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China

Perceptions of **China**, a country in East Asia, must be adjusted to its enormous scale. Its culture and its civilization go back thousands of years. Its vast area of more than 3,690,000 square miles (9,560,000 square kilometers) is the third largest in the world, after Russia and Canada. With a population of more than 1.3 billion, it is Earth's most populated country.

The Himalayas along China's southwestern frontier with India are the world's tallest mountains. China's greatest river, the [Yangtze River](#) (Chang Jiang), is the world's third longest. The Takla Makan Desert, in western Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, is one of the driest spots on Earth. Other parts of **China** have tropical climates, subarctic climates, and many types in between. There are dozens of urban areas with populations of more than a million, with some much larger, including Beijing, the capital, and Shanghai, China's largest city.

China has a great wealth of mineral and natural resources. Reserves of coal, iron ore, tungsten, tin, bauxite, copper, limestone, and many other minerals needed in modern industry are abundant. These resources helped provide **China** with a solid foundation for rapid industrial growth.

Another significant aspect of **China** is its long cultural and national history. The Chinese people have shared a common written culture longer than any other group on Earth. The Chinese writing system dates back almost 4,000 years. The imperial dynastic system of government, which continued for centuries, was established as early as 221 BC. Although specific dynasties were overturned, the dynastic system survived. **China** was even ruled at times by foreign invaders, such as the Mongols during the Yuan Dynasty, from the 13th to 14th century, and the Manchu during the Qing Dynasty, from the 17th to early 20th century, but the foreigners were largely absorbed into the culture they governed. It is as if the Roman Empire had lasted from the time of the Caesars to the 20th century, and during that time had evolved a cultural system and written language shared by all the peoples of Europe.

The dynastic system was overturned in 1911/12, and a weak, nominally republican form of government existed until 1949. In that year, after a long civil war, the People's Republic of **China**, with a communist government,



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was proclaimed. This government, through the ruling Chinese Communist party, has controlled **China** ever since. Although the dynastic system disappeared, the People's Republic occupies largely the same territory and governs the same people as the last dynasty—the now-independent country of [Mongolia](#) being a notable exception. If anything, the culture and power of **China** seem stronger in the early 21st century than at almost any other period in history. Under the People's Republic, China's role in world economic and political affairs has grown increasingly more important.

Size alone makes **China** an important member of the world community, a fact that the United Nations has recognized. **China** has had a permanent seat on the UN Security Council since that organization was founded. For a number of years, this seat was occupied by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, which had fled to the island of Taiwan when the communists came to power.

In 1971, however, the UN General Assembly voted to turn this seat over to the representatives of the People's Republic. Most countries recognize the People's Republic as the legitimate government of **China**, though Taiwan retains the formal name of the Republic of **China**. The governments of both the People's Republic and Taiwan consider Taiwan to be a province of **China**.

After 1971, the People's Republic of **China** joined a number of UN and other international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund. An example of China's growing involvement with the world community in that period was the rapid increase in its foreign trade. Between 1959 and 1982 China's total trade turnover with noncommunist countries rose from 1.3 billion dollars to about 32 billion dollars. This represented a significant shift in policy. It indicates that the Chinese had come to believe that the key to economic growth and modernization—including access to new industrial and scientific technologies—lay in closer economic and political relationships with developed countries such as Japan, the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

By the early 1980s, after several decades of civil war, conflicts with foreign powers, and domestic upheavals, **China** seemed to have stabilized. Disputes with neighbors and foreign powers remained, but they were muted. The emphasis had switched to the practical problems of improving the economy, the educational system, and the level of scientific and technical achievement.

In the late 20th century the country adopted a series of wide-reaching economic reforms that transformed Chinese society. It began a period of economic liberalization, in which elements of a free-market system, including private ownership of many industries, were introduced and foreign investment was allowed. Both foreign trade and the gross domestic product experienced dramatic growth, and by the 21st century it had one of the world's largest economies. Although **China** is still not a rich country in per capita terms, the well-being of the Chinese people as a whole has improved rapidly, though income gaps have also grown. Moreover, China's sheer numbers (about a fifth of the world's population) and the size of the overall economy make it an important force among the world family of nations.

