. This, in turn, is germinating the development of various sects which are at risk of being branded as cults and banned by the government.

Other officials in authority appear to show considerable ambivalence to Christianity, with the religion popping up within the government itself. One telling occasion occurred when ex-president Jiang Zemin was asked what he would do if he could make one last decree before leaving office; he replied 'I would make Christianity the official religion of China.' Many in China see Christianity as the secret of the West's successes.

David Aikman in his *Jesus in Beijing* sees China becoming a predominantly Christian country within the next 30 years, with all the huge implications this would mean for foreign policy and the global balance of power. Chinese Christians are far more pro-American and pro-Israeli than their Buddhist and Taoist and atheist confrères.

ARTS

Maoist ideological controls and the Cultural Revolution levelled nasty blows at China's art scene. Since the 1970s a great deal has been done to restore what was destroyed, and vibrant artistic expression is once again prominent in Chinese society. The majority of China's avant-garde artists are based in the eastern cities of Běijīng, Hong Kong, Guǎngzhōu and Shànghǎi; the Southwest sees more reserved, traditional art forms.

Visual Arts

Since its earliest days, China has courted beautiful things. The Chinese began making pottery over 8000 years ago, with handcrafted earthenware primarily used for religious purposes. Jade has been revered since Neolithic times; it was believed to have magical, life-giving properties. Opulent jade suits were placed in tombs, and the elixir of powdered jade was eaten by Taoist alchemists. Bronze and copper have also been long valued and were produced in Yúnnán's Dian kingdom 2500 years ago – everything from drums to mirrors to statuettes depicting mythological beasts; to see some of these, visit Kūnmíng's Provincial Museum (p226).

CALLIGRAPHY

Calligraphy was traditionally regarded in China as the highest form of artistic expression. Even today, a person's character is judged by their handwriting; elegant writing is believed to reveal great refinement. Calligraphy is extremely popular in China and a major area of study. You will encounter calligraphy all over the Southwest – on documents, artworks, in temples, adorning the walls of caves, and on the sides of mountains and monuments.

PAINTING

Traditional Chinese painting is the art of brush and ink applied to *xuān* (宣; paper) or silk. The brush line, which varies in thickness and tone, is the important feature of a Chinese painting, along with accompanying calligraphy. Shading and colour play only a minor symbolic and decorative role. From the Han dynasty until the end of the Tang dynasty, the human figure occupied the dominant position in Chinese painting. Then, from the 11th century onwards, landscape dominated. It was not until the 20th century that there was any real departure from native traditions.

Since the late 1970s, the work of Chinese painters has been arguably more innovative and dissident than that of writers, possibly because the political implications are harder to interpret by the authorities. In the Southwest, Yúnnán in particular has seen an upsurge in contemporary painting and a distinctive style has emerged amongst the Naxi; watch for the stunning work of He Xiang Yun, whose strong colour on handmade paper blends traditional Naxi pictographic elements (see the boxed text, p265) with an expressionist style.

SCULPTURE

Chinese sculpture dates back to the Zhou and Shang dynasties, when small clay and wooden dragons, lions and chimeras were commonly placed in

tombs to protect the dead and guide them on their way to heaven. Sculptures of humans became more common in succeeding dynasties but it wasn't until China's introduction to Buddhism that sculpture moved beyond tomb figurines to other realms of figurative art. Enormous figures of Buddha, carved directly into the rock, are dotted around China and are a mesmerising sight. To experience the world's largest, head to Lèshān in Sìchuān (p383). Also check out the well-preserved caves in Dàzú County (p453) where a wild assortment of colourful sculptures were created during the Song dynasty.

'Be dutiful at home, brotherly in public; be discreet and trustworthy, love all people, and draw near to humanity. If you have extra energy as you do that, then study literature.'
CONFUCIUS, *I CHING*

Literature

China's rich literary tradition is largely out of reach to non-Chinese speakers. Many of the translations of the past decade have produced rather stilted, bland versions of Chinese classics, modern short stories and poetry. In recent years publishing houses have been putting more effort into their translations, though the selection remains limited.

PREMODERN LITERATURE

Prior to the 20th century there were two literary traditions in China: the classical and the vernacular. The classical canon, largely Confucian in nature, consisted of a core of texts written in ancient Chinese that were the backbone of the Chinese education system but nearly indecipherable to the masses. *Analects* (论语; *Lúnyǔ*) is a collection of sayings attributed to Confucius that were remembered by his followers; many consider Arthur Waley's 1938 translation to be the best. Tang China is remembered as China's Golden Age of literature; its two greatest poets had strong connections with the Southwest: Li Bai (or Li Bo) was banished to Guìzhōu early in his career and Du Fu was born in Sìchuān.

The vernacular tradition arose in the Ming dynasty and consisted largely of prose epics written for entertainment. Many of China's vernacular texts are available in translation and can give you an interesting glimpse of life in long-ago China. Try *Water Margin/Outlaws of the Marsh* (水浒传; *Shuǐhǔ Zhuàn*) by Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong; *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国演义; *Sānguó Yǎnyì*) by Luo Guanzhong; *Dream of the Red Chamber* (红楼梦; *Hónglóu Mèng*) by Cao Xueqin; or *Journey to the West* (西游记; *Xīyóu Jì*) by Wu Cheng'en.

PAGE TURNERS

While not much of China's contemporary literature has spawned from the Southwest, a number of novels available in translation are set in this region. Others cover themes and events that have strongly influenced the Southwest of today. Grab a mug of green tea and settle down with:

- *Half of Man Is Woman,* by Zhang Xianliang (WW Norton & Co, 1998), a candid exploration of sexuality and marriage in contemporary China, and considered one of the most controversial novels of the 1980s.
- *Please Don't Call Me Human,* by Wang Shuo (Hyperion East, 2000), a mocking look at the failures of China's state security system, which appeals to a broad spectrum of Chinese society despite being banned.
- *The Book and the Sword: Gratitude and Revenge,* by Jin Yong (Oxford University Press, 2004), a suspenseful story revolving around the Red Flower Society (a fictional secret society) and its battle to overthrow the Manchu dynasty; first published in 1955.
- *Blades of Grass: The Stories of Lao She,* (University of Hawaii Press, 1999), a collection of 14 stories containing poignant descriptions of people living through times of political upheaval and uncertainty.
- *Wild Swans,* by Jung Chang (Touchstone Books, 2003), the gripping story of three generations of Chinese women struggling to survive the tumultuous events of 20th-century China, with a good portion of the story set in the Southwest.

MODERN & CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

By the early 20th century, translations of Western novels were available in China, causing Chinese intellectuals to look more critically at their own literary traditions. Calls for a national literature based on vernacular Chinese rather than stultifying classical language grew in intensity. The first major Chinese writer to publish in colloquial Chinese was Lu Xun (1881–1936), who is now regarded as the father of modern Chinese literature. His works were mainly short stories that examined China's inability to drag itself into the 20th century. His most famous tale is *The True Story of Ah Q*.

After China came under the control of the communists, most writing in China tended to echo the CCP line. Following Mao's death, writers dared for the first time to explore the traumatic events of the 20th century that had reshaped the Chinese landscape. China's economic progress has spawned a new generation of authors, who write largely about the loneliness and decadence of urban life. See the boxed text, opposite for more.

The *Three Hundred Tang Poems,* compiled from over 48,000 poems preserved from the Tang dynasty Golden Age, provides Chinese conversation with quotable quotes, much as Shakespeare does in English. See http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/chinese/frame.htm for all 300, along with English translations.

Music

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

The traditional Chinese music scale differs from its Western equivalent. Unlike Western music, tone is considered more important than melody. Music was once believed to have cosmological significance and in early times, if a musician played in the wrong tone, it could indicate the fall of a dynasty. Traditional Chinese musical instruments include the two-stringed fiddle (二胡; *èrhú*), four-stringed banjo (月琴; *yuè qín*), two-stringed viola (胡琴; *húqín*), vertical flute (洞箫; *dòngxiāo*), horizontal flute (笛子; *dízi*), piccolo (梆笛; *bāngdí*), four-stringed lute (琵琶; *pípa*), zither (古筝; *gǔzhēng*) and ceremonial trumpet (唢呐; *suǒnà*).

China's ethnic minorities have preserved their own folk song traditions, which are central in their festivals, weddings and courtship rituals. Epic, historical oral ballads with a reed pipe and round lute accompaniment are especially popular. A trip to Lìjiāng in Yúnnán will give you the chance to appreciate the ancient sounds of the local Naxi orchestra (p270).

For a percussion-heavy earful of tunes from Chinese minorities, look for *Yunnan Instrumental Music* (Hugo) or *Baishibai: Songs of the Minority Nationalities of Yunnan* (Pan).

Chinese Opera

Chinese opera has been in existence since the northern Song dynasty, developing out of China's long balladic tradition and based on popular legends and folklore. Performances were put on by travelling entertainers in teahouses frequented by China's working classes.

Chinese opera draws together diverse art forms, including acrobatics, martial arts, stylised dance and elaborate costumes with four major roles: the female, male, 'painted face' (for gods and warriors) and clown. There are over three hundred types of opera in China. Southwestern varieties, such as Sìchuān (see p368), Ānshùn (p114) and Nuo, arose from contact between Han Chinese garrison communities and local minorities.

POPULAR MUSIC

China's thriving popular-music industry came about in the 1980s and has been greatly influenced by a growing exposure to international music trends. Cui Jian, the singer and guitarist whose politically subversive lyrics provoked authorities, led the way for a slew of gritty bands who hacked away at the

GOING WITH THE FLOW

In the West we think of it as a term meaning 'to dejunk', but feng shui (风水; feng meaning 'wind' and shui meaning 'water') is actually a collection of ancient geomantic principles that sees bodies of water and landforms directing the cosmic currents of the universal *qì* (气). To follow feng shui guidelines is to create a positive path for *qì* which can maximise a person's wealth, happiness, longevity and procreation. Ignoring the principals and blocking the flow can spell disaster. Temples, tombs, houses and even whole cities have been built to harmonise with the surrounding landscape in feng shui fashion. Within a building, the order of rooms and arrangement of furniture can also inhibit or enhance *qì* flow. In recent centuries, the barging through of railways and roads and the construction of high-rises has incensed residents who believe the balance of the geography is being disturbed.

edifice of rock and metal (Tang dynasty) and punk (Underground Baby, Brain Failure). Both Chéngdū and Kūnmíng have thriving music scenes with live performances and overflowing CD shops.

For insight into China's contemporary rock scene and information on the latest bands, go to www.rockinchina.com.

Architecture

China's architectural history stretches back more than 3000 years, making it one of the longest of any civilisation. Traditional four-sided courtyard homes (四合院; *sìhéyuàn*) continue to abound today, particularly in rural towns and villages. Enclosed by grey walls, each room opens into a central courtyard. Originally, the height of the walls, the size of the door and the shape of the door stones all told of the type of merchant, official or family that lived inside. An excellent place to see traditional buildings is in Lìjiāng's Old Town (p267), which has been designated as a Unesco Heritage site for its ancient, well-tended buildings. For something a little more unusual and remote, head to Zhàoxīng (p138), a Dong village in Guìzhōu with beautiful traditional wooden structures such as wind-and-rain bridges, and drum towers, all built without a single bolt or nail.

It was not until the 20th century that Chinese architects began to design Western-style buildings with materials such as steel and glass. The early decades of communism have left behind countless cement-block buildings but these days urban architects seem to be trying to outdo one another with contemporary (and sometimes garish) structures.

