

1

China

THE FOUNDATIONS

PEOPLE AND GEOGRAPHY

China is the most populous country in the world (1.39 billion people) and the second largest in land area (3.6 million square miles, after Russia). Its territory covers vastly different topographies and climates. Over 90 percent of its population lives on the eastern half of the country, which consists of fertile lowlands and is the origin of Chinese civilization. Major river systems such as the Yellow River (*Huang He*) in the north, the Long River (*Chang Jiang*) in the middle, and the Pearl River (*Zhu Jiang*) in the south provide key lifelines for irrigation and transportation but may also cause floods leading to significant loss in life and property.

The mountain ranges in the southwest (the Himalayas and the Altai) and the desert in the northwest (Xinjiang region) are difficult to cross and form natural geographic barriers. The Qinling mountain range, extending east from north of Tibet, divides China into north and south. Farmers of the northern plains produce millet and wheat in a dry climate, while farmers in the south grow rice and tea in fertile plains and hills.

The north, where Chinese civilization first originated, is connected to the south through the Grand Canal. Dug in the 7th century and extended in the 13th century, it brought rice from the southern plains to supply the armies and the government in the north.

The confluence of size, geography, and resources historically contributes to a Sino-centered worldview for its people. The name China, meaning the “Middle Kingdom” in Chinese, reflected the Chinese perception that they were at the center of civilization. Even when the country had been weakened by internal conflicts, natural barriers provided security protection to the Chinese in the premodern era.

The majority of the people in China are the Han ethnic group. Approximately 8.5 percent of the total population (or 115 million people) belong to 55 government-designated minority nationalities, who are concentrated in the border regions that are rich in natural resources such as oil, coal, gold, and

other minerals. The largest groups are Zhuang in the southwest, Hui (Muslim) in the west and northwest, and Manzu in the northwest.

Because arable land accounts for only 15 percent of China's territory, the pressure to produce enough food to feed the population has been a chronic challenge for China throughout its history. The nature of China's population challenge, however, has changed significantly in the past several decades. In 1953, according to the first population census, the total population was 582 million. By the late 1970s, the number had nearly doubled, leading to fear that the runaway population growth would produce economic stagnation and social instability. To counter the growth trend, the government instituted in 1979 the one-child policy that limited urban couples to a single child. The policy effectively reduced China's fertility rate from 2.8 children per woman in 1979 to 1.6 in 2016. Nevertheless, the steep decline in the fertility rate, which is below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman needed to maintain population size, contributes to the aging of the population and increases burdens in health care and social welfare (China Power Team 2017). Although the government in 2015 replaced the one-child policy with a two-child policy, the action might be too late to reverse the demographic trend. The projection is that the Chinese population will peak in the late 2020s or early 2030s, followed by a steady decline thereafter.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS

The ancient Chinese civilization dates back to the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE), as evinced in archaeological excavations of the weapons, oracle bones, and bronze vessels from that period. Shang was an agrarian, feudal society controlled by an aristocracy that maintained a standing army of cavalry and chariots. Inscriptions on oracle bones and tortoise shells represented the priestly attempts to seek divination from the spirit world and were the earliest known form of the written Chinese characters. Shang was succeeded by the Zhou dynasty (Western Zhou, 1046–771 BCE; Eastern Zhou, 770–256 BCE). It was during the formative years of Zhou that a number of enduring governing ideas and institutions emerged.

Mandate of Heaven

Emperors of Zhou, bearing the title of the "Son of Heaven" (or *Tianzi* in Chinese), purported to rule based on the "Mandate of Heaven." They justified their military actions against Shang on grounds of change in mandate, pointing to social disorder and natural disasters in the late Shang dynasty as evidence that the original mandate had been shattered by morally corrupt Shang emperors, hence the disharmony between Heaven and Earth.

Although the myth of mandate intended to lend legitimacy to the ruler, it implicitly created a performance standard by which rulers were judged. While

Chinese emperors faced no formal legal constraints on their ruling power, the concept of mandate formed the moral basis for justified rebellion to depose a ruthless tyrant.

