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Xi'an: Past and Present

Xi'an is one of China's oldest cities and it has a rich and important history. Today, the wonderful and vibrant city is one of modern China's high-tech centers, drawing from both the present and the past to offer something truly special to locals and visitors.

China Showcase Library Learn about China, through its history, people, places, and culture. Supported by original material developed by National Geographic Learning and People's Education Press, the China Showcase Library presents non-fiction reading selections on a variety of fascinating topics.

The audio for this reader is available for download at ELTNGL.com/csl

Intermediate
1600 headwords

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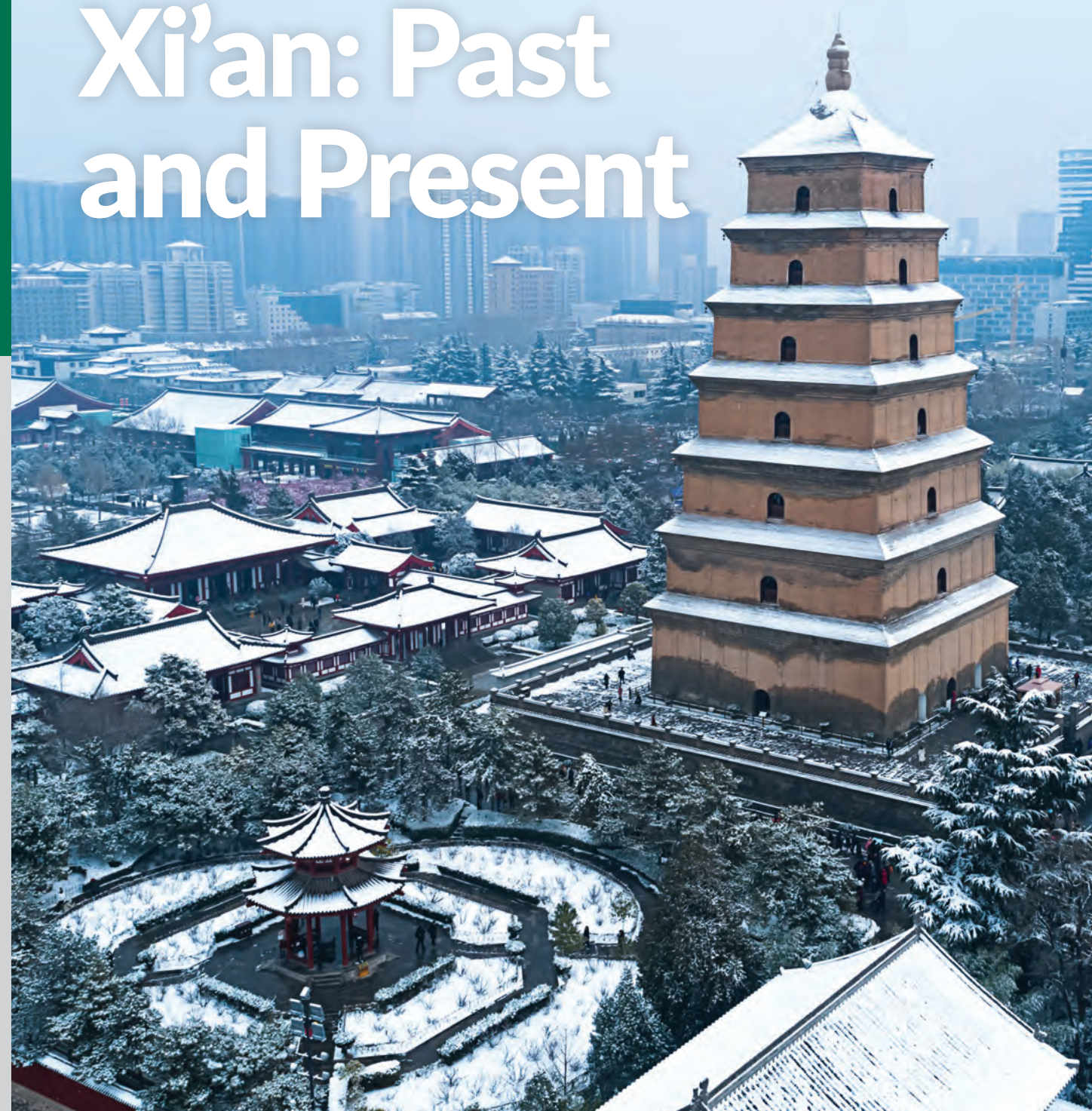