Minority Cultures

For anyone in search of unique cultural experiences, China's Southwest is the jackpot. A cultural kaleidoscope of Tibetan, Thai and Burmese peoples injects a vibrant dimension into the region. Get off the beaten track and, with each bend in the road, travellers are likely to encounter new languages and new ways of living. The matriarchal Mosu of Yúnnán, the nomadic Tibetans of Sìchuān, the Yi with their slave-raiding, bandit-style past and the festival-fanatic Miao – journey throughout China's Southwest and the list of who you may bump into goes on and on and on…

Spring of the Butterflies & Other Folktales of China's Minority Peoples contains tales from 10 different minority groups, translated by He Liyi. Its eye-catching illustrations depict traditional dress and culture.

IN CONTEXT

Around 37% of China's Southwest is made up of minorities (compared to 9.4% nationwide) and the region contains almost 50% of China's entire 'minority nationality' population – about 50 million people. China's 107-million-strong minority people are divided into 55 ethnic groups, of which 26 are found in the Southwest, though even these only touch the tip of the iceberg. In remote areas of Yúnnán, random geographical features such as a fast-flowing river or mountain range can result in sharp cultural and ethnic divides. When minority classifications were first drawn up in the early 1950s, Yúnnán alone nominated 260 groups, of which 25 were formally recognised. Some minorities, including the Baima of northern Sìchuān, remain officially unrecognised to this day; others are pigeonholed with another group, such as the Mosu of Yúnnán who are officially classified as Naxi. Group populations range from the 16-million-strong Zhuang of Guǎngxī to the fragile pocket of 5000 Drung people in southwestern Yúnnán.

www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu gives intriguing cultural information on each of China's recognised minority groups. The site is run by the Chinese government so take it with a bucket of salt.

These minority peoples are far more strategically important to China than mere numbers suggest. Not only do they inhabit sensitive border areas but many also have ethnic kin on the other side of these borders. The Guìzhōu Miao are ethnically the same as the Hmong of Laos and Vietnam; the Yao of Guǎngxī are the Mien of Laos and Thailand; and the Jingpo are known in northern Burma as the Kachin. Also, minority lands contain large reserves of untapped minerals and other natural resources.

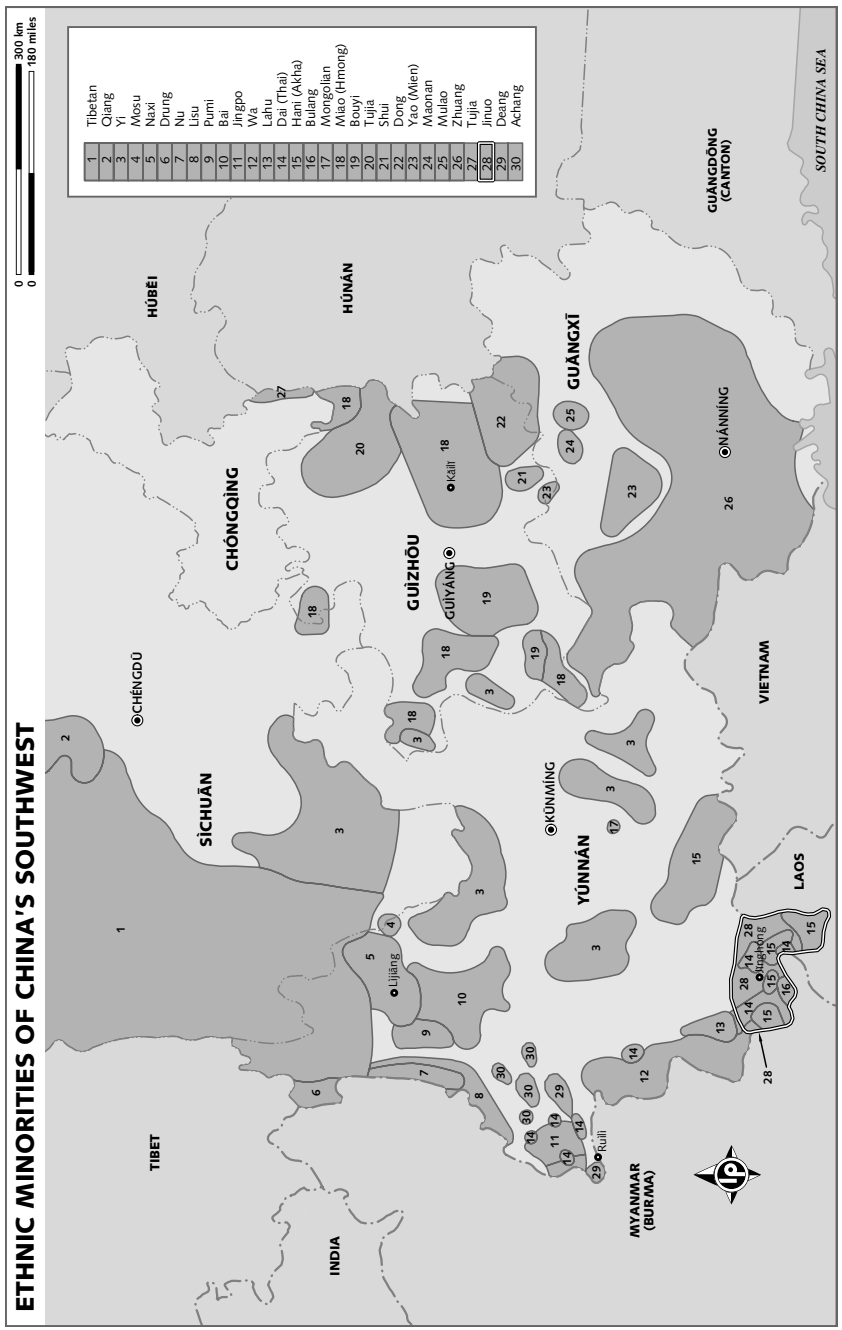
BIG BROTHER

China's 56th recognised ethnic group is the Han, who make up a staggering 91.9% of the population. Relations between the minorities and the Han Chinese have always been dicey. The Han Chinese have traditionally regarded non-Han groups as 'barbarians', even though China was itself

SENSE A DIFFERENCE?

Nearly every Southwestern destination has something to tantalise your senses:

- **See** – the colourful, rambunctious Miao markets in and around Kǎilǐ (p126)
- **Hear** – the mesmerising clamour of the Naxi Orchestra in Lìjiāng (p270)
- **Smell** – the melting yak-butter candles in Kāngdìng's Tibetan Buddhist temples (p388)
- **Taste** - the spicy lamb kebabs sold by Hui-Muslim restaurateurs in Chóngqìng (p449
- **Touch** – the blue-and-white batik cloth handmade and sold by the Bai in Dàlǐ (p261)



THREAD OF LIFE *Natuo*

Today I have been to help people planting rice seedlings. This time I helped them; then later when there is water in my paddy, others will come to help me.

We exchange our work. One person is not able to finish cultivating a plot of land; several people doing it together finish it quickly. Doing it in a group heightens your motivation, so we exchange labour.

Old people settled here a long time ago. We live here from generation to generation. Our forefathers Ah Bi and Duojieba have been buried in the village. Now, even their tombs have been trodden flat under a road. We may be the third generation since then.

Of course, it's better to live on the *beizi* (plains). In the *beizi* there are large plots of paddy, while in the mountains the plots are mostly fragmented and small. In the *beizi,* whatever you plant, it yields; while in the mountains, it's harsh for any planting, the land is infertile. Some labour and get food; some labour but in vain. I'm still thinking that we stay here because this is where we belong.

When the old people sewed, I learned from them. Now the price of thread is very high and most people wear Han clothes. Han clothes aren't as warm as Lahu ones. The old generation wears only Lahu clothes. Lahu clothes are better than the Han's. If you wear Lahu clothes and go to plant rice seedlings, it keeps your knees warm.

I don't weave now. One reason is because I have no money to buy the thread – besides, there are many who sell clothes, so you don't have to weave by yourself. Some women still weave cloth.

Most of the young people now don't know how to weave cloth. You just have to labour for others for four to five days, then you can buy a piece of clothing to wear. There are many Han clothes available. But they are a bit too short. The clothes don't cover your waist when you carry firewood on your back. [She sings:]

Take the cotton; use my hands to weave clothes.
We wear them and we feel warm.
Wearing the robe, our necks and shoulders feel warm.
Wearing the clothes we feel warm.
Covering our head with a veil we are beautiful.

The young people like to listen to the people who sing well. Most people can sing. People sing best after they've drunk. Now most people don't know how to sing the songs of the Spring Festival. When people work they sing work songs. When young women and men go out to have fun, they sing love songs. When people send off the spirits, they sing spirit songs. When people die, others sing laments.

It's not only me who knows how to do *jiàohún* (叫魂; calling the spirit); I learned from others. I put rice in a bowl, put an egg on top of it, and take out one [item] of the dead person's clothes. I use a 'call-the-spirit' thread that is brought by the family, and then called the ghost: 'You follow the thread and come back, follow your clothes to come. The sun won't shine on you and the rain won't wet you.'

After this is done, the *jiàohún* thread (spirit thread) would be tied for him, the joss sticks would be burned for the god of the house, the god of the house begged not to hurt him, the sun and the moon asked to protect him.

This [corner of the house] is for burning joss sticks to the god of your house. This ritual is passed on to us from the older generations, so we burn the joss sticks. Even when we have no pain and no disease, we still have to burn the joss sticks in the direction of sunrise.

All the traditions passed on by our older generations – we have to maintain them. As for burning joss sticks, we'll burn when we remember; we won't if we forget.

Natuo lives in Mengba village, Lancang County, Yúnnán and belongs to the Lahu minority group. She is around 80 years old (although she is not sure) and as well as farming rice, she is one of the few people in her village to perform jiàohún.

FORCE OF NATURE

Animists believe that the world is a living being – its rocks, trees, mountains and people all contain spirits which must be in harmony for existence to run smoothly. When this harmony is disrupted, it must be restored, something usually accomplished through the mediation of a shaman. Some shamans are also able to cross over into the spirit world; to divine the future through astrology; and to heal with herbal remedies.

But it's not all left to the shamans. Effort is required by all humans to ensure the goodwill of those spirits found in nature and those of deceased ancestors. Requests for good health, bountiful harvests and successful births are all regularly put before the spirits, with offerings of incense, rice, tobacco, tea and fruit.

Approximately 3% of China's population is animist, the majority of whom belong to minority groups. Others follow folk animism, which is the result of a more dominant religion (such as Buddhism) being introduced into a culture and combined with animism. If you are lucky enough to be invited into the home of a minority family, you will likely see a spirit altar set up in one corner of the room.

ruled by two of these 'minorities' – the Mongols during the Yuan dynasty and the Manchu during the Qing (p27). All nationalities in China are referred to as 'equal brothers', with the Han as the 'eldest brother'; from this stems the belief that (in accordance with Confucian beliefs) it is not only the Han's right, but their duty to watch over and control these younger brothers. History has seen several minority rebellions against Han control, particularly the Muslim and Miao rebellions of the 19th century (see p24).

For an academic look at internal colonisation and Han perspectives on minority regions, pick up *Frontier People: Han Settlers in Minority Areas of China*.

The Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward were dark times for the minorities. Local languages were outlawed and the 'four olds' (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits) were criticised. Religious freedoms were suppressed, and shamans, priests and holy men were arrested. Minorities were forced to cremate their dead, a practice that broke traditional taboos. Local headmen or chiefs were subject to self-criticism and re-education.