During the latter reign of Eastern Zhou, the state affairs degenerated into the period of disorder as feudal lords fought with one another to expand their domains and spheres of influence. Ironically, it was at this time that Chinese civilization and intellectual tradition first developed and grew. The strong Chinese influence on the region was in large part due to its ability to develop institutional innovation early on, such as sophisticated governance structures and practices, including specialized state functions and coherent political philosophy.

Confucianism

Competing schools of thoughts flourished during the latter era of Zhou when the imperial control weakened, as people aspired to establish an ideal social and political order. The instructions of Confucius (551–479 BCE) laid the philosophic foundation of Chinese political order. Confucius, a teacher and a philosopher living in a time with widespread political instability and disorder, believed that the best way to achieve an orderly and harmonious society was to cultivate ethical and virtuous behaviors such as humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity.

For Confucius, proper behaviors, manifested in relationships between emperor and subject, father and son, as well as husband and wife, led to enduring social and political order. Subjects should be loyal to their emperor, the emperor righteous and just toward subjects. Sons and daughters should show filial piety toward their parents, and parents should show kindness to their children. Husbands should provide for wives, and wives should be faithful and obedient to husbands. The teaching provided practical codes of ethics and conduct for different roles in the society. Emperors and political leaders had moral obligations to be just and responsible, acting as guardians of the public interest and welfare. Even though such expectations were never codified in law or enforceable at court in premodern China, they became an institutional constraint to manage public affairs fairly and wisely.

More than any other individual in Chinese history, Confucius offered a code of conduct and ethics with broad applications in all aspects of the society. With its implicit emphasis on social harmony, deference to authority, and hierarchical nature of society, Confucianism is seen as a conservative belief system in support of existing political order and power.

Political Centralization

Division and disorder in Zhou ended when the ruthless Qin First Emperor (*Qin Shi Huang Di*, 221–210 BCE) conquered his rivals with an efficient military machine in 221 BCE. After unifying the country, he constructed a

governance structure comparable to a modern state in its ability to extract resources and control people's behaviors, laying down the foundation of the Chinese imperial system.

Under Qin, people had to pledge their allegiance to the central government, not to their traditional masters such as the landowners or feudal lords. The measure gave the government a huge reservoir of work force for military service and public projects such as roads, canals, royal tombs, and sections of the Great Wall. To centralize political power, Qin First Emperor created regional administrative units, appointed nonhereditary officials, implemented uniform laws and taxes, as well as promoted standardized weights, measures, and written characters.

Since then, for more than two thousand years and with more than 20 dynastic turnovers, the form and substance of the core governing institutions within a single, centralized Chinese empire were remarkably stable and remained essentially unchanged.

In an attempt to clean up the past and create new loyalties, Qin went to the extremes to order the burning of all books, except those in agriculture, medicine, and divination. Scholars who disobeyed the command were executed or buried alive. Qin's cruel and totalitarian control of public affairs led to widespread uprisings that quickly ended the regime in 206 BCE.

Meritocratic Bureaucracy

The Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) that succeeded Qin was comparable to its contemporary, the Roman Empire, in area and population. To enhance the governing capacity of the emperor, imperial leaders developed a selection system to recruit and promote officials based on merit and experience. This practice marked an early attempt of developing a meritocratic, professional bureaucracy, rather than appointing officials based on their aristocratic pedigree—an idea that did not emerge in other parts of the world until centuries later.

The utility of the Confucian doctrine in promoting virtuous behaviors to maintain social harmony and political stability was not lost to the Han imperial court. Han rulers began to elevate Confucianism above all other contending schools of thoughts as officially sanctioned political ideology and established an imperial academy to train Confucian officials.

The bureaucratic selection system gradually evolved into the civil service exams in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). Civil servants who served the emperor were recruited through competitive civil service examinations based on their knowledge of the Confucian classics. For centuries, rote memorization of the ancient Confucian texts was the only effective strategy to pass the exams, which had a long-term pass rate of less than 10 percent (Eisenstadt 1967). Notwithstanding the remarkable advances in science and technology of the world, the exam and its criteria stayed virtually unchanged well into the early 20th century.

Because the examination was open to commoners, the system promoted social mobility and served to break the dominance of hereditary aristocracy. From Tang onward, China gradually evolved into a society with greater social mobility. While the meritocratic bureaucracy lent support and legitimacy to imperial rule, the examination system helped promote education and popular literacy in China.