Land and Climate

Like the United States, **China** is located in the midlatitudes. On the east and south, **China** faces the Pacific Ocean. Consequently, eastern **China**—especially the southeastern coast—is humid and has generally mild winters compared to the rest of the country. High mountains close off the west, however, and much of the northwestern half of the country is relatively dry and isolated. Traditionally, China's western regions have been sparsely populated, largely by minority peoples such as Tibetans, Uighurs (Uygurs), and Mongols.

With a vast land boundary as well as a long coastline, **China** shares borders with 14 countries: North Korea and Russia on the northeast; Mongolia on the north; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan on the west; and India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Vietnam on the south. It also faces South Korea and Japan across the Yellow Sea and the Philippines across the South **China** Sea.

Surface Features

China's land surface is rugged and uneven. Almost one third of the total area consists of mountains and hills. Traveling westward from the coast in central



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China means going steadily upward across a series of hills and ridges, plateaus, and elevated basins. This climb ends at the Plateau of Tibet with the towering Himalayas on its southern flank. This high, vast plateau has an average elevation of more than 13,000 feet (4,000 meters) and accounts for about a quarter of China's area. The Plateau of Tibet includes the administrative region known as Tibet but also stretches well beyond it, through much of Qinghai Province and into western Sichuan Province and southern Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang.

The major mountains, plateaus, and basins of the west generally follow an east-west axis. They are, from south to north, the Himalayas, the Plateau of Tibet, the Kunlun Mountains, the Tarim Basin, the Tien Shan (Celestial Mountains), the Junggar Basin, and the Altai Mountains. The main structural orientation of the mountains in the east—the Da Hinggan Range (Da Xing'an Ling) and the Taihang Mountains—is northeast-southwest. Where these mountains cross, they form what has been likened to a gigantic checkerboard. In the southeast, however, the low, rugged mountains and hills form a more complex pattern. The lowlands of the east also include many plains, notably the Northeast Plain, the North **China** Plain, and the plains along the Yangtze River (Chang Jiang).

In the southwest the ridges are folded into extremely rugged, high uplands separating the major drainage systems of several great rivers. Extensive areas in southern **China** are underlaid with limestone. This karst, or limestone, region has been weathered into some unusual and striking landscapes that feature a variety of steep domes and towers. These landscapes have served as a popular theme for the traditional school of Chinese landscape painting.

Major Rivers

Most of China's tens of thousands of rivers flow generally eastward, to the Pacific Ocean. This is true of the country's two longest rivers, the [Yangtze River](#) (Chang Jiang) and the Huang He (Yellow River), which rise on the eastern edge of the Plateau of Tibet. The Huang He eventually empties into the Bo Hai (Gulf of Chihli), while the Yangtze empties into the East **China** Sea. Several other large rivers that rise in the Plateau of Tibet, such as the [Mekong](#), Salween, and Brahmaputra, flow into Southeast Asia or India. Another important river, the Amur, forms part of the boundary between **China** and Russia in the northeast. China's major southern river is the Xi (West) River. The Xi, together with the Pearl (Zhu) River and other rivers, forms the important large southern delta plain in which the southern city of Guangzhou (Canton) is located.

Natural Resources

China has a large and varied stock of natural resources, including many minerals. The country has about 12 percent of the world's mineral resources, with only the United States and Russia possessing larger proportions. There are sizeable reserves of coal, iron, tin, copper, lead, zinc, molybdenum, tungsten, mercury, graphite, antimony, magnesite, flourspar, and other minerals.

The country's rich mineral supply is a product of its complex geology. In ancient geologic times much of what is now **China** was under the sea. Movements of Earth's crust against three huge, stable masses of ancient Precambrian rock (in southeastern **China**, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia) gave rise to China's characteristic parallel ridges and plains. In the lowlands and basins, which were repeatedly submerged during the Paleozoic era hundreds of millions of years ago, great quantities of carbon-containing material were deposited. These became the carbon-based fossil fuels that exist in **China** today—coal, which is abundant, and petroleum and natural gas, which are present to a smaller degree. Deposits of other minerals accumulated as a result of geologic processes, including vulcanism associated with the crustal movements.

The variety of different landforms, soil conditions, and climate patterns offers many different kinds of opportunities for agricultural production. A tremendous range of crops can be grown, and this made it possible for **China** to keep imports to a minimum during its Maoist period of self-reliance. **China** has only a modest supply of arable land (about 10 percent of the total land area). Where precipitation is sufficient for growing

crops, however, Chinese farmers have satisfactory to good soils to work with or they have improved existing soils by adding nutrients. (See also "Mining and Energy" and "Crops and Livestock" below.)

Difficult Environments

One of the most unusual and challenging regional environments in **China** is found on the Loess Plateau, a highland plateau west of the North **China** Plain. There the special type of fine, siltlike soil known as loess covers tens of thousands of square miles. The Loess Plateau has the most extensive area of loessic soil in the world. The loess is blown by the wind from the adjacent Ordos (Mu Us) and Gobi deserts, as well as from territories beyond China's borders, and has accumulated over thousands of years. In many places the loess forms a thick mantle that completely covers the original landforms. When the forest or prairie vegetation on the loess is disturbed, the soil in the upland regions is easily eroded and formed into gullies during heavy summer rainstorms.

The region around the confluence of the Wei River and the Huang He is often called the cradle of Chinese civilization. It is thought that Neolithic people in that region began to develop the culture that evolved into the Chinese civilization. When these people began to farm, they disturbed the original vegetation. Ultimately, this increased the rate of erosion and led to severe environmental problems. In addition to scarring the surface landscape with gullies and badlands, the runoff found its way into the Huang He, adding to the silt burden of that river. The Huang He's high content of yellow-brown silt gives it its name, which means "Yellow River." The silt load causes sediment to be deposited in the river channel at a high rate and has resulted in a tendency to flood farther east on the North **China** Plain. The chronic and severe flooding of the Huang He, sometimes accompanied by major changes in the location of the channel, led the Chinese to call it "China's sorrow." Tremendous efforts and vast amounts of human labor have been used in building levees, channels, and dams to control it.

Parts of the southwest, with their extensive limestone deposits, irregular karst towers, and subsurface drainage networks, present a different set of difficulties. There the problems are to find areas of level land large enough to cultivate and to keep water on the surface so it can be used for irrigation.

Other environments within **China** pose their own challenges. Farming is difficult in many parts of the country, and large investments have been needed to improve the land and control water for irrigation. Transportation networks are difficult and expensive to plan and build in many areas, where inaccessibility and geographic isolation have seriously impeded development for centuries.

The movements of Earth's crust that created China's mountain ranges and high plateaus continue today, making much of the country prone to earthquakes. Over its long history, it has been struck by hundreds of powerful, deadly quakes. In recent times, particularly devastating earthquakes occurred in eastern Gansu Province in 1920, in eastern Hebei Province in 1976, and in east-central Sichuan Province in 2008.

Climate



Climatic regions of China.

In terms of climate, **China** may be divided roughly into the dry west and the humid east. Actually, the line dividing these regions would be diagonal, with the driest part of the country being in the northwest and the most humid in the southeast. The humid east may be further subdivided into the warm and humid south and southeast and the temperate-to-cool, moderately humid north and northeast. Much of the humid eastern region of **China** exhibits a monsoonal pattern of temperature and precipitation. In a monsoon climate, the warm summer months are typically the months of maximum precipitation.

Climatic regions of **China**.

Precipitation

Only the south and southeast have sufficient rainfall to support intensive farming. Just 20 to 26 inches (500 to 650 millimeters) of precipitation are common throughout much of the north and northeast. This is not enough to grow rice or to raise more than one crop per year. Consequently, much of northern and northeastern **China**

must rely on irrigation water. In the early 2000s **China** began building massive water transfer schemes to bring water from southern **China** to northern **China**.

Western **China** gets very little rainfall. Most of this region consists of mountains or enclosed desert basins. In extreme western Xinjiang at Kashgar (Kashi) in the Tarim Basin, rainfall averages only 4 inches (100 millimeters) per year. About the same amount falls farther northeast, at Ürümqi in the Junggar