These days, while Han chauvinism remains rife, the Chinese authorities paint the minorities as happy, smiling colourful people – and do so with even greater embellishments for the tourism industry. Minorities remain exempt from the one-child policy (they are allowed two) and receive preferential weighting for educational placement – two good reasons why more and more people are registering as belonging to a minority nationality. In total, China's minority population is growing about seven times faster than that of the majority Han Chinese. Local festivals, and cultural life in general, are increasing in strength.

Always ask before you get snap-happy. Many minority peoples, such the Yi, believe that cameras steal their soul.

Nevertheless, in reality, minority peoples are often at the lowest rung of the social and economic ladder. Most groups originate from the richer agricultural lands of central China and were pushed first south into the valleys and then up into the mountains of China's Southwest by Han expansion.

Minority areas remain the remotest and least developed parts of China and have generally been passed by in the race to get rich quick. While opium used to be a major cash crop for many minorities (see p29), the communists clamped down hard on this and most are now subsistence farmers.

Integration of the minorities into modern Chinese society is pushed by the government (mainly through demographic dilution) and, in larger, less remote towns, is happening fast. The government often provides preferential economic development to minority regions but rapid economic development generally brings with it immersion in the Han language and social system. Nevertheless, many minority groups are unsurprisingly wary of the majority Han and, particularly in remote villages, remain relatively insular and culturally distinct.

CULTURAL DISTINCTIVENESS

While many minority peoples have mastered Mandarin, the majority of them speak their own languages, which are not taught in schools but are passed from one generation to the next. Most minority groups also use Chinese script as few of these languages have a written form; exceptions include the Yi, Tibetans and Naxi who all have their own ancient scripts. Other groups, like the Miao, have a written code that was established by missionaries during the 18th century.

The Naxi created a written language over 1000 years ago using an extraordinary system of pictographs – the only hieroglyphic language still in use today.

Many minority cultures are structured on an elaborate set of festivals closely linked to fertility and courtship. The Lusheng Festivals of the Miao (see the boxed text, p104), the Torch Festival of the Yi (see p268) and the Water-Splashing Festival of the Dai (see p326) are just a few of the celebrations that bring animated (and sometimes near-frenzied) atmospheres to quiet, rural communities. While festival-style performances put on especially for tourists can give you a glimpse of this, there's nothing like experiencing the real thing.

Another strong, visual distinction between groups is found in dress. The enormous black hats of the Yi; the elaborate embroidering of the Miao; the plain navy Naxi garments embellished with seven distinctive embroidered circles; the flower headdresses of the Bulang; and the white skullcaps of the Muslims provide a visual feast.

WHEREABOUTS

Western Sìchuān is made up of Tibetans (see p394), mostly Khambas from eastern Tibet or Goloks from the northern Amdo region of Qīnghǎi. Also resident here are small numbers of Tibetan-related Qiang (see boxed text, p396). The south of the province is home to the fascinating Yi people of the Liáng Shān (Cool Mountains), who remained a slave-raiding society strictly divided along caste lines until the end of the 1950s (see p434).

Guìzhōu's social calendar is packed with more folk festivals than any other province in China.

Guìzhōu is dominated by the seven-million-strong Miao (Hmong; see p131) but also populated by the Dong (see p139), known for their dramatic wooden drum towers and bridges, and the Bouyi (see p112), the batik masters of central Guìzhōu. The border with Guǎngxī is home to small groups of Yao and Shui (see p139).

WHERE TO NEXT?

Find out just how diverse the Southwest's minority cultures really are. Turn to:

- p265, for more on the flexible love affairs and pictographs of the Naxi
- p337, to learn about the turbans, tattoos, teeth-staining and tea-growing practices of the Bulang
- p404, to learn about the ecologically sound (if seemingly gruesome) Tibetan sky burial
- p429, to read about the mystery of the Bo hanging coffins
- p99, for a rundown of the countless festivals of the Miao
- p184, and trek through strings of Dong villages with their distinctive drum towers
- p180, for a spectacular escapade through Zhuang and Yao settlements

Drung girls of northwestern Yúnnán have their faces tattooed as a coming-of-age custom. Drung men generally consider tattooed women very beautiful and refuse to marry a woman who is not tattooed.

Northwest Yúnnán has large numbers of Naxi (see p265) and the matrilineal Mosu (see Walking Marriage, p286). The Bai of Dàlǐ have been largely Sinofied over the centuries but were once the most powerful ethnic group in the region (see Nanzha Kingdom, p25). The Bai and the Yi are the two largest minority groups in Yúnnán. The remote border valleys of the Salween River (Nù Jiāng) near Assam in India are Drung, Lisu and Nu areas (see p300).

Xīshuāngbǎnnà has the densest collection of ethnic groups, of which the largest are the Hani (or Akha; see p346) and Dai (see p326). Many smaller groups such as the Lahu (see p340), Wa, Jingpo and Khmer-speaking Bulang (see p337) live in remote settlements and still practise slash-and-burn agriculture. Tiny communities of Pumi, Achang, Jinuo (see p333) and Deang still exist.

Guǎngxī is the most Sinofied province of the Southwest but has communities of Dong, Yao and Mulao in the north.

Environment

From within the cement seas of the Southwest's cities, you may wonder if the urban sprawl has swallowed up all nature had to offer. Fear not. China still has some natural wonders to behold and the Southwest has the lion's share. Spelunkers will be awed by Guìzhōu's Zhijin Cave, one of the world's largest underground labyrinths. Geologists will be perplexed by Guǎngxī's bizarre karst landscape at Guìlín. Hikers after a challenge with views will find it at the holy Éméi Shān, and photographers (and everyone else) will be gobsmacked by the alpine scenery of Jiuzhaigou Nature Reserve. From soaring mountain peaks to lush subtropical forests, from the elusive panda to marauding monkeys, China's Southwest will leave nature-lovers spoiled for choice.

Nevertheless, China is also faced with serious environmental problems. Environmental laws are often unpoliced, and environmentalists are only beginning to gain a voice. Things are improving in some areas but be prepared to encounter heavy pollution, piles of litter and dirty waterways.

THE LAND

China is the third-largest country in the world with an area of 9.5 million sq km. The land surface is like a staircase descending from west to east. The Southwest sits near the top of the stairs, with the mountains of Sìchuān and Yúnnán being an extension of the lofty Qīnghǎi–Tibet Plateau. The highest peak in the Southwest is Gònggā Shān at 7556m; other notable peaks include Kawa Karpo (Méilǐ Xuěshān; 6740m) near Déqīn, and Yùlóng Xuěshān (Jade Dragon Snow Mountain; 5596m) near Lìjiāng.

From these mountains, the land drops down to the Sìchuān Basin and Yúnnán–Guìzhōu Plateau. Melting snow and ice from these highlands tumbles down to form some of the most dramatic gorges in the world, including the famous Tiger Leaping Gorge. In this part of northwest Yúnnán, some of the country's largest rivers pass within 150km of each other, separated by huge mountains: the Salween River (Nù Jiāng), Mekong River (Láncāng Jiāng) and the Upper Yangzi (Jīnshā Jiāng). The Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) runs through the Southwest and is, at 6300km, China's longest river. It's also home to the Three Gorges Dam (p458) and the controversial Yangzi Dam Project (p284). Its watershed of almost 2 million sq km – 20% of China's land mass – supports 400 million people.

Earthquakes are not uncommon. A major quake hit Lìjiāng in 1996, killing 228 people; another destroyed over 10,000 homes 100km east of Dàlǐ in January 2000, and western Sichuān was hit again in 2001. The region's worst quake was in 1970, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, when 15,500 were killed around Tānghǎi.

Below the mountains lies the Sìchuān Basin, known as the Red Basin due to its purple sandstone and shale deposits. This fertile plain averages only 500m in altitude and supports over 100 million people. South of this is the limestone Yúnnán–Guìzhōu Plateau, which takes in eastern Yúnnán, Guìzhōu and western Guǎngxī. At 1000m to 2000m, this eroded carbonate rock produces the weird karst formations of Shílín (the Stone Forest), the caves and waterfalls of Guìzhōu and the famous landscapes of Guìlín and Yángshuò.

Many of the region's ethnic groups have traditionally maintained a close and sustainable relationship with their natural environment.

Southern Yúnnán and Guǎngxī sit astride the tropic of Cancer. Southern Yúnnán is protected from cold northern winds by the Himalayan mountains and receives moisture-laden air from the Indian Ocean, resulting in a monsoon climate and isolated pockets of tropical rainforest.

WILDLIFE

China's Southwest is endowed with an extremely diverse range of natural vegetation and animal life. Unfortunately, humans have had a considerable impact and much of China's rich natural heritage is rare, endangered or

BANKING ON YAKS

Travelling through the northwest of Sìchuān, you'll inevitably encounter the yak. Huge and silent, they'll eye you up from the other side of the bus window as they're herded along by nomadic Tibetans. Unlike you and me, these animals thrive at 1070m to 1220m with a whole lot of fat accumulated just below their heavy wool coat to keep them warm through the frozen winters. Female yaks weigh in at around 360kg while males can reach weights of 1000kg and stand over 1.8m tall.

Tibetans recognised the potential of the yak and began domesticating it over 5000 years ago. There is scarcely an inch of the animal that goes unused: wool for tents, clothes, carpets and rope; skin for shoes, coats and boots; horns for decoration and utensils; fat for candles burned in temples; and the live animal itself for ploughing and threshing. Not to mention the meat and milk – yak meat is surprisingly low in fat, but the milk is around 7%, making the butter and cheese decidedly strong to say the least.

The wild yak, distinguishable by its all-black coat and gargantuan proportions, is now categorised as vulnerable by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre. More commonly seen is the domestic yak, crossbred with dairy cattle in order to produce more milk and better meat. These *dzo,* as they're called in Tibetan, retain their hardiness but are closer in size to a cow than a yak.

While the yak remains the backbone of the Tibetan economy and culture, increased degradation of grasslands and inbreeding have brought about a massive drop in the animals' weight and milk production. To counteract this, a yak sperm bank has opened its doors just north of Lhasa with hopes of raising both the numbers and the quality of the animal, if not the morale of the male yaks.

extinct. Many animals are officially protected, though illegal hunting and trapping continues. A bigger challenge is habitat destruction, caused by encroaching agriculture, urbanisation and industrial pollution. While catching sight of China's rare wildlife in its natural habitat requires a great deal of time, patience and luck, many visitors do include visits to protected parks and research bases for a more guaranteed look at China's elusive residents and blooms. Bird-watching is the exception to the rule; if you're willing to rough it in China's outback, you have a good chance of seeing some rare winged friends.

The website www.wwfchina.org has details of the World Wildlife Foundation's projects for endangered and protected animals in China. You'll also find a kids' page for the budding biologists in the family.

Animals

The Southwest's wealth of vegetation and variety of landscapes has fostered the development of a great diversity of animals. In mountain regions, you'll have no trouble spotting yaks and macaque monkeys while the lakes of the Yúnnán Plateau are particularly rich in carp: of China's 13 species, 12 are found only here. (Not exactly earth-shatteringly exciting, but an impressive statistic nonetheless.)

Chinese Taoists and Buddhists believe in ceasing to use protected animals in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which they maintain is traditionally based on achieving a balance in nature. What is bad for the environment is bad for the soul.