Political Governance

At the top of the political structure of the Chinese imperial system stood the emperor, the holder of the Mandate-of-Heaven claim. The emperor served as a symbol of unity, although the real power might vary in each case.

Ministers and official-scholars (the mandarins) recruited through the civil service exams played an important role in political governance under the imperial system. They administered public affairs in various ministries in the central government. Some of them, serving as advisors and counsels to the emperor, could, in fact, constrain the power of the emperor.

The vast majority of the population in the traditional Chinese society were farmers, while others were engaged in crafts or commerce. Together, they shouldered most of the tax burden and uncompensated labor service such as building levees and bridges.

Most of the people were governed at the local level by government officials in respective administrative jurisdictions. The local administrative apparatus, however, was not entirely autonomous, for there were other power contenders in the governing system. The gentry class of the landlords, for example, was usually influential in local affairs. They tended to collaborate with local officials in governance, collecting taxes, and maintaining social stability. Corrupt officials might take the opportunity to enrich themselves.

Advanced farming techniques such as irrigation systems, waterwheels, and multiple cropping boosted productivity to support China's large population. The strength of the Chinese agricultural economy gave the imperial system great staying power. During the time of agrarian crisis and famine, however, farmers sometimes rose up against the heavy tax burdens imposed by the officials and gentry class. Some prominent examples in the premodern era included the Yellow Turban Rebellion (named for the scarves that the rebels wrapped around their heads) in the Han dynasty (184 CE) and the Red Turban Rebellion (1351–1368) against the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty.

One achievement of imperial China was its remarkable ability to hold the country together. Despite periods of division, and the rise and fall of more than 20 dynasties throughout history, Chinese governing institutions effectively maintained law and order and extracted resources for governance purposes like a modern state. As a polity commanding the world's largest landmass and population, the Chinese state was able to bring together diverse subcultures and ethnic groups, maintaining its integrity since the Qin dynasty without breaking up into separate states like those in Europe. By the 14th century, an

estimated forty thousand bureaucrats were involved in collecting taxes and administering laws. From the 13th century to the end of the 19th century, each year the bureaucracy organized the largest grain shipment, moving hundreds of thousands of tons of taxed grain through the Grand Canal to feed the population in the capital and other large cities in northern China. A common cultural identity, the communication and transportation infrastructure, and the massive bureaucratic apparatus all seemed to contribute to the unification of the country in the premodern era.

Foreign Relations: The Tributary System

During the Han dynasty, China entered a period of military conquest to expand its territories and extend its frontiers. International trade and foreign exploration were encouraged in the Han dynasty. The Silk Road, trade routes between China and Europe through Central Asia, helped promote commerce and cultural exchanges. At the height of its power, the territories of the Han dynasty almost reached the modern-day Chinese frontiers, from its base in the north China plain to modern Vietnam and from the Pacific coast to Central Asia.

Unlike modern diplomatic practices based on the principle of equality and reciprocity between states, Han China managed its relations with neighboring states through the “tributary system.” Foreign rulers offered tribute (i.e., native products or other precious commodities) to the emperor; in return, they received the nominal status of a vassal and the permission to have commercial and cultural contact with China. While the presentation of tribute signaled subservience to the Chinese emperor, these tributary missions were in fact opportunities to conduct trades for both sides. Additionally, they facilitated cultural exchange for foreign scholars to collect Chinese books and learn the latest cultural trends.

With its immense size and sophisticated governing system, China’s military power and cultural influence prevailed in the region. At the beginning of the 14th century and on the eve of the European Renaissance, China held superior technological advances in areas such as metallurgy, gun power, shipbuilding, papermaking, block printing, and silk and porcelain production. Its maritime technology was more advanced than that of Europe at the time, as evidenced by its seafaring expeditions to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean in the early Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

Zheng He (1371–1433), a Ming eunuch and admiral, launched the first voyage in 1405, 87 years before Columbus’s trip. Under Zheng’s command, more than 20,000 people boarded 300 plus ships on his first voyage, compared to Columbus’s four boats and 150 sailors. From 1405 to 1433, Zheng conducted seven expeditions, blending commerce with politics to display China’s power and wealth.