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Before You Read

This is a brief story of Xi'an, a city in China. When you look at Xi'an on a map, it is near the center of China. However, because of China's historical development and because much of China's population is in the east, most Chinese think of Xi'an as a city in Northwest China. Xi'an is the capital of Shaanxi Province.¹



Xi'an, China

A. **Liu Bang.** Read the sentences. Then complete the paragraph with the correct form of the underlined words or phrases.

Something that is ancient is very old.
Someone's career is their life of work.
An invention is something new that has been made, that no one thought of before.
Linked with means connected with in some way.
Peace is when there is no war or fighting between people.

Xi'an has a(n) **(1)** _____ history. The city's early history is often **(2)** _____ Liu Bang. Liu Bang began his **(3)** _____ as a local leader in what is now modern-day Jiangsu Province. However, in time and through his ability he became **emperor**² in 202 BCE. He started the Han **Dynasty**³ and made Xi'an his capital, giving it the name, Chang'an—Long **(4)** _____. The Han Dynasty became known as a golden age, when most of the rulers were good and the people were happy. Many important **(5)** _____ were created during the Han Dynasty, including paper.

¹**province:** a large district of a country
²**emperor:** the ruler of a group of countries or a large country
³**dynasty:** a period of time when member of the same family rule a country

B. **Xi'an Facts.** Read the facts about Xi'an and look at the photos in this reader. Then answer the questions below.

Xi'an Facts	
Area	10,752 square kilometers
Population	around 10 million
Climate	spring: warm with a nice breeze; summer: quite hot; fall: cool, sometimes rainy; winter: cold and dry
Popular foods	<i>yangrou paomo</i> (pieces of bread served in a lamb soup), <i>roujiamo</i> (meat sandwiches), <i>liangpi</i> (cold noodles)
Traditional culture	<i>Qinqiang</i> Opera, Xi'an <i>guyue</i> (a kind of music), shadow puppets ⁴
Events	Chang'an Annual International Calligraphy ⁵ Meeting (March), Xi'an City Wall International Marathon ⁶ (April)

1. Have you ever heard about Xi'an? What do you know about the city?
2. In what ways is Xi'an different from or similar to your own city?
3. What kinds of things do you think you would see in a city like Xi'an?

⁴**puppet:** a doll moved by strings or sticks and used for putting on shows
⁵**calligraphy:** beautiful writing done by hand
⁶**marathon:** a long running race (approx. 42 km / 26 miles)



You begin your tour of the city at the modern Yongningmen **Metro**⁷ Station. Going upstairs and then walking north, you enter South Gate **Plaza**,⁸ a park filled with grass and trees, and also the clean lines of the latest architecture. The modern offices and paths to underground parking lots all show off the park's ancient buildings, some more than 1,000 years old. Pass over the cool, quiet waters of a wide **moat**,⁹ turn a corner, and then climb some stairs. You are now on an ancient wall, which goes around the central part of the city. You can rent a bicycle and begin riding around the city on top of the wide, **brick**¹⁰ path. As you go, you pass old city gates and children flying kites. On your left and right you see modern office and apartment buildings, but you also catch sight of old streets crowded with shoppers and visitors, just as they were more than two thousand years ago. This is Xi'an, a city which combines the best of China, old and new.