ENDANGERED ANIMALS

The Southwest's most exciting wildlife is also its rarest. The stunning snow leopard is found in the most remote reaches of western Sìchuān and is rarely encountered, even by researchers. It preys on mammals as large as mountain goats, but is persecuted for allegedly preying on livestock. Also at risk is the Asiatic black bear and the brown bear; the sika, white-lipped (Thorold's) and diminutive mouse deers; the golden takin; and argali sheep.

While monkeys are a common enough sight in China's Southwest, several are rare and endangered, including the beautiful golden monkey of the southwestern mountains, the snub-nosed monkey of the Yúnnán rainforests and Guǎngxī's rare white-headed leaf monkey. For sheer diversity of wildlife, the tropical area around Yúnnán's Xīshuāngbǎnnà region is one of the richest

in China and home to the endangered slender loris, black gibbon, Asiatic Indian elephant, scaly anteater-like pangolin, and the South China tiger, of which only 30 to 80 remain in the world (making it one of the world's 10 most endangered species).

The giant panda is China's most famous mammal and lives in the bamboo-covered slopes of Sìchuān's Himalayan foothills. Of China's 28 panda reserves, 22 are located in Sìchuān. A recent census has revised the world population upwards after an estimated 39 pandas were located in Wanglang Nature Reserve, Sìchuān. Another positive development has been the 'bamboo tunnel', a reforested corridor for the pandas to move between two fragmented patches of forest. Red pandas are also found in Sìchuān and northwest Yúnnán. For more on pandas see the boxed text, p362.

The giant panda spends up to 16 hours a day eating up to 20kg of bamboo shoots, stems and leaves.

BIRDS

Southwest China has superb bird-watching opportunities, particularly in spring. Cǎohǎi Hú (Caohai Lake), in northwestern Guìzhōu province, supports overwintering black-necked cranes, as well as other cranes, storks and waterfowl. Emerald Pagoda Lake (Bìtǎ Hǎi) and Nàpà Hǎi (Napa Lake) in northwest Yúnnán are also important wintering sites for rare species of migratory birds.

Sìchuān's Jiuzhaigou Nature Reserve is home to rare and endemic Chinese birds, such as the Sìchuān owl. Also in Sìchuān, Wolong Nature Reserve is home to spectacular golden, blood, eared and kalij pheasants, which live on the steep forested hillsides surrounding the main road. As the road climbs towards Beilanshan Pass, watch for eared pheasants and the Chinese monal. The rocky scree slopes at the pass hold partridges, the beautiful grandala and the enormous bearded vulture, which has a 2m wingspan.

At www.cnbirds.com China Birding can fill you in on overwinter sites, migration routes and the geographical distribution of your feathered friends in China. It also has lots of excellent photos.

Plants

The Southwest's rich flora that has been well utilised over the years. Tea-oil trees, camphor, lacquer, betel nuts, tangerine, pomelo, orange, longan, lychee, kiwis (also known as the Chinese gooseberry), tea, chillies and garlic all grow wild in the region. Three thousand species of medicinal plants are harvested in Sìchuān alone, the most important of which are ginseng, golden hairpin, angelica, fritillary and gastrodia. Xīshuāngbǎnnà in the tropical south has plantations of rubber trees, oil palms, coconuts, cashews, coffee, cocoa, avocados and sapodillas as well as wild tea trees up to 1700 years old.

KILL OR CURE?

Before you swallow that time-honoured remedy, ask for the ingredients. Despite laws banning their capture, protected and endangered animals continue to be led to the chemist counters of China. As traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) makes it big globally, international laws prohibiting the trade of many species have forced practitioners to seek out alternative ingredients. The difficulty lies in getting Chinese consumers to accept such alternatives. Rodent bones just don't come close to the prestige of the tiger bones they're meant to replace.

These days, poachers trading in protected species can find themselves behind bars for up to 15 years, while those found smuggling the internationally revered panda face death. Even consumers can be punished, a law that has been around for some time but only recently enforced. Ingredients to watch for include bear bile, rhinoceros horns, dried seahorse, musk deer, antelope horns, leopard bones, sea lions, macaques, alligators, anteaters, pangolins, green sea turtles, freshwater turtles, rat snakes and giant clams.

The area around Xīshuāngbǎnnà has a diverse and rich flora, with over half of China's protected plants found there. Over 5000 species are known to grow here – up to 100 species in a 250 sq metre area. The tropical forest is, however, under intense strain from slash-and-burn agriculture and is today mostly secondary growth. Only 20% to 30% of the original forest remains.

Most of the world's roses, magnolias, orchids, chrysanthemums and camellias are indigenous to the mountains of western Sìchuān and northwest Yúnnán. At least 600 species of rhododendrons and 650 varieties of azaleas are found in Yúnnán. To see some of the world's rarest azaleas, head to Sìchuān's Wolong Nature Reserve (p375).

The Chinese parashorea, discovered in the 1970s in Xīshuāngbǎnnà and parts of Guǎngxī, is sought after for its timber. It's so fast-growing that the Chinese call it the Wàngtiānshù (Looking at the Sky) tree.

Also endemic to China is the ginkgo tree, a famous living fossil, the unmistakeable imprint of which has been found in rocks 270 million years old. Another prehistoric plant is *Cyathea spinulosa,* a large, woody fern which existed as far back as the Jurassic period. More recently, scientists were somewhat astonished to find specimens of *Metasequoia,* a 200-million-year-old conifer long thought extinct, growing in an isolated valley in Sìchuān. This ancient pine is related to the huge redwoods of North America's west coast. Yúnnán's 'Dragon's Blood Tree' has a life span of up to 8000 years, making it the longest-lived tree on earth. One of the rarest trees indigenous to the area is the magnificent Cathay silver fir, found in isolated groups at Huaping in Guǎngxī. The unique dove tree, or handkerchief tree, grows only in the deciduous forests of the southwest and is becoming increasingly rare.

Apart from rice, the plant probably most often associated with China is bamboo. Some 300 species cover about 3% of the total forest area in China and most of this is located in the subtropical areas south of the Yangzi River. The best place to surround yourself by it is in the Shunan Bamboo Sea of Sìchuān. Bamboo is the favourite nosh of the giant panda and cultivated by the Chinese for building material, food, scaffolding and disposable chopsticks, not to mention furniture and arts and crafts.

NATIONAL PARKS

China has an incredibly diverse range of natural escapes scattered across the country. Since the first nature reserve was established in 1956, around 2000 more parks have joined the ranks, protecting about 14% of China's land area.

Over the past decade, there has been an explosion of nature reserves in the Southwest; Yúnnán alone has over 100 nature reserves, more than any other province. Some reserves protect whole ecosystems while others protect specific rare animals or flora. Others protect geological wonders, such as the limestone terracing at Báishuǐtái (p292) or Shílín (the Stone Forest; p430).

The Chinese government site http://china.org.cn has a link to a page covering environmental issues, with regularly updated stories and links. While the content is interesting, it leans heavily on optimism.

Be prepared to share many of the more popular reserves with expanding commercial development. Tourism is generally welcomed into these reserves with open arms, meaning pricey hotels, more roads, gondolas, hawkers and busloads of tourists. With a little effort, you can often find a less beaten path to escape down but don't expect utter tranquillity.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

As a developing country with quick-paced industrialisation, it's not surprising that China has some hefty environmental issues to contend with. Unfortunately, China's huge population makes its environmental plights infinitely bigger than those of other nations. With one-quarter of the world's population living on only 7% of the earth's cultivable land, there is incredible pressure on the land's resources. Air pollution, deforestation, melting glaciers, endangered species, and rural and industrial waste are all taking their toll.

TOP NATURE RESERVES

Reserves	Features	Activities	When to Visit	Page
Éméi Shān	luxuriant scenery along a steep, ancient pilgrim route; monkeys; Buddhist sights	hiking, monasteries	May-Oct	p378
Fànjìng Shān	mountainous ecosystems with dove trees; golden monkeys	hiking, monkey breeding centre	May-Oct	p143
Jiǔzhàigōu	stunning alpine scenery & gem-coloured lakes; takins, golden monkeys, pandas	hiking, Tibetan village stays	Jun-Oct	p415
Wòlóng	deep, lush mountain valleys with rare azaleas & bamboo; pandas, golden monkeys, snow leopards, musk deer, golden langurs	panda rehabilitation centre, hiking	Jun-Sep	p375
Sānchàhé	tropical monsoon rainforest home to half of China's protected plant species, 62 species of mammals & 400 species of birds; elephants, gaurs, slow loris, pythons, great pied hornbills, green peafowls	hiking, elephant rehabilitation centre	Jan-Mar	p333

Conservation

Increasingly under the world's limelight with its entry into the World Trade Organization and the 2008 Summer Olympics, China seems to have shifted its policy slightly from one of 'industrial catch-up first, environmental clean-up later' to one that embraces at least a few initiatives for tidying up its environmental act now. Things like natural-gas powered buses tend to be found in urban centres and do little to counteract the countless polluting factories, but are nonetheless a step in the right direction. China is also now a member of Unesco's Man and Biosphere Programme, a signatory to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species and a member of the World Conservation Union. To the government's credit, more than 150 nature reserves have been established in the Southwest alone, protecting about 7% of China's land area. Nevertheless, the tensions between environmental conservation and economic development remain particularly acute, especially as wildlife and natural resources have long been considered mere economic commodities to be exploited.

During the Great Leap Forward, the Four Pests Campaign aimed to eradicate flies, mosquitoes, rats and sparrows. The result was an environmental imbalance with a huge increase in hungry, crop-devouring bugs.

Resources & Pollution

The biggest source of China's air pollution is coal, with major cities lying smothered under great canopies of smog. Coal provides some 70% of China's energy needs and around 900 million tonnes of it go up in smoke every year. Somewhere in China a new coal-fired power station opens every seven to ten days; the result is immense damage to air and water quality, agriculture and human health, and acid rain. As demand quickly outstrips domestic resources of coal, the government has made some effort to seek out alternative sources of energy. Plans to construct natural gas pipelines are underway and taxes have been introduced on high-sulphur coals. It is also proposed that the controversial Three Gorges Dam (p461) will produce up to one-ninth

For a fairly academic but constructive look at China's environmental problems, check out *Green China: Seeking Ecological Alternatives* by Geoffrey Murray and Ian Cook.

GOING GREEN

China has a long tradition of celebrating nature within its frontiers, from landscape paintings to poems dwelling on mountain peaks shrouded in mist. Like many nations of the world, the contradictory China of today eulogises its landscape while simultaneously destroying it.

The green movement in China is relatively new. Waking up to the reality that its citizens had no education or information on ecology, the government has begun bombarding audiences with green directives on TV, from saving water to planting trees to litter disposal. A growing middle class finds itself wooed by adverts for environmentally friendly washing powders and detergents. There has also been an increase in the severity of penalties for violating China's conservation laws, with the death penalty and life sentences not uncommon.

Impressively, the public has also begun to join in the discourse on conservation. Since the advent of China's first environmental nongovernmental organisation (NGO) in the mid-1990s, more than 2000 environmental groups have sprung up. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese now participate in activities ranging from politically 'safe' issues, such as biodiversity protection and environmental education, to cutting-edge environmental activism like dam protests. So far, the government has largely tolerated these activities, perhaps conscious that environmental NGOs can fill gaps in official efforts to protect the environment. However, with little elbow room given for heated debates in the media, it remains to be seen whether or not the government's heavy foot will eventually stamp out this dissent.

of China's energy and therefore decrease emissions by 100 million tonnes. The government also has plans to dam the Yangzi in eight places further upriver, including at the popular Tiger Leaping Gorge (see the boxed text, p284). There are also plans to dam the Nu River, see p301.