Ming China, however, turned inward in the 15th century, terminating foreign trade missions and private trade. The policy shift was justified on the

grounds that potential invasion from Mongolia or Manchuria demanded reallocation of resources from overseas missions to inland defense. The isolation policy, reinforced by the sense of self-sufficiency and self-confidence of the Sino-centric worldview, continued well into the last dynasty in China, the Qing dynasty (1644–1912).

The Qing dynasty, established by foreign ethnic Manchus in 1644, ruled over a country of approximately 300 million people. Though a foreign regime, Qing emperors adopted the Chinese governance model. A series of successful territorial expansions by Qing emperors expanded the Chinese empire to modern-day Xinjiang and Tibet.

Under the isolation policy, Chinese merchants in southern China traded with Southeast Asia and restricted trade with Russia took place in the north. Trade with Europeans, however, was limited to the southern port of Guangzhou.

CHINA IN THE AGE OF IMPERIALISM

External and Internal Upheavals

At the time when Europe advanced rapidly through the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution, China's technological development and innovation began to languish. The Chinese were largely unaware that scientific, technological, political, and social revolutions had transformed Western Europe and North America into major players on the world stage. Improved technology and enhanced productivity brought by the Industrial Revolution led to over-supplies of manufactured goods in Europe, creating the urgent need to look for new markets and trading opportunities. Asian markets, particularly the Chinese market, appeared to be an ideal outlet for those goods.

As European powers sought to trade with China, Qing emperors dismissed these overtures as inferior vassal states seeking trading privileges with China. Frustrated by the fact that their requests to greater market access were repeatedly rejected by Qing emperors, the European powers relied on their superior military power to open the Asian markets. From the 1840s to 1860s, by force and by coercion, European states, particularly Great Britain, succeeded in prying open Chinese markets.

Britain easily defeated China in the Opium War (1839–1842) and secured a number of economic and political concessions. In the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), China was forced to pay the British a large indemnity restitution, cede Hong Kong to Britain, and open five treaty ports to foreign trade under “fair and reasonable” tariffs, as determined by the British. An 1843 agreement supplemented the treaty, granting “extraterritoriality” and the “most-favored-nation” status to the British. Under the principle of extraterritoriality, British citizens were exempt from all Chinese taxes and from any accountability to Chinese laws, while the most-favored-nation clause automatically gave Britain

all privileges that China might grant to other countries. The Chinese, however, did not have the same rights in Britain, thus making the treaty unequal. Other Western states soon followed the example, securing rights and privileges through unequal treaties with China. By the end of the 19th century, 50 treaty ports in China had been opened to foreign trade.

Within treaty ports, foreign powers could acquire concessions, which were areas designated for occupancy of their residents. Foreign communities were responsible for governing themselves in concessions by the laws of their own country rather than by the laws of China, as extraterritoriality suggested. As many Westerners lived their separate lives with as little contact with the native Chinese population as possible, racial tension and conflict sometimes erupted. Treaty ports, however, also became a transmission belt of Western thoughts and ideas. Western concepts such as freedom, equality, nationalism, and constitutionalism came through treaty ports unhindered and gradually became part of the vocabulary in Chinese political discourse.

Foreign incursion aggravated social disorder, which had been built up by rampant official corruption and prolonged economic stagnation for decades beneath the surface of political stability. Between the first Opium War and the Second Opium (Arrow) War (1856–1860), major uprisings erupted, including the most devastating Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) that swept through some of China's wealthiest and most productive areas for 14 years and caused an estimated 20 million deaths. Together, these rebellions led to widespread economic dislocation and seriously undermined the foundation of the Qing dynasty.

Early Modernization: The Self-Strengthening Movement

In the aftermath of the Second Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion, the highest priority for the governing elites in Qing China was defense. The inadequacy of the navy and army in dealing with the Western invasions and domestic rebellions called for fundamental reforms. Anti-Taiping generals such as Zeng Guofan and his protégé Li Hongzhang began to advocate for self-strengthening. Facing the dynastic decline, they emphasized maintaining social and political order with Chinese core values, while selectively adopting elements of Western technology, particularly military technology, for modernization purposes. The selective adoption of Western technology and institutions was to be carefully balanced with the preservation of the traditional social, political, and cultural order.