⁷ **metro**: an underground train

⁸ **plaza**: a public square

⁹ **moat**: a deep wide channel, usually filled with water, dug around a place as a defence

¹⁰ **brick**: a block of baked clay used for building walls, houses etc.

Xi'an—which means Western Peace—is the capital of Shaanxi Province. With an ancient history going back as long as 6,000 years, it is among the oldest cities in China, and it is often called the **cradle**¹¹ of Chinese **civilization**.¹² In 202 BCE, the first emperor of the Han Dynasty, Liu Bang, made the city his capital, and named it Chang'an—Long Peace. (The name was changed to Xi'an in 1369.)

¹¹**cradle**: a baby's bed

¹²**civilization**: a society or culture

Main Idea

1. What is the main idea of the paragraph on page 5?
2. What old things and new things does the writer mention?



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Between 139 and 126 BCE, Zhang Qian traveled to Central Asia as a **diplomat**¹³ for the Han emperor. As a result of his efforts, Chang'an became the starting place of the Silk Road, a network of trading routes that went all the way to the Roman **Empire**.¹⁴ People who traveled on the Silk Road carried more than just silk. Merchants also used the Silk Road to bring tea, spices, and Chinese inventions such as paper to Europe. In return, the Chinese received fruits and vegetables, some of which were unknown in Asia before then, along with glass products and carpets.

However, in many ways, Chang'an was most powerful during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). During this time, it had as many as one million people, and was in fact the largest city in the world.

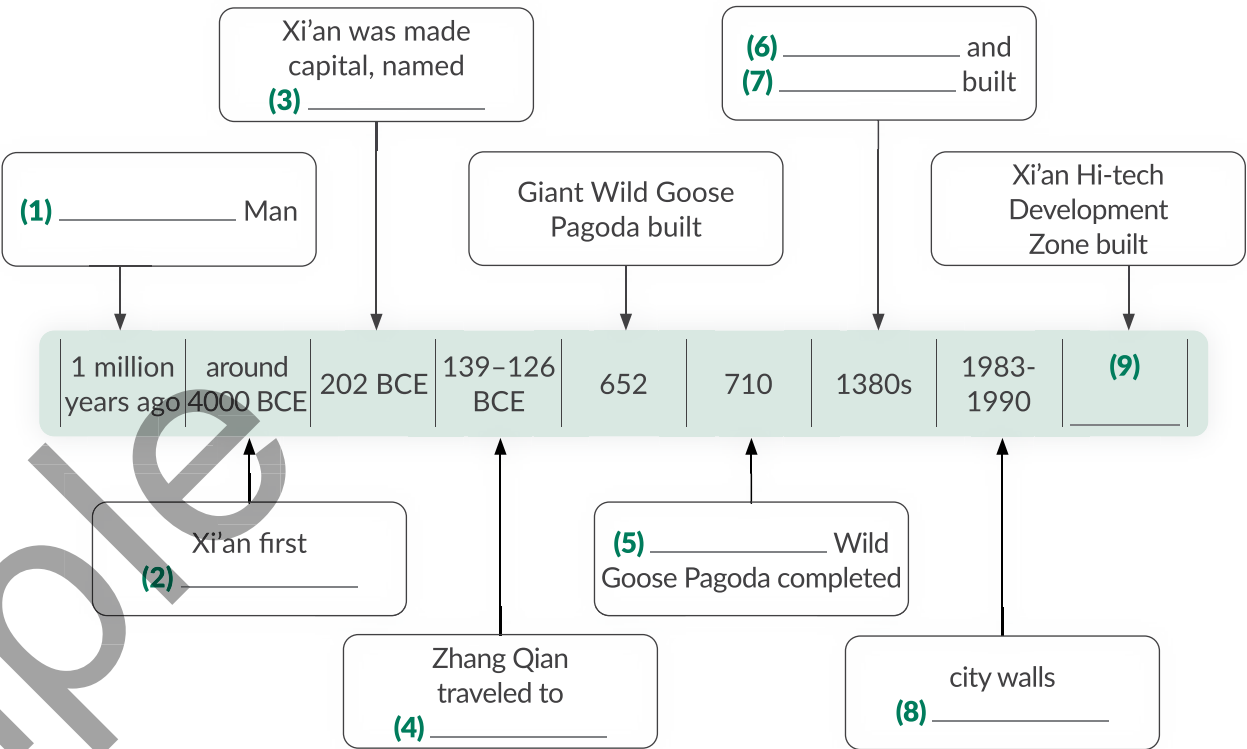
¹³**diplomat**: a person who goes abroad to speak for his or her country