In *The River Runs Black* Elizabeth Economy gives a fascinating account of China's environmental crisis. Her perspective is neither melodramatic nor dull, and is very readable.

The country's water isn't faring any better than its air. It is estimated that China annually dumps three billion tonnes of untreated water into the ocean via its rivers, a statement that won't likely shock you if you take a look at some of the water flowing under the bridges. At the end of 2005, around 40% of China's cities had no wastewater-treatment plants and many of those that did have plants didn't use them because local officials resented the cost of running them.

China's rivers and wetlands also face great pressure from siltation due to deforestation and increased run-off, which have brought devastating floods in western Sìchuān and led to a government ban on commercial logging in Sìchuān and Yúnnán. It's hoped that a rise in tourism can earn back some of the billions previously reaped from the lumber trade. Since 2002 two huge diversion projects have been underway as further means of controlling the Southwest's flooding and of moving water from the Yangzi River Basin to drought-prone northern China. A third route, which will necessitate blasting through mountains to link the Yangzi and Yellow Rivers, is proposed for 2010. Opponents call the diversions an overblown Maoist approach; a more moderate solution would be to increase water prices as a means of deterring waste. Prices are currently way below market rates but the government fears that raising them could cause widespread social unrest.

The impact of China's environmental problems doesn't stop at the country's borders – grit from China's desertification has reached as far as Vancouver and San Francisco.

All of this is exacerbated by global warming, which is shrinking the Qīnghǎi–Tibet Plateau's enormous glaciers by 7% each year. This rapid melting will initially increase rivers' water levels, causing widespread flooding, but it's believed it will eventually lead to severe water shortages, droughts and increased sandstorms.

Southwest China Outdoors

China's Southwest is the very icon of the great big outdoors, where huge, voluptuous landscapes insist on an open-air sense of adventure. This is very much an alfresco destination – the Southwest doesn't do stuffy museums or decaying imperial palaces very well. It's not so hot on the Great Wall (it never made it this far south), but the awe-inspiring natural scenery of the Southwest really is something to write home about.

The Southwest isn't, by and large, one of China's big polluters either, so fresh air is a powerful incentive to get out and about. The deserts and arid plains of the north and northwest have no place here – down here it's largely green and intoxicatingly luxurious with a rich diversity of fauna and flora. Unlike other parts of China, it's simple to get off the beaten path and into the big outdoors. And with the sheer variety of landscapes around you – from the dreamlike karst peaks around Yángshuò to the lush vegetation of Xīshuāngbǎnnà and the looming mountains of western Sìchuān – you're spoiled for choice. A sizable and growing crop of outdoor activities can further pepper up any trip to the Southwest and add an adrenaline edge to the fantastic scenery.

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

The rapidly modernising zeal of Běijīng and Shànghǎi – with their hard-edged and futuristic skylines – doesn't make it this far. The Southwest is developing rapidly, but its largely landlocked topography (save for the long Guǎngxī coastline) and the huge distance from China's powerhouse cities corrects expectations that China is a land of shimmering high-rises and breakneck growth.

It is the opportunity to explore the diverse landscapes and vibrant minority cultures of the region that generates its allure, rather than Hong Kong–style modernity. Travellers to Běijīng and Shànghǎi may be initially swept away by their modern guise, but travel through China is ultimately about seeking out the old, the traditional and surviving remnants from earlier dynasties. The Southwest has these in bundles.

The Last Panda, by George Schaller, is the evocative story of a field research team who delve into this elusive animal's habitat in Sìchuān's Wolong Nature Reserve.

Coming to China's Southwest is essentially a nonurban experience. Chóngqìng may be the world's largest metropolitan area, but even this vast city is the gateway to one of China's premier natural phenomena – the awe-inspiring Three Gorges (p458). Most large cities in the Southwest – take Nánníng, Kūnmíng or Guìyáng – are incidental in the bigger picture and serve as launch pads to explorations of the surrounding outdoors.

Han civilisation remains the predominant culture in the Southwest, but if savouring minority culture tops your menu, there isn't much reason to leave the region. The ethnic melange of China's Southwest is unique and far more evident than, say, in northeast China, and it's a principle reason to be here.

Getting out into the open can liberate you from China's hard-nosed entry ticket system for tourist sights. Virtually every official sight in China requires an entrance ticket, often at absurd prices (eg Emerald Pagoda Lake in Yúnnán; p292) that increase way ahead of inflation. Practically every museum in China requires a ticket (which does nothing to promote free education). Although you will be charged at many of the big destinations

in the Southwest, much remains that is gratis, as long as you pack a sense of adventure and are prepared to venture off the tourist trail. There's also all the fun of leaving your guidebook behind and taking off into the unknown; except for the border regions, you won't have to worry too much about where you go, and half the fun of exploring China's Southwest is getting suitably lost.

The Chinese have a high tolerance for synthetic walkways, poured concrete statues and artificiality in general. Westerners do not. This is in sharp contrast with traditional Chinese mores as seen in traditional Chinese painting, where the human presence was minimised. Among young Chinese, there is a growing need to eke out unspoiled areas of natural beauty; but for most Chinese over the age of 40, a kind of communist comfort is drawn from beholding man's indelible impact on the environment.

CLIMATE

As hot and humid as a greenhouse, the Sichuān Basin has so many foggy days that locals say that the dogs bark in shock whenever they see the sun.

China's Southwest has some of the land's best year-round climate. That said, you want to pick and choose carefully if arriving in the off season. The blistering winter of Běijīng may be a glacial world away from a December trip to Xīshuāngbǎnnà, but at altitude in western Sìchuān or northern Yúnnán, things can get dangerously cold. See p467 for further climate information. Summers in the Southwest are also extremely hot, and although altitude can make things more pleasant, spring and autumn trips are recommended.

BALLOONING

Taking lazily to the skies in hot-air balloons over China's Southwest is feasible. The **Xi'an Flying Balloon Club** (西安飞翔热气球俱乐部; Xīān Fēixiáng Rèqìqiú Jùlèbù; ☎ 0773-882 8444; www.xaballoon.com; 126 Kangzhan Lu; per hr per person Y650) has an office in Yángshuò with hot-air balloons taking to the skies from the Hongqi wharf (红旗码头; Hóngqí Mǎtou) on the Yulong River, around 2km downriver from Yuèliàng Shān (Moon Hill). Flights vary from short vertical lift-offs to hour-long voyages drifting with the wind over the dreamy karst landscape below; for the best views, aim for early morning and evening flights. If you've never experienced a journey in a hot-air balloon, the sublime terrain around Yángshuò can be perfect for a maiden voyage.

BIRD-WATCHING

Keen bird-watchers should carry *The Field Guide to the Birds of China,* by J MacKinnon, which illustrates and describes all 1300 species that have been recorded in China, and gives worthwhile background on their ecology and conservation.

Ornithologists will want to visit the Napa Hai Nature Reserve (p292) between September and March to catch glimpses of black-necked cranes. These cranes can also be seen at Cǎohǎi Hú (p118) at Wēiníng in Guìzhōu province, which sees 100,000 birds passing through in winter (the optimum time to visit is between December and March). Bird-watchers also journey to Wēibǎo Shān (p246) in Yúnnán as it lies on a migratory route. The wetland reserve near Zhiyun Monastery (p272) in Yúnnán is a bird-watching diversion for those in the area. Before visiting reserves, check the latest bird flu situation; see the Health chapter (p496) for more information.

CAVING

The Chinese predilection for caves illuminated by fluorescent rainbow lights grates with Western visitors who prefer their caves *au naturel* and with human impact kept to a minimum. Apart from illuminating stalactites with disco lights, the Chinese delight in naming geological forms with names culled from Chinese myth, religion and superstition; this frequently serves to confuse Westerners as well as robbing the rock form of its spontaneous beauty.

Some caves, such as the Longgong Caves (p113) in Guìzhōu, frequently see a log jam of visitors. For Middle Earth–style effects, try out China's largest cave at Zhijin Cave (p114), also in Guìzhōu.

An organisation with a wealth of information on caving in China is the **Hong Meigui Cave Exploration Society** (www.hongmeigui.net), dedicated to caving in China and which has mounted numerous expeditions to caves around Chóngqìng and throughout Sìchuān, Yúnnán and Guǎngxī. An organisation focussing on the limestone caves around Chóngqìng – rich caving territory – is the **CQOutdoor Caving Team** (☎ 023-6696 1458; www.cqoutdoor.com). Its website is Chinese only at present, but you may be able to get in touch with an English speaker. For guided caving expeditions in the Southwest, also consult **ChinaCaving** (www.chinacaving.com). The company takes teams into karst caves around Lèyè County and Fèngshān County in Guǎngxī province.

CYCLING

Increasing numbers of travellers are cycling into China from Southeast Asia. Cycling through China's Southwest allows you to go when you want, to see what you want and at your own pace. It can also be an extremely cheap, as well as a highly authentic, way to see China.

You will have virtually unlimited freedom of movement and you may also encounter people who rarely if ever come into contact with foreigners. Bear in mind, however, that China's Southwest is a massive chunk of territory (Guǎngxī province, for example, is the size of the UK), and you may wish to alternate your cycling days with trips by train, bus, boat, taxi or even plane, especially if you want to avoid particularly steep regions or areas where the roads are poor.

Yúnnán has 6000m peaks while Guǎngxī has over 1500km of coastline.

Bikechina (www.bikechina.com) is a good source of information for cyclists coming to China, and includes numerous travelogues by cyclists. The Yángshuò-based company offers tours around China's Southwest, ranging from one-day bike tours of Chéngdū to five-day round trips from Chéngdū to Dānbā to eight-day tours around Yúnnán from Kūnmíng to Tiger Leaping Gorge, via Dàlǐ and Lìjiāng. Groups consists of small numbers of cyclists; you can fit in with a range of tours or have a route designed for you. Prices start from around US$90 per person per day.

Biking routes in the Southwest are infinite in number, but be sure to include the journey from Kūnmíng to Dàlǐ, Lìjiāng and on to Shangri-la (Zhōngdiàn), from where you can continue through magnificent scenery on to Lǐtáng in Sìchuān (one week); be prepared for very steep gradients and avoid doing this in winter as the road will be totally snowbound. Numerous roads lead into Tibet (eg via Bātáng from Lǐtáng); despite massive temptation, remember that you are legally not allowed to enter Tibet without a permit. A mammoth bike journey can be undertaken from Kūnmíng in Yúnnán to Chéngdū in Sìchuān. The possibilities are countless, including cycling from Yúnnán into Guìzhōu and then on to Guǎngxī; naturally the rest of China lies beyond. See www.bicycle-adventures.com for recommended cycling routes in the region.

Roads in China's Southwest are generally in good condition, but be prepared for the worst wherever you go. Be aware that lorries (trucks) and cars in China can drive very dangerously. Equipping yourself with a provincial map in Chinese is essential for showing locals to get directions, and for following road signs. Wild dogs can be a menace in more remote areas.

Villages can be widely spaced apart, for example in wilder parts of Sìchuān, and you may need to camp, so taking camping equipment is necessary. Also ensure you have adequate clothing as many routes will be taking you to considerable altitude.

Most areas are now open to foreigners so you won't need a travel permit (the big exception to this is Tibet), although it is worth checking with the local Public Security Bureau before you enter an area you are unsure about.

A basic check list for cycling in China's Southwest includes a good bicycle repair kit, sunscreen and other protection from the sun, waterproofs, camping equipment and maps. For more information on cycling in China, see the Bicycle section in the Transport chapter (p486).

