

# Chinese Culture & Foods

Country of Origin: China and surrounding Provinces

Primary Language(s): Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghainese<sup>3</sup>

Percent of Iowa's Population: 2.6%<sup>17</sup>

## Where are we from?



Red symbolizes the Communist Revolution and the traditional color of the Han People. The big gold star represents Communism. While the smaller stars represent the social classes. They represent the unity of the Chinese people under the Communist Party of China.<sup>4</sup>



## Education and Literacy

China's literacy rate which is defined as those aged 15 and over who can read and write is 96.4%.<sup>11</sup> The male population literacy rate is 98.2%, and the female population literacy rate is 94.5%.<sup>11</sup> School life expectancy in China has gone up about 2 years for each gender over the last decade. The school life expectancy for both male and females is 14 years.<sup>11</sup>

## Background

China's history is rich with art, politics, science, and philosophy. China was ruled by various dynasties for much of its history. China is one of the world's four ancient civilizations. Possibly the first dynasty in ancient China, is generally believed to be the Xia Dynasty which consisted of several clans living alongside the Yellow River.<sup>18</sup> The Shang Dynasty was the first to have historical records remaining. Much of the culture today was created during the Han Dynasty. Later famous dynasties, like the Song and the Tang, continued to refine the culture and bring new innovations to the world including printed money, a permanent navy, and a complex government that ruled over 100 million people.<sup>20</sup> Mao Zedong established the Peoples Republic of China on October 1, 1949.<sup>20</sup> This new government was strongly allied with the Soviet Union and modeled its government after Soviet communism. China is world's third largest nation and is the most populous nation on earth.<sup>19</sup> The county is divided into two regions which include Inner and Outer China. The Great Wall, which was built in the fifteenth Century to protect against military invasions, marks the division.<sup>19</sup>

## Traditions, Customs, & Taboos

In the Chinese culture there are only five official religions. Any religion other than Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism are illegal, even though the Chinese constitution states that people are allowed freedom of religion.<sup>12</sup> Chinese cuisine is influenced by geography and ethnic diversity. Rice is not only a major food source, it is a major element that helped grow their society.<sup>12</sup> Sculptures and paintings in China depict spiritual figures of Buddhism, which is influenced by their rich spiritual history. Many instruments are integral to Chinese culture, including the flute-like xun and the guqin.<sup>12</sup> A top Chinese taboo is don't wear a green hat. In China, wearing a green hat means to cheat on your husband.<sup>13</sup>

## Holidays & Celebrations

National holidays in China are those festivals designated by the Chinese government that everyone gets to enjoy. Chinese New Year, also known as Lunar New Year, is the grandest festival in China, with a 7-day long holiday.<sup>5</sup> The 15th day of the first lunar month is the Lantern Festival which is the first significant feast after Chinese New Year. The most important activity during the night of the event is watching various wonderful Chinese lanterns.<sup>5</sup> Christmas is one of the grandest religious festivals and a widely-spread holiday celebrated by millions of people around the world, especially in western countries. In recent years it has become more popular in the non-Christian world, including Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, and Singapore.<sup>5</sup>

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## Health Disparities

Due to the severe environmental deterioration, especially of the atmosphere and water bodies, has affected the health of the people living in China.<sup>10</sup> As a result, cancer has become a major health issue. Data from the GLOBOCAN 2012 showed that two-thirds of new cancer cases worldwide were in china.<sup>10</sup> Infant, maternal, and under-five mortality rates are two to three times higher in western rural China than in eastern China. <sup>10</sup>

## Traditional Foods & Meal Patterns

The Chinese constantly adapt new eating habits because of the scarcity of food. Meat was scarce, so dishes were created using small amounts of meat mixed with rice or noodles, both of which were more plentiful.<sup>8</sup> Rice is china's staple food. Scallions, bean sprouts, cabbage, and gingerroot are other traditional foods.<sup>8</sup> Tofu is an important source of protein for the Chinese. The Chinese typically eat 3 meals per day with snacks.<sup>9</sup> Each dinner is served with rice or noodles. Food is eaten with chopsticks, and a porcelain spoon is used for soup.<sup>9</sup>

## Considerations for WIC

- Rice is china's staple food. Tofu is an important source of protein for the Chinese.<sup>8</sup> Vegetables play a central role in Chinese cooking. These are WIC food items that families can purchase.
- Mealtimes in China are not very fixed; it depends on the individual. The common mealtimes for Chinese are usually these three: breakfast, lunch, and dinner.<sup>21</sup> Breakfast is often between 7:00am-9:00am, lunch between noon-2:00pm, and dinner between 6:00pm-8:00pm.<sup>21</sup> Dinner has become the most important meal for the Chinese.
- Greetings are formal and the oldest person is always greeted first. Handshakes are the most common form of greeting with foreigners.<sup>22</sup> Many Chinese will look towards the ground when greeting someone.<sup>22</sup> Women have many more advantages than in previous years and take up roles traditionally held by men.
- The Chinese Association of Iowa is a community-based, member-focused, and non-profit organization. A purpose of this association is to create an awareness, to inform, to educate, to support, to promote, and to advocate on issues of vital interest to the Chinese Americans in the state of Iowa.<sup>15</sup>

## What's the Iowa Connection?

The epicenter of the Chinese immigration wave in Iowa is found on the campuses of the state's largest universities. The aspirations of these immigrants is to learn at the world's best universities, land a job in the U.S. and gain a few years' experience, then return home to fulfill their Chinese dream.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese Association of Iowa is a community-based, member-focused, and non-profit organization.<sup>15</sup>



Rice is China's staple food. It can be served with any meal.

Tofu is an important source of protein for the Chinese.



## How are we Living?

In the Chinese culture it is not uncommon to have two or three generations living under the same roof. Typical cooking utensils are woks, ladles, chopsticks, and rice cookers. The most common methods are stir-frying, deep-frying, shallow-frying, boiling, and steaming.<sup>16</sup> The top three counties of residence for all Asians in Iowa in 2017 are Polk with 28.5%, Johnson with 12.0%, and Story with 10.1%.<sup>17</sup>