the buildings and other structures created in China from prehistoric times to the present day.

**Early Architecture**

As a result of wars and invasions, there are few existing buildings in China predating the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Insubstantial construction, largely of wood and rice-paper screens, also accounts for the tremendous loss. However, evidence of early architectural development is provided by representations in Han dynasty (202 B.C.–A.D. 220) bronze vessels, tomb models, carvings, and tiles. One substantial early structure that remains is the Great Wall, begun in the 3d cent. B.C.

The background of Chinese architecture has been somewhat clarified as a result of the increase of archaeological activity since 1949. Discoveries in 1952 near Xi'an brought to light a complete Neolithic village near Banpo. Two kinds of mud-walled dwellings were found—of round and rectangular shapes. As in later construction, buildings were usually oriented to the south, probably as a protection against the north wind.

**Structural Elements**

As early as the Neolithic period, a basic principle of Chinese architecture was already established, wherein columns spaced at intervals, rather than walls, provided the support for the roof. Walls came to serve merely as enclosing screens. Although the typical Chinese roof was probably developed in the Shang (c.1523–1027 B.C.) or the Chou (1027–c.256 B.C.) period, its features are unknown to us until the Han dynasty. Then it appeared in the form that we recognize today as a hallmark of Chinese architecture—a graceful, overhanging roof, sometimes in several tiers, with upturned eaves. The roof rests on a series of four-part brackets, which in turn are supported by other clusters of brackets set on columns. Decorative possibilities were soon realized in the colorful glazed tiling of roofs and the carving and painting of brackets, which became more and more elaborate.

**The Chinese Ground Plan**

During the Han dynasty a characteristic ground plan was developed; it remained relatively constant through the centuries, applied to palaces and temple buildings in both China and Japan. Surrounded by an exterior wall, the building complex was arranged along a central axis and was approached by an entrance gate and then a spirit gate. Behind them in sequence came a public hall and finally the private quarters. Each residential unit was built around a central court with a garden. Based on imperial zoos and parks, the private residential garden soon became a distinctive feature of the walled complex and an art form in itself. The garden was laid out in a definite scheme, with a rest area and pavilions, ponds, and semiplanned vegetation.

**The Pagoda**

In the first centuries A.D., the coming of Buddhism did not strongly affect the Chinese architectural style. Although there was considerable building activity, temples continued to be constructed in the native tradition. The only distinctly Buddhist type of building is the pagoda, which derived from the Indian stupa. Several masonry pagodas are extant that date from the 6th cent. In the T'ang period (618–906) pagodas were usually simple, square structures; they later became more elaborate in shape.
In the 11th cent. a distinctive type of pagoda was created in the Liao territory. Built in three different stages, with a base, a shaft, and a crown, the structure was surmounted by a spire. Its plan was often octagonal, possibly as a result of the influence of Tantric Buddhism in which the cosmological scheme was arranged into eight compass points rather than four. One of the finest Liao structures is the White Pagoda at Chengde.

**Architectural Development: T'ang Dynasty and Thereafter**

Through the T'ang and Sung dynasties, Chinese architecture retained the basic characteristics already developed in the Han, although there was a greater technical mastery and a tendency toward rich adornment and complexity of the system of bracketing. Though little survives of the wooden structures, our knowledge of their appearance comes from detailed representations in painted scrolls, especially by the Li school of artists in the T'ang period and their followers (see Chinese art).

Extant monuments in Japan, profoundly influenced by Chinese architecture, also reflect the progress of Chinese building techniques. Examples are the 7th-century monastery of Horyu-ji and the 8th-century monastery of Toshodai-ji. In the Ming period the complex of courtyards, parks, and palaces became labyrinthian in scope. Little remains of the imperial palaces at Nanjing, the capital of the Ming dynasty until 1421.

**The Forbidden City**

After 1421 Beijing became China's capital, and its group of imperial buildings, known as the Forbidden City, remains a remarkable achievement. Around its main courtyard and many smaller courts are grouped splendid halls, galleries, terraces, and gateways. White marble, wall facings of glazed terra-cotta, roofs of glazed and colored tiles, and woodwork finished with paint, lacquer, and gilding unite to create an effect of exceptional richness. Notable among these buildings is the group constituting the Temple of Heaven, including the Hall of the Annual Prayers (added in the late 19th cent.), a circular structure on a triple platform surmounted by a roof in three tiers covered with tiles of an intense blue glaze.

**Modern Styles**

Since the late 19th cent. the Chinese have adopted European architectural styles. When first under Communist rule they tended to imitate modern Soviet buildings. The trend has been toward the impressively massive and the clearly functional in public buildings (e.g., the Great Hall of the People, 1959; Beijing). In such buildings only in the detailing around window frames and doorways can traditional features still be seen.

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