ECOSYSTEM BIODIVERSITY

The opposite of the swirling dust storms of the Taklamakan Desert or the plummeting water table of dry-as-dust Běijīng and Tiānjīn, China's Southwest is a lush and fecund region. Flourishing and well-watered ecosystems abound wherever you glance; Yúnnán alone accounts for at least half of China's animal species (see boxed text, p305). The sheer wealth of regional ecosystem diversity is a dazzling draw card for visitors. Trek to the magnificent ecosystems flourishing around Yúnnán's Mingyong Glacier (p295) or be wowed by the sheer richness of the Nujiang Valley (p297) – home to almost 25% of China's plant and animal species. Explore the primeval forests of Báimǎ Xuěshān (p297) or be simply overwhelmed in spring by the vibrant yellows of Luópíng's fields of canola (p304).

Only about 5% of Yúnnán and Guizhōu can be considered flat.

Disappear among 30 different types of swaying bamboo in the Shunan Bamboo Sea (p427) for a taste of the utter sublime, or surrender to the jaw-dropping beauty of Jiuzhaigou Nature Reserve (p415), perhaps the most iconic backdrop of China's Southwest. Sìchuān's Huanglong National Park (p414) also harbours some impressive ecosystems, and eager panda-watchers will enjoy trooping off to Wolong Nature Reserve (p375) for fleeting glimpses of the endangered mammal (see also boxed text, p362). The splendid alpine scenery and gorgeous terrain of Yading Nature Reserve (p407) demands exploration by the visitor. Chìshuǐ's (p147) magnificent ferns have their origins way back in the Jurassic. For details on opportunities for bird-watching in China's Southwest, see p64.

HORSE TREKS

China's Southwest has a handful of places where you can ride horses on treks into the hills, principally in Sìchuān and Yúnnán. In Sìchuān, Sōngpān (p411), around Lǎngmùsì (p421), Yading Nature Reserve (p407) and the Tagong Grasslands (p393) are all popular destinations for horse trekking. In Yúnnán, horse treks can also be made up to the Mingyong Glacier (p295) and on Yùlóng Xuěshān (p274) outside Lìjiāng. You may not be able to do too much solo horse trekking or have much freedom of movement, and generally you will be accompanied by a guide.

RIVER JOURNEYS

The Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) cuts a dramatic path through Yúnnán and Sìchuān, before pouring out of Chóngqìng to funnel splendidly through the Three Gorges. Despite the completion of the Three Gorges Dam, the journey through the gorges (in between Chóngqìng and Yíchāng) remains one of China's most spectacular trips (p458). The other celebrated river trip is through the splendid karst scenery along the Li River (Lí Jiāng; p166) between Guìlín and Yángshuò. The highlight of the five-hour round trip along the Zuo Jiang Scenic Area (p206) in southwestern Guǎngxī province is the 2000-year-old Zhuang murals at Huāshān. For trekking opportunities in some of Yúnnán's most splendid river-valley scenery, the Nujiang Valley (p297) is second to none.

ROCK CLIMBING

Yángshuò is one of Asia's fastest growing rock-climbing destinations, with massive potential for new routes; see p169 for further details. For loads of tips and hints on climbing, mountaineering and trekking in China, consult www.outdoorschina.com. Yángshuò-based **Karst Climber** (www.karstclimber.com) is another useful climbing operation and source of information for climbs in the Yángshuò region. A guidebook to rock climbing in Yángshuò is available from local shops, detailing recommended bolted routes in the area.

TREKKING

Trekking is essential for a full-on appreciation of the beauty of the Southwest (for a local voice on trekking, see p408). Whether it's the Yubeng or Kawa Karpo Treks (see p296), Tiger Leaping Gorge (p281), treks around Fúgòng p299) and other reaches of the Nujiang Valley (p297), hikes up to Dímáluò and Báihànluò (p301), Yading Nature Reserve (p407), or around Lǎngmùsì (p421), tramping through the Southwest can generate the most vivid memories of your trip.

Trekking through borderland territories – where ethnic cultures and languages merge and overlap, and Han China is at its most diluted – allows a unique perspective on the Middle Kingdom. Exploring western and southern Yúnnán province will bring you into contact with a long and meandering international border, where the province comes up against Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. Travellers to western Sìchuān will find themselves in a largely Tibetan world, in parts very close to the border with Tibet.

You will see flowers growing in reckless profusion… For days on end you may tramp over carpets of flowers.

FRANK KINGDON-WARD ON YÚNNÁN; PLANT EXPLORER; C 1911

Treks can generally be divided into two groups: established treks (where routes are easy to follow, visitor numbers are relatively large and guesthouses and restaurants lie along the trail) and wilderness experiences (where there is no defined route, no accommodation or food, and the thrill of the unexpected waits at every turn). Established treks also vary in difficulty from the simple, but lovely, trek between Píngān and Dàzhài through the Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces (p181) to more complex and exhilarating, but similarly established, trails such as Tiger Leaping Gorge and Yading Nature Reserve. From a navigation point of view, some of the simplest treks are up sacred peaks such as Éméi Shān (p378) and Qīngchéng Shān (p373).

For wilderness trekking, you will need to set out fully prepared, with detailed maps, tent, stove, sleeping bag, waterproofs and everything you may need to subsist away from civilisation. Climate change is one of the greatest

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR WALKING

Before embarking on a walking trip, consider the following points to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience:

- Pay any fees and possess any permits required by local authorities.
- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable walking for a sustained period.
- Try to obtain reliable information about physical and environmental conditions along your intended route.
- Walk only in regions, and on trails, within your realm of experience.
- Be aware that weather conditions and terrain vary significantly from one region, or even from one trail, to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any trail. These differences influence the way walkers dress and the equipment they carry.
- Ask before you set out about the environmental characteristics that can affect your walk and how local, experienced walkers deal with these considerations.

hazards, so time your expedition well and prepare for the worst possible weather. Western Sìchuān offers unrivalled trekking opportunities if you are willing to be self-sufficient and adventurous. The Tagong Grasslands (p393) is great for summer treks, and the area around Dānbā (p395) brings you to fascinating Tibetan and Qiang villages and Qiang watchtowers (see p396). At altitude, Lǐtáng (p402) in Sìchuān is an increasingly attractive trekking destination.

Joining a trekking tour can be expensive and an unattractive option for those who want absolute freedom, but you can take a back seat as all the preparation is done for you, guides are provided and you are looked after. See p475 for recommended tour companies that arrange treks in China's Southwest.

Food & Drink

In China, cuisine is about far more than just filling your belly. It's used as a social lubricant, as an offering to the gods, as a means of showering generosity, and as a conduit for business. A common Chinese saying claims 'for the people, food is their heaven'. This passion for food has shaped Chinese culture, with cooks developing and perfecting their art in even the harshest of living conditions. The result is a triumphant blending of inventiveness, flavour and economy. In all but the remotest corners of the Southwest you'll find a handful of ingredients combined into a cacophony of dishes.

www.eatingchina.com is a terrific blog dedicated to the delights of Chinese gastronomy and dishes up recipes and info on tea and holiday foods.

A well-prepared Chinese dish is expected to appeal to all the senses: smell, colour, taste and texture. You can also look for a blending of Yin and Yang, the principles of balance and harmony – bland dishes paired with spicy ones, crisp dishes paired with soft ones. Most vegetables and fruits are Yin foods, generally moist or soft, and are meant to have a cooling effect which nurtures the feminine aspect of our nature. Yang foods – fried, spicy or with red meat – are warming and nourish our masculine side.

Chilli peppers came to China from Peru and Mexico during the Ming dynasty and are a concentrated source of vitamins A and C as well as the hallmark of the Southwest's cuisine.

China's geographical and climatic differences, together with local cooking styles, have created many different schools of cuisine. Generally, the western school is summed up as spicy although it varies dramatically between provinces and regions. In the north of the Southwest, cuisine has evolved to provide lasting satisfaction in a cold climate (think lard, meat and yak butter) while southern dishes tend to dry out the body through perspiration (think chilli and more chilli), which helps to adjust to the intense humidity.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

The most commonly used ingredients in southwestern cuisine are pork, poultry, legumes and soya beans, spiced up with a variety of wild condiments and mountain products such as mushrooms and bamboo shoots. Seasonings are heavy – red chilli, peppercorns, garlic, ginger and onions. Most dishes are stir-fried quickly under extreme heat ('explode-frying') but you'll also find cooking styles like *hóngshāo* (soaked in soy sauce), *yúxiāng* (cooked in a spicy sauce meant to resemble fish) and *tiěbǎn* (served sizzling).

Particularly popular in Sìchuān and Guìzhōu, hotpot is a huge bowl of bubbling, spicy broth that you can warm yourself around while dipping in skewers of veggies, tofu and meat. It's a cheap, tasty way to fill your belly in the winter. For the spicy version ask for *làwèi* (spicy); if you'd like something milder request *báiwèi* (not spicy; and expect a smirk from your server).

In Guǎngxī you'll find Cantonese-style cooking, which tends to be lighter, less spicy and more exotic. Its most popular creations are sweet and sour dishes and dim sum, which has become a Sunday institution worldwide.

While you'll find apples and mandarins throughout much of the region, fruit-lovers should keep on the watch for more exotic varieties, especially in Yúnnán. Lychees, pomelos, longan, rambutan, spodilla, persimmons, dragon fruit and exceptionally sweet pineapple frequently make an appearance in the markets.

You should also have an opportunity to try the region's unique minority dishes. Dai dishes are particularly tasty; try black glutinous rice (really, it's better than it sounds!); sticky rice steamed in bamboo tubes; pineapple and coconut rice; and beef with lemon grass. The Miao use zesty tangerine peel in stir-fries and the Naxi make delicious flatbread that will fill you for a day. In Tibetan communities you may get to try immensely strong yak cheese, *shemre* (rice, yogurt and yak-meat curry) and *tsampa* (roasted barley meal).

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

In a traditional Chinese meal, grains are always the centrepiece, served with vegetables, soya bean and, if affordable, meat or fish. The principle that a proper meal is based around a staple grain dates back at least to the Shang dynasty (1700–1100 BC) and remains fundamental to Chinese cuisine wherever it is found.

In the Southwest you can expect to eat rice at least once a day but will also have ample opportunity to slurp down rice or flour noodles and munch on local breads like steamed buns and flatbread. For meat you can expect mainly pork and chicken in the cities.

OUR FAVOURITE EATING EXPERIENCES

Damian Harper

Whether the sight of dog meat is finally goading you into vegetarianism or you simply want to feast on inventive Chinese Buddhist cuisine, make a meal of it at Guìlín's Nengren Vegetarian Restaurant (p161). You're on temple grounds so the food is strictly bloodless, but the flavour's full-on.

After three days dieting on backpacker staples, I was overjoyed to bump into the Uighur chef (p173) who made an evening appearance on Yángshuò's Xi Jie to flame up handfuls of chilli-laced *yángròuchuàn* (lamb kebabs), bringing some of the aroma of China's northwest to Guǎngxī.

Tienlon Ho

A great way to while away an afternoon is sipping tea on the 2nd floor of Lǎo Jiē Shí Bā Tī Teahouse (p451). From that roost, you can look out over the old city and still hear the soft strains of the live orchestra that plays downstairs. I especially enjoyed a green tea called *yǒng chuān xiù yá* (永川秀芽) that originated during the Ba era and is a great accompaniment to the dried tomatoes and other little bites you order on the side.