For the first decade, the focus was on manufacturing machines and weaponry. In 1865, with permission from the imperial court, Zeng and Li established the Jiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai, which became the first builder of modern guns and cannons in China. Its translation bureau translated foreign works into Chinese, assisting in the adoption of Western knowledge and technology. A machine-building factory was established in Tianjin and a naval yard in Fujian. Young Chinese students were sent to the United States to study the latest thoughts on military and international affairs.

Subsequently, from the 1870s to the 1890s, the focus expanded to other defense-related fields, including steamships, railroads, mining, and manufacturing to generate wealth. Li created a few state-sponsored firms in shipping, mining, telegraphs, and textiles. These firms received government loans and were overseen by government officials, but private merchants were responsible for their day-to-day operations. The model resembled some elements of a state-led economic modernization. Additionally, Li founded the Tianjin Navy Academy (1880) and built Beiyang Fleet in 1888. Overall, with its primary focus being on defense and military technologies, the approach was still narrow.

While Western technology helped lay the foundation for Chinese industrialization, the scope, however, was limited. As discussed earlier, the proponents of the self-strengthening movement advocated using all valid means, including Western weapons, to maintain the country in its existing form. Their thinking could be summed up in a slogan: “Chinese learning for substance, Western learning for practical use.” Thus, Chinese political leaders never entertained the radical notion of Westernization. Industrial projects were often initiated by provincial governors such as Zeng and Li based on their own vision and interest. There was no centralized or coordinated effort to transform the economy based on the Western model.

The absence of a unified vision for broader social reform underscored deeper governance problems in Qing court: the division between factions in competition of political power. Beginning in 1861, Empress Dowager Cixi was the de facto ruler of China for almost half a century. She twice manipulated emperor succession (in 1861 and 1875) to maintain her regency for two young emperors. She was willing to entrust Han Chinese officials such as Zeng and Li as provincial governors and to support the self-strengthening movement. Under her leadership, the Qing government instituted a modern customs service and created the first Chinese foreign service office. Nevertheless, she was never fully committed to a consistent progression toward reform, for she manipulated factional rivalry in the imperial house to maintain her position, satisfying different groups at different times.

A significant number of Manchu aristocrats in the Qing court were conservatives who harbored deep distrust of Westerners. They advocated hostile and militant responses to confront foreign powers. Hence, Cixi’s policies and attitudes toward modernization were not always consistent, pending the prevalent direction of political undercurrents at a particular time.

More External and Internal Upheavals

While the Qing court offered no unified, enthusiastic leadership on modernization, neighboring Japan took a different course of action (Chapter 5). During Meiji Restoration, with central planning and strong government intervention, Meiji leaders quickly and successfully transformed Japan into a rising power with expanded regional ambition.

In spring 1894, Korea, China's traditional tributary state, sought military assistance from China to put down a rebellion. As China sent its troops, the Japanese perceived the Chinese intervention as a threat and moved troops into Seoul first. After the rebellion was defeated, neither party withdrew their troops. In July, the Japanese initiated military action against China, sinking a Chinese ship. Clashes between China and Japan over Korea escalated into the first Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895), in which the better trained and better equipped Japanese army and navy scored quick victories on land and sea and advanced into Manchuria.

In 1895, the Qing officials had no choice but to accept the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki as dictated by the Japanese government: recognizing the independence of Korea; ceding Taiwan, the Pescadores, and the Liaodong Peninsula (in southern Manchuria) to Japan; and granting Japan commercial concessions. Additionally, China was required to pay 200 million taels (a traditional Chinese unit of weight) of silver to Japan. The huge indemnity was more than twice China's annual revenue at the time.

From the perspective of national defense, the loss of the Liaodong Peninsula would have placed Japanese troops close to Beijing, making China particularly vulnerable. Wary of Japan's expansion, and its potential threat to its own national interest, Russia intervened. Russia, along with France and Germany, forced Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China for additional indemnity. Japan acquiesced reluctantly.

The war was a huge setback for the Qing court self-strengthening movement. Seeing China's weakness, Western powers were emboldened to exact territorial concessions. For the next several years, they competed with one another to divide China into different spheres of influence. Germany moved into Shandong, Russia entered Manchuria, France expanded in southwest China, and Britain took central China as its sphere of influence, besides taking over the Kowloon Peninsula opposite Hong Kong Island. China was on the brink of partition, with a status worse than a colony, having to answer to multiple foreign powers.