¹⁴**empire**: a large group of countries under one ruler

A. Multiple Choice. Answer the questions below by choosing A, B, C, or D.

1. What does the phrase “cradle of Chinese civilization” on page 6 mean?
A. The earliest people in China were all from Xi’an.
B. This was the place where much of China’s culture first started.
C. Xi’an has always been technologically ahead of other Chinese cities.
D. Many people from China think of Xi’an as their hometown.
2. According to the passage, when did Chang’an achieve its greatest importance?
A. when it was made the capital of the Han Dynasty
B. in the early years of the Silk Road
C. during the Tang Dynasty
D. in 1370
3. According to the passage, how did people in Xi’an know it was sunset?
A. They saw the sun coming up.
B. They heard bells.
C. They heard drums.
D. They heard bells and drums.
4. Why is Xi’an one of the top destinations for young people looking for a career in software development?
A. The city has a Software Park in the Xi’an Hi-tech Development Zone.
B. Many software companies have offices there.
C. It is an important factory center, and a center for research and development for China’s airplane and space industries.
D. They like the fact that Xi’an is a city filled with history, but is very much part of the modern world.
5. What would be a good header for the paragraph on page 16?
A. Xi’an, a City Filled with History
B. Advancing Forward with Airplane Design
C. Finding a Career in the Xi’an Hi-tech Development Zone
D. Xi’an’s Hi-Tech Present and Future