A makeshift restaurant on the deck of the lone boat on the bank of the Qu Jiang in Láitān (p456) serves up an extremely fresh catch of the day. The friendly couple that runs Méng Dǎ Yú Qú Jiāng Shuǐ Shàng Cāo Chuán Yú Zhuāng (蒙打鱼渠江水上草船鱼庄) spends mornings reeling in fish and prawns upriver, which are then kept swimming in a bin on the side of the boat, until they go into the wok and (after a liberal douse of Sìchuǎn peppercorns) onto your plate.

Thomas Huhti

1910 La Gare du Sud (Kūnmíng; p230) is what I had always longed for, a classy Yunnanese food eatery – here in a neocolonial-style building – without indifferent service.

Without a doubt my favourite spot to actually eat out, as in al fresco (becoming rarer as Yúnnán catches up with China's modernisation), is wandering the ubiquitous Jinghong night markets (Jinghong; p330). Plop down, wipe the sweat off, have a cold beer and start smiling as boisterous Chinese on holiday howl for you to party with them.

Eilís Quinn

Neighbourhood locals swear by Xiǎohuì Dòuhuā (Chéngdū; p366), where the modestly sized dishes explode with flavour (and lots and lots of chilli). Picking and choosing among the mysterious list of snacks will be an absolute treat for gastronomic adventurers (I *still* crave its sweet and spicy noodles) but even the everyday dishes like dumplings are fantastic.

Staying with a Miao family in Xījiāng (p130) you may have one of the most memorable (and lengthy) meals of your life. Miao dishes are colourful with plenty of pickle. It's not too spicy but the cuisine still bursts with vivid tastes. I'd like to tell you what I ate that night in detail, but a Miao custom dictates rice wine be poured down guest's throats continually throughout the meal (no, you don't even need to hold the cup yourself). I woke up the next morning to embarrassingly illegible notes. Don't even ask about the pictures!

In minority regions, duck is often popular, dog is not uncommon, mutton is served in Muslim restaurants and, in very remote, poor areas, you'll even find rat dished up. Vegetables are varied – everything from sweet peppers to mushrooms and aubergine; in the poorest regions you can expect lots (and lots) of cabbage.

Foreigners generally find breakfast the most difficult meal to get their stomach around in China. Locals often have a bowl of rice porridge (*zhōu;* 粥; or *congee*) with pickles and *yóutiáo* (油条; deep-fried dough sticks), along with steamed buns, served plain or with fillings. This is usually washed down with hot soya bean milk.

Other common breakfast dishes include rice-noodle soups, fried peanuts and pork with hot sauce, accompanied with a glass of beer. Just what you had in mind at 7am.

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

The Chinese were the first to cultivate tea, and the art of brewing and drinking tea has been popular since the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907). You'll most commonly encounter weak jasmine *(cháshuǐ)* or nonfermented green tea *(lǜ chá)*, served on the house in most restaurants and awaiting you in your hotel room.

Indulged in a fiery, chilli-spiced dish and need to cool the fires? Order a can of almond milk. It's delicious and, more importantly, it restores calm to your tastebuds.

You'll also find wulong tea (semifermented) and, less commonly, black tea *(hóng chá)*. Eight-treasures tea *(bābǎo chá)* is a delicious combination of rock sugar, dates, nuts and tea.

Chinese people will also commonly throw a variety of ingredients – fresh ginger, orange peel, roots and herbs – into empty jars, top it with boiling water and slurp at it all day long. Teahouses serve an outrageous number of teas – many of them are also outrageously expensive so be sure to check the price list before taking a sip.

Coffee has begun making a dent in the Chinese market. In urban centres you'll find cafés serving a semidecent brew. You'll also find packets of instant coffee (including milk and sugar) that act as a good pick-me-up on long, freezing bus rides.

Soft drinks such as Coca-Cola and Sprite are readily found, along with even sweeter local versions. Jianlibao is a Chinese orange-flavoured soft drink made with honey and is definitely the best option.

Mineral water is easy to find, though it's always wise to check the seal. Served in a bottle with a straw, sweet yogurt drinks are available from some shops and street vendors. You'll also find coconut milk, soya bean milk and almond milk.

Hejie Jiu (Lizard Wine) is produced in Guǎngxī; each bottle contains one dead lizard suspended in clear liquid. Wine with dead bees or pickled snakes is also popular for alleged tonic properties. In general, the more poisonous the creature, the more potent the tonic.

Alcoholic Drinks

If tea is the most popular drink in the China, beer must be number two. And as with tea, the Chinese have perfected the art of brewing it.

The best-known brand is Tsingtao, which heralds from a brewery in Qīngdǎo that was inherited by the Chinese from the German concession. There are countless other domestic brands to sample: Liquan in Guìlín, Yufeng in Guìyáng, Báilóngtán and KK Beer in Kūnmíng, and Wanli in Nánníng. In minority regions try honey beer, prickly pear beer and Tibetan *chang,* made from barley.

China has produced wine for more than 4000 years, however Westerners are generally disappointed with the results. (Unlike Western producers, Chinese winemakers go to great lengths to achieve oxidation.) Yúnnán has a tradition of making red wine that dates from the Catholic missionaries of the 19th century; watch for the Rouhong and Shangri-la labels.

LOCAL REMEDY *Korina Miller*

We'd arrived in the small Tibetan village late and had been lucky enough to find a room in the home of a local family. The brightly painted wooden room was beautiful – but frozen. December in northwest Sìchuān was cold. Very cold. There had to be a local remedy.

We made our way into the kitchen and perched as close as we dared to the wood fire. Amid shy and friendly smiles we were each offered a big bowl of warmth – yak-butter tea.

I am a seasoned tea drinker, having slurped it back since early childhood, and I believe there is little that a good cuppa can't cure. I took a gulp. A big gulp. A big chunky gulp. I kept my smile plastered in place while my taste buds went into a horrified frenzy.

Yak-butter tea is exactly that – tea with salty, incredibly strong yak butter glopped on top. It offers a hearty dose of salt and fat during the winter months and is something of a lifesaver for the Tibetans. But I'd rather I be given my English Breakfast any day. Apparently I'm not so seasoned after all.

I looked at my travelling companion and knew from his bulging eyes and puckered cheeks that he was finding his beverage as challenging as I was. What to do?

Our hostess turned her back and 'pling' went a chunk of yak butter, torpedoed into the fire by my friend. 'Pling. Pling.' The fire sputtered and sizzled but kicked up little fuss. Nevertheless, I couldn't believe my companion's cheek. And I could believe my own even less as I followed suit. 'Pling. Pling. Pling.'

We were finally reaching the bottom of our bowls and smiling with grand relief. Our hostess wandered over and seemed genuinely pleased that we'd nearly polished off our tea. So pleased that she ladled us each out another big serving, slapped the yak butter on top and sat down to join us.

The word 'wine' gets rather loosely translated and many Chinese 'wines' are in fact spirits. Rice wine is intended mainly for cooking rather than drinking. *Baijiu* (white spirits) is extremely popular for toasting at banquets. Made from sorghum, it has a sweet, pungent smell and tastes like paint thinner. If you find yourself invited to a banquet, you will be expected to keep up with the copious toasts of this face-numbing drink, accompanied to loud cries of '*gānbēi*' ('dry the cup'). Be warned: this stuff is strong and hits hard.

The Chinese commonly greet each other with the question '*Nǐ chī fàn le ma?*' ('Have you eaten yet?').

CELEBRATIONS

Holidays

Food is the guest of honour at Chinese holidays and often plays a symbolic role. Noodles are eaten on birthdays and New Year because their long thin shape symbolises longevity. (And consequently it's bad luck to break the noodles before cooking them.)

During the Chinese New Year it's common to serve a whole chicken because it resembles family unity. Fish also plays an important role during New Year celebrations as the word for fish, *yú,* sounds similar to the word for abundance.

Many poor families who can rarely afford meat during the year will save up to serve meat at New Year to symbolise prosperity. Moon cakes *(yuè bǐng),* sweet cakes filled with sesame seeds, lotus seeds, dates and other fillings, are eaten during China's Mid-Autumn Festival, and *zòngzi* (dumplings made of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves) are eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival.

Banquets

In China, the banquet is the icing on the cake. Important for clinching business deals, welcoming guests and celebrating occasions like weddings, banquets are often a splashy affair. During a banquet, dishes appear in sequence, beginning with cold appetisers and continuing through 10 or more courses.

The host orders far more than anyone can eat; if there are empty bowls this implies a stingy host. Rice is considered a cheap filler and rarely appears at a banquet – don't ask for it; this would imply the food being served is insufficient.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

In China, clientele focus on what's in their bowl more than the ambience. Consequently, the way to hunt down a good local eatery is to find one that's busy. Unlikely posters of foreign meals may adorn the wall, the chairs may well be plastic and the lighting glaring, but if it's packed with happy, noisy locals, you can bet the food is good.

To order, you can simply point at dishes that other customers are having or, in places with an open kitchen, you can point to the ingredients you'd like. (Be sure to indicate how many dishes you'd like or you'll get a separate one for each ingredient.) The drawback to this is that you end up eating the same thing again and again; to break the habit, try using the menu in Eat Your Words (p75).

In cities, restaurants around sights and universities will often have English signs and menus, but prices are generally higher and there's often an attempt to gear dishes towards foreign tastes.

The word *fàndiàn* (饭店) usually refers to a large-scale restaurant that may or may not offer lodging. A *cānguǎn* (餐馆) is generally a smaller restaurant that specialises in one particular type of food. The most informal types of restaurants are canteen-style or small hole-in-the-wall eateries with low-end prices and often have some of the best food – watch for *cāntīng* (餐厅), *xiǎochī* (小吃) and *dàpáidàng* (大排档).

Breakfast is served early in China, mainly between 6am and 9am. In larger cities many restaurants serving lunch and dinner open from 11am to 2pm, reopen around 5pm and close at 9pm. In smaller cities, restaurants may close as early as 8pm. Some street stalls stay open 24 hours.

During its short stay in Chóngqìng (1938–1945), the Chinese Nationalist Government acquired a small army of Sichuanese chefs, many of whom continued on with the government to Taiwan, from where Sichuanese cooking spread across the globe.

Quick Eats

Weekly produce markets, night markets and old town backstreets offer an eyeful and a bellyful too. Hygiene is always a question, so make sure to eat only at the busiest of places to avoid getting sick.

Dumplings (饺子; *jiǎozi*) are a popular snack in China. Similar to ravioli, they're stuffed with meat, spring onion and greens. Locals mix chilli (辣椒; *làjiāo*), vinegar (醋; *cù*) and soy sauce (酱油; *jiàngyóu*) in a little bowl for dipping.

Portable barbeques are used to grill skewers of veggies, tofu and meat; be sure to step in before they're dosed with chilli if you're not keen on spicy foods. At more permanent barbeque stalls, you can prop yourself up at the grill, choose what you like and dip it into tasty sauces.

Other street snacks include fried tofu, tea eggs (soaked in tea and soy sauce), grilled corn-on-the-cob and baked sweet potatoes. Market snacks that most foreigners turn down include chicken feet and pig's ears. Yum, yum.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

While vegetarianism can be traced back over 1000 years in China, today it's seen as unusual at best, snobbery at worst. Many Chinese remember all too well the famines of the 1950s and 1960s and these days eating meat (as well

EATING DOS & DON'TS

- Don't wave your chopsticks around or point them at people unless you want to be labelled rude.
- Don't drum your chopsticks on the sides of your bowl – only beggars do this.
- Never commit the terrible faux pas of sticking your chopsticks into your rice. Two chopsticks stuck vertically into a rice bowl resemble incense sticks in a bowl of ashes and is considered an omen of death.
- Don't let the spout of a teapot face towards anyone. Make sure it is directed outward from the table or to where nobody is sitting.
- Never flip a fish over to get to the flesh underneath. If you do so, the next boat you pass will capsize.

as milk and eggs) is a sign of progress and material abundance. Don't be too shocked to find bits of meat snuck into your food.