The aggressiveness of foreign powers created a new sense of urgency in China. While supporters of the self-strengthening movement had emphasized defense and military affairs, some intellectuals and officials began to realize the significance of institutional and economic reforms in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War.

After Cixi's retirement in 1898, young Emperor Guangxu was anxious to find a solution to the worsening condition of the country. Beginning in June 1898, urged by more radical reformers, he initiated a series of radical and hastily prepared reforms, including the overhaul of the education and examination system, the restructuring of the government, and the promotion of agriculture, mining, and trade. Although the reform measures produced no concrete results, they provoked the conservatives, who brought Cixi out of retirement. In September 1898, Cixi took over the administration. The emperor was detained and six of the reformers executed. The reform movement, known as the Hundred Days Reform, was over before it could begin.

Decades of foreign domination had caused economic stagnation in China, as foreign commercial penetration displaced local workers and industries. Financial burden to pay for wars and indemnities increased tax load for the public. Widespread social discontent was a breeding ground for political instability.

In Shandong, a band of people called the Yihequan (or “Righteous and Harmonious Fists,” mistranslated as “boxers” in the West) believed that a certain kind of boxing art would render them mysteriously invulnerable to firearms. Disturbed by German advances there, they began to stage antiforeign, anti-Christian uprisings that were covertly encouraged by the provincial governor.

By 1900, the Boxer Rebellion grew in strength, openly attacking Chinese Christians and Western missionaries and destroying all things foreign, including churches and railways. They laid siege to the foreign legations in Beijing and Tianjin. Thousands of Chinese Christians and roughly 250 foreign nationals (mostly Christian missionaries) were killed. The Western allied army that came to rescue quickly defeated the unorganized and poorly armed Boxers in August 1900 and occupied Beijing. The Qing government was forced to pay an enormous indemnity to Western powers, adding to China’s already crushing burden of foreign payments.

Republican Revolution

China’s humiliating defeat by Japan also spurred radical movements that called for complete political and social revolutions. One prominent revolutionary was Dr. Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan). Educated in Hawaii and Hong Kong, he founded an anti-Manzhou revolutionary group, the Revive China Society (*Xingzhonghui*), in October 1894 in Honolulu to plot uprising activities. Sun participated in a failed attempt to capture Guangzhou in 1895. Afterward, he lived in exile in Europe, Japan, and the United States for 16 years, raising money from the overseas Chinese communities while coordinating revolts with revolutionaries in China. His revolt attempts, however, all ended in failure. In October 1911, an armed rebellion not directly under Sun’s control broke out in Wuhan, Hubei province. With the Qing provincial governor fleeing the scene, the rebels managed to control the provincial government. Soon afterward, other provinces announced their break with the Qing. By December 1911, more than half of China declared its independence from the Qing government. Sun returned to China and was elected provisional president of the new government.

CHINA IN THE REPUBLICAN ERA

Political Governance in the Early Republican Period

The establishment of the first republican country in Asia, however, did nothing to change the existing political culture and structure. The country remained in the hands of the powerful military leaders of the Qing regime.

Among them, Yuan Shikai was the dominant figure. He was trusted by the Qing court and regarded as the indispensable person to restore unity. In a three-way settlement, Sun resigned his position in February 1912 in favor of Yuan; Yuan promised to establish a republican government; and the Qing court proclaimed the decree of abdication, ending its rule of China and paving the way to power transition. Yuan was elected the first president of China but was tangled in power contention with the former revolutionaries.

The majority of the members elected to the first National Assembly (parliament) in February 1913 were former revolutionaries from the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT). They drafted a constitution that placed the executive power in the cabinet accountable to the National Assembly rather than to the president. Afterward, Yuan revoked the credentials of the KMT members and dissolved the parliament. The presidency reverted to a dictatorship.

Following the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Japan joined the Allies and seized Germany's land possessions in Shandong. In January 1915, Japan secretly delivered twenty-one demands to Yuan, making claims to rights and concessions that would turn China into a Japanese dependency. These demands sought Chinese recognition of Japanese privileges in newly acquired territory in Shandong and special privileges and concessions in Manchuria. They also called for granting Japan greater access to Chinese ports and railroads, as well as political and police affairs. In May 1915, under the pressure of 48-hour ultimatum, Yuan accepted all but the most extreme conditions (i.e., to grant Japanese advisors the power to control Chinese financial, political, and police affairs). The public was outraged, calling for a boycott of Japanese goods.

In the wake of the humiliating concessions, Yuan launched a movement to revive the monarchy, only to encounter strong oppositions from other political leaders and his own subordinates. In March 1916, Yuan was forced to abolish the new monarchy and died three months later. With Yuan's death, regional military leaders, the warlords, carved up China.

Frustrated by the warlords' attempt to sabotage the republican revolution, Sun in 1917 established a rival government in Guangzhou, joined by some 100 members of parliament. Military men soon dominated the southern government, forcing Sun to leave Guangzhou. Nevertheless, the split between north (Beijing government) and south (Guangzhou government) continued. The Beijing government was the one recognized internationally as the legitimate Chinese government.

The collapse of Yuan's regime produced a power vacuum, leading to a decade of war and chaos as China disintegrated into several regions dominated by military warlords. Warlords competed for territorial bases, which were the source of revenue and manpower. Competition for territory brought on unceasing wars and conflicts. To finance their armies and sustain their war efforts, military rulers and their subordinates taxed the people heavily, taking money away from education and other government services. Merchants and

bankers were forced to provide “loans” to the military. Ironically, while warlords contended for power and territory, they were less interested in prescribing any particular ideology. As a result, college students and intellectuals had more freedom to speak their minds and debate about ideas.

In late April 1919, the powers at the Paris Peace Conference decided that Germany’s rights and possessions in Shandong should be retained by Japan, rejecting China’s appeal to regain full control. On May 4, thousands of patriotic students demonstrated in Tiananmen Square. Waves of protests soon spread to other cities. Joining the students, merchants and workers joined the mass demonstrations, urging the Beijing government not to sign the Treaty of Versailles.

This May Fourth Movement marked a new stage in China’s attempt for modernization. It came to represent not only a political or nationalistic campaign but also a cultural and intellectual movement. Participants advocated the ideas of democracy (for individual liberty and equality) and science (for a scientific, practical approach to solving the country’s problems, free of the restraints of culture and tradition). Seeking deeper reforms of China’s institutions than the self-strengthening movement or the republican revolution, the movement created new momentum for national revolution, as led by the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Political Struggle between the Nationalist and the Communist

With the patriotic upsurge in 1919, Sun revived the name of the KMT. He returned to Guangzhou the following year and established the party headquarters there. In 1921, a few intellectuals who had been inspired by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 established the CCP in Shanghai.

In 1923, Soviet advisors arrived in Guangzhou and assisted Sun with the reorganization of the KMT based on the Leninist centralized party structure. With the help of Soviet funding, Sun established a military academy near Guangzhou to build a KMT army. Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), a close associate of Sun, was appointed the first commandant of the academy. In 1924, the CCP members were advised by the Soviets to join the KMT while maintaining their separate party identities in the CCP.

Within the KMT, members of the two parties began to compete for control over policies, organizations, and members. After Sun’s death in 1925, the KMT-CCP alliance fell apart. Chiang, now commander of the National Revolutionary Army, took actions to purge the Communists. The CCP revolted but was quickly defeated. Under Chiang, the Nationalist government in Guangzhou launched the military campaign called Northern Expedition in 1926 against the warlords and armies in the north. By 1928, the major warlords were defeated. In October 1928, the Nationalists formally established the National Government in Nanjing and quickly received diplomatic recognition by foreign powers.

Although military separatism continued in some areas, the Nationalist government was able to expand its governing capacity. It created a coherent monetary and banking system, expanded the public education system, improved transportation and the communication system, and encouraged industry and commerce. The KMT closely allied with business in urban centers and landlords in the countryside but did little to improve the rural economy.

The government also had limited success in restoring sovereignty. It reclaimed tariff autonomy and regained control over some concession areas. Nevertheless, most of the unequal treaties remained unchanged. The KMT achievement in economic modernization was seriously undermined by corruption, mismanagement, the continuous threat of civil war with the CCP, and Japanese invasion.

In September 1931, Japan's Guangdong Army engineered a bombing incident near Mukden (Shenyang), leading to the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and creation of a puppet state of "*Manzhouguo*" with the last Qing emperor as the head of state. Incidents of Japanese territorial encroachment and seizure continued for the next several years in Manchuria and neighboring Mongolia and northern China.

While external threats escalated, the internal threat from the Communists also intensified. The Communists created rural bases in central China. One of the largest, the Jiangxi Soviet (1931–1934), was established in November 1931 by Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and Zhu De (1886–1976). They had their own military, tax, and financial systems and implemented land reforms by distributing farm land from landlords to landless farmers to attract support from the poorer classes.

Facing both the external and internal threats, the Nationalist government decided to implement the policy of "Unity before Resistance," hoping to suppress the Communist uprisings first before fighting with the Japanese.

Chiang intensified the military campaign against the Communists in late 1934, forcing the Communists to abandon their bases and retreat. Many of the later Communist leaders, including Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Zhou Enlai, and Liu Shaoqi, joined in the Long March (1934–1935), a circuitous retreat that covered 6,000 miles through some of China's roughest terrain. Around 400,000 people started out, but only 40,000 made it to Yan'an, a remote rural base in northwestern China. During the Long March, Mao took the CCP leadership position in 1935.

Before then, Mao's revolutionary strategy was at odds with other CCP leaders, who mostly advocated the conventional Marxist strategy to encourage a Communist revolution relying on industrial workers in the urban centers. In contrast, Mao believed that the Communist revolution in China needed to depend on peasants, drawing on his observation of peasant uprisings in Chinese history. Mao's experience in building Jiangxi Soviet in a rural base with the farmer army lent him the credibility in reorienting the revolutionary movement toward the farmers.

The China embroiled in civil war was considered by Japan as the perfect opportunity to expand the Japanese empire to the rest of Asia. In 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China. The Japanese army moved swiftly and captured several major Chinese cities. By December, they occupied Nanjing. To trade space for time, the Nationalist government relocated its capital to the city of Chongqing in mountainous Sichuan province for the duration of the war. Frustrated that the fall of Nanjing did not result in China's surrender, the Japanese army brutally killed more than 300,000 unarmed civilians in the city in December 1937. Repeated denial of the occurrence of the Nanjing Massacre by some Japanese officials continues to cause diplomatic tensions in the post-WWII era.

The Japanese invasion of 1937 profoundly reshaped the course of the civil war between the KMT and the CCP. Although both parties ostensibly formed a united front against the Japanese, they continued to battle each other. The CCP took the opportunity to regroup and recover, consolidating its territorial hold. It recruited from the rural population and young students from the cities, organizing them for food supply and guerrilla warfare, and steadily grew during the war.

In contrast, the Nationalist government had difficulty managing the war-time economy. With limited sources of revenue, it resorted to printing money to support a large bureaucracy and an army of more than three million soldiers, causing runaway inflation. Factional politics and corruption further weakened the Nationalist government. As the war prolonged, the morale of the bureaucracy and military steadily declined. Under the name of national security, the government used violence to suppress dissidents and critics.

By the time the Sino-Japanese war ended in 1945, the CCP had expanded its membership and commanded support in much of the countryside. It successfully mobilized the farmers to form an army, resorting to guerrilla warfare tactics. In contrast, the KMT was weakened, as its traditional urban support was shattered by war.

The civil war between the KMT and CCP resumed shortly after the Japanese surrender. The Soviet Union, who received the Japanese surrender in Manchuria, turned over Japanese weaponry and factories to the Communists, further strengthening their power. In 1949, the Communist forces entered Beijing unopposed and established the People's Republic of China. Chiang and the KMT supporters fled to the island of Taiwan.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the basic teachings of Confucianism? Discuss how they shape the attitudes and behaviors of the people in contemporary China.
2. China turned toward isolationism beginning in the 15th century. How did the policy affect its political and economic development since?

3. Why do you think China stayed as one state for thousands of years without breaking up into separate states? What brought the country together and kept it together?
4. Describe China's early modernization attempts such as the self-strengthening movement. What kind of criteria would you develop to evaluate its efficacy?
5. How did the focus of Chinese modernization efforts change after the self-strengthening movement? Why did people participating in the May Fourth Movement believe that China was in need of broader reforms?

Do not copy, post, or distribute