B. Complete the timeline. Complete the timeline below with information from the passage.

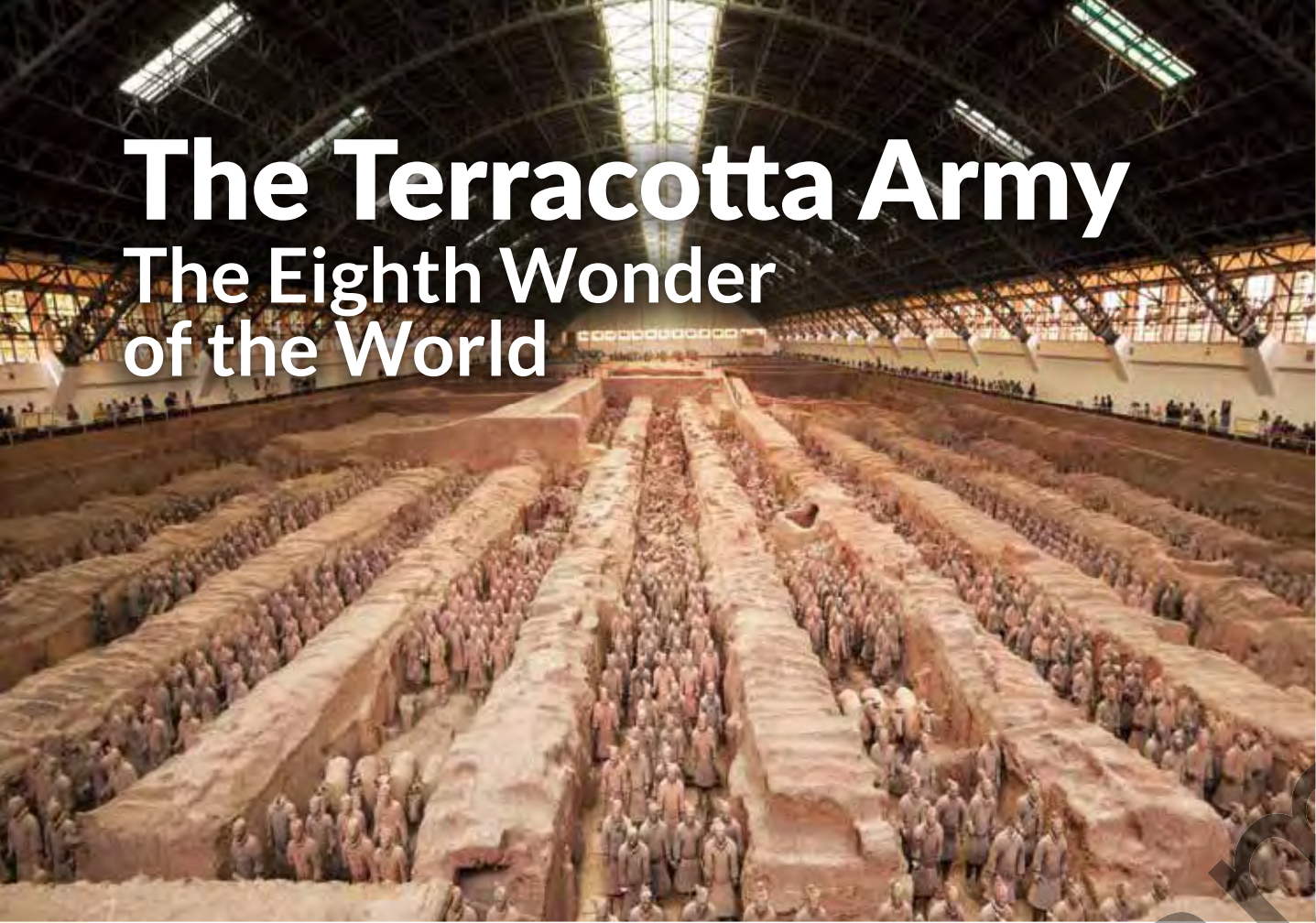


C. Answer the questions. Use information from the passage to answer the questions below.

1. How does Xi’an combine the best of China, old and new?
2. Why might so many companies have offices in the Xi’an Hi-tech Development Zone?
3. What other cities in the world combine past and present? How do they do so?

The Terracotta Army

The Eighth Wonder of the World



Track 2

On March 29, 1974, farmers were digging a well northeast of Xi'an when they made an amazing find: the bodies of life-sized figures made of terracotta. Archaeologists later confirmed that these objects were from the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BCE). Within months, people had dug up statues of more than 500 warriors, 24 horses, and 6 chariots in that same field, making it the archaeological find of the century.

The founder of the Qin Dynasty was Qin Shihuang (259-210 BCE), who made his capital the city of Xianyang, which is on the northwestern border of what is now Xi'an. It was no secret that when Qin Shihuang died he was buried in an enormous tomb more than 70 meters tall, northeast of Xi'an. About 500 secondary tombs and sites have been discovered nearby. However, through the ages, details of his tomb had become forgotten, and so when the first terracotta soldiers were dug up in 1974, the whole world reacted in surprise.

We now know that the army was meant to protect Qin Shihuang in death. It is thought there may be more than 8,000 soldiers in total. Every statue is different: The face and clothes of each one was modeled on a real soldier in Qin Shihuang's army. Each was painted in bright colors, though the paint has now faded. In addition to the soldiers, there are also terracotta horses and chariots. Much of this terracotta army is now on display at a huge museum on the site.

Only a small part of the area around Qin Shihuang's tomb has been dug up, and the contents of the tomb itself is still a mystery. According to old stories, it contains a huge, underground palace, filled with treasure. While some research has been done on the tomb, and it appears that these old stories may be true, the tomb has not been dug up because of the challenges involved in preserving what is found. It could take many more years to discover all the secrets buried there.

Word Count: 336
Time: _____