While dropping food is OK, never drop your chopsticks – it's bad luck.

Strict vegetarians and vegans will find the Southwest a difficult dining date, especially outside urban areas. Vegetables are often plentiful but are generally fried in animal-based oils, and soups and noodle broth are most commonly made with meat stock. If you are willing to turn a blind eye to this, hotpot, barbeques and noodles are often a good way to fill up (nearly) meat-free.

In the most remote, poor areas, the monotony of cabbage and noodles will begin to wear your appetite thin; be sure to bring lots of snacks from the cities. Getting enough salt (something you begin to crave at higher altitudes) is also a challenge as it's generally used only in meat dishes – even crisps are seasoned with chilli rather than salt.

Pure vegan food is best sought at restaurants attached to Buddhist monasteries. The dishes are most often 'mock meat', made from tofu, wheat gluten and vegetables but shaped to look like spare ribs or fried chicken. Just close your eyes and dig in.

Swallowing Clouds gets rave reviews. In it, A Zee weaves together knowledge on cooking, culture and language in an insightful, educational, humorous way. You'll find recipes, folk tales and may even come away with the ability to decipher Chinese menus.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Dining in China is a noisy, crowded affair. Viewed as a way to celebrate togetherness, everything from slurping to spitting out bones is done with enthusiasm and at high volume.

Typically, the Chinese sit at a round table and order dishes from which everyone partakes; it's not unusual for one person at the table to order on everyone's behalf. Don't be surprised if your hosts use their chopsticks to place food in your bowl or plate; this is a sign of friendship.

Remember to fill your neighbours' tea cups when they are empty, as yours will be filled by them. On no account serve yourself tea without serving others first. When your teapot needs a refill, let the waiter know by taking the lid off the pot.

Most Chinese think little of sticking their own chopsticks into a communal dish, though this attitude has changed post-SARS. Most high-end restaurants now provide separate serving spoons or chopsticks to be used with communal dishes.

Never use a personal spoon to serve from a communal plate or bowl. When eating from communal dishes, don't use your chopsticks to root around in a dish for a piece of food. Find a piece by sight and go directly for it without touching anything else.

Probably the most important piece of etiquette comes with the bill: the person who extended the dinner invitation is presumed to pay, though everyone at the table will put up a fight. Don't argue too hard; it's expected that at a certain point in the future the meal will be reciprocated. Tipping is not the norm in China.

EAT YOUR WORDS

See the Language chapter (p501) for pronunciation guidelines.

To save on cooking fuel, meat and vegetables were traditionally chopped into tiny pieces for faster cooking and dishes were served communally to make sure everyone got something to eat.

Useful Words & Phrases

I'm vegetarian.	*Wǒ chī sù.*	我吃素
I don't eat dog.	*Wǒ bù chī gǒuròu*	我不吃狗肉
Let's eat!	*Chī fàn!*	吃饭
Not too spicy.	*Bù yào tài là.*	不要太辣
Cheers!	*Gānbēi!*	干杯
chopsticks	*kuàizi*	筷子
fork	*chāzi*	叉子
hot	*rède*	热的
ice cold	*bīngde*	冰的
knife	*dāozi*	刀子
menu	*càidān*	菜单
spoon	*tiáogēng/tāngchí*	调羹/汤匙
bill (check)	*mǎidān/jiézhàng*	买单/结帐

Food Glossary

COOKING TERMS

chǎo	炒	fry
hóngshāo	红烧	red-cooked (stewed in soy sauce)
kǎo	烤	roast
yóujiān	油煎	deep-fry
zhēng	蒸	steam
zhǔ	煮	boil

RICE DISHES

mǐfàn	米饭	steamed white rice
ròusī chǎofàn	肉丝炒饭	fried rice with pork
shūcài chǎofàn	蔬菜炒饭	fried rice with vegetables
jīdàn chǎofàn	鸡蛋炒饭	fried rice with egg
jīròuchǎofàn	鸡肉炒饭	fried rice with chicken
xīfàn; zhōu	稀饭; 粥	watery rice porridge (congee)

The delightful children's book *Moonbeams, Dumplings & Dragon Boats,* by Nina Simonds and Leslie Swartz, is filled with recipes from Chinese holidays and will teach you how to make your own mooncakes and dumplings.

NOODLE DISHES

guòqiáo mǐxiàn	过桥米线	across the bridge noodles
mǎyǐ shàngshù	蚂蚁上树	ants climbing tree (noodles and mince-meat)
niúròu miàn	牛肉面	beef noodles in a soup
shuǐjiǎo	水饺	Chinese ravioli
gān bànmiàn	干拌面	dry 'burning' noodles
jiān bǐng	煎饼	egg and flour omelette
chǎomiàn	炒面	fried noodles ('chaomein')
niúròu chǎomiàn	牛肉炒面	fried noodles with beef
huǒguō	火锅	hotpot
jīdàn miàn	鸡蛋面	noodles and egg
qìguō	汽锅	soupy casserole
zhēngjiǎo	蒸饺	steamed shuijiao

BREAD, BUNS & DUMPLINGS

yóutiáo	油条	dough stick
mántou	馒头	steamed bun
bāozi	包子	steamed savoury bun

Some Chinese believe eating pigs' feet regularly will slow down the ageing process.

MEAT & SEAFOOD DISHES

qīngjiāo niúròu piàn	青椒牛肉片	beef with green peppers
gānbiān niúròu sī	干煸牛肉丝	stir-fried beef and chilli
háoyóu niúròu	蚝油牛肉	beef with oyster sauce
shuàn yángròu	涮羊肉	lamb hotpot
chǎo lǐjī sī	炒里脊丝	shredded pork fillet
liūròupiàn	熘肉片	fried pork slices
yāoguǒ jīdīng	腰果鸡丁	chicken and cashew nuts
hóngshāo jīkuài	红烧鸡块	chicken braised in soy sauce
qìguōjī	汽锅鸡	steam-pot chicken
Běijīng kǎoyā	北京烤鸭	Peking duck
gōngbào jīdīng	宫爆鸡丁	spicy chicken with peanuts
biǎndòu ròusī	扁豆肉丝	shredded pork and green beans
guōbā ròupiàn	锅巴肉片	pork and sizzling rice crust
gǔlǎo ròu	古老肉	sweet and sour pork fillets
mù'ěr ròu	木耳肉	wooden-ear mushrooms and pork
qīngjiāo ròupiàn	青椒肉片	pork and green peppers
hóngshāo yú	红烧鱼	fish braised in soy sauce
suāntāng yú	酸汤鱼	sour soup fish
gǒuròu	狗肉	dog meat
yáng ròu	羊肉	goat, mutton
lǎoshǔ ròu	老鼠肉	rat meat

For details on the 23 recognised Sichuanese flavour combinations, the 56 cooking methods and the secrets behind tastes like fragrant fish, sour-sweet and lychee, pick up *Land of Plenty: A Treasury of Authentic Sichuan Cooking*, by Fuchsia Dunlop, written from knowledge gained at a Chéngdū cooking school.

VEGETABLE DISHES

sùchǎo dòuyá	素炒豆芽	fried beansprouts
sùchǎo shūcài	素炒蔬菜	fried vegetables
xiānggū báicài	香菇白菜	bok choy and mushrooms
jiāngzhī qīngdòu	姜汁青豆	string beans with ginger
chǎo fānqié càihuā	炒番茄菜花	fried tomato and cauliflower
mógu chǎo fānqié	蘑菇炒番茄	mushroom and tomato
mù'ěr	木耳	wooden-ear mushroom
fānqié chǎodàn	番茄炒蛋	egg and tomato
yúxiāng qiézi	鱼香茄子	'fish-resembling' aubergine
suānlà tāng	酸辣汤	hot and sour soup
qiézi	茄子	aubergine
hélándòu	荷兰豆	beans
báicài	白菜	bok choy
gānlán	甘蓝	broccoli
càihuā	菜花	cauliflower
sìjìdòu	四季豆	four-season beans
biǎndòu	扁豆	French beans
rǔbǐng	乳饼	goat's cheese
mógu	蘑菇	mushroom
tǔdòu	土豆	potato
nánguā	南瓜	pumpkin
bōcài	菠菜	spinach
yùtou	芋头	sweet potato

BEAN CURD DISHES

shāguō dòufu	沙锅豆腐	tofu casserole
dòufu	豆腐	tofu
málà dòufu	麻辣豆腐	spicy tofu
jiācháng dòufu	家常豆腐	'home-style' tofu
hēimù'ěr mèn dòufu	黑木耳焖豆腐	tofu with wooden-ear mushrooms
dòufu cài tāng	豆腐菜汤	tofu and vegetable soup
cuìpí dòufu	脆皮豆腐	crispy skin tofu
lúshuǐ dòufu	卤水豆腐	smoked tofu
shāguō dòufu	砂锅豆腐	claypot tofu

CONDIMENTS

dàsuàn	大蒜	garlic
jiāng	姜	ginger
làjiāo jiàng	辣椒酱	hot sauce
fēngmì	蜂蜜	honey
yán	盐	salt
jiàng yóu	酱油	soy sauce
táng	糖	sugar

DESSERTS

bāsī xiāngjiāo	拔丝香蕉	caramelised banana
bābǎofàn	八宝饭	eight-treasures rice
tāngyuán	汤圆	sweet glutinous ball

FRUIT

píngguǒ	苹果	apple
xiāngjiāo	香蕉	banana
lóngyǎn	龙眼	longan
pípa	枇杷	loquat
lìzhī	荔枝	lychees
gānzi	柑子	mandarins
mángguǒ	芒果	mango
lízi	梨子	pear
shìzi	柿子	persimmon
bōluó	菠萝	pineapple
yòuzi	柚子	pomelo
hóngmáodān	红毛丹	rambutan

DRINKS

píjiǔ	啤酒	beer
chá	茶	tea
kāfēi	咖啡	coffee
kāi shuǐ	开水	boiling water
kuàng quán shuǐ	矿泉水	mineral water
hóng pútáo jiǔ	红葡萄酒	red wine
bái pútáo jiǔ	白葡萄酒	white wine
wēishìjì jiǔ	威士忌酒	whisky
fútèjiā jiǔ	伏特加酒	vodka
mǐ jiǔ	米酒	rice wine
báijiǔ	白酒	Chinese spirits
niúnǎi	牛奶	milk
dòujiāng	豆浆	soybean milk
suānnǎi	酸奶	yogurt
guǒzhī	果汁	fruit juice

An old Chinese saying identifies tea as one of the seven basic necessities of life, along with fuel, oil, rice, salt, soy sauce and vinegar. Tea drinking in China was documented as early as 50 BC.

To me wisdom
Lies in being drunk perpetually
And sleeping the rest of the time

LI BAI (701-762)

liǔchéng zhī	柳橙汁	orange juice
yézi zhī	椰子汁	coconut juice
bōluó zhī	菠萝汁	pineapple juice
mángguǒ zhī	芒果汁	mango juice
qìshuǐ	汽水	soft drink (soda)
rède	热的	hot
bīngde	冰的	ice cold
bīng kuài	冰块	ice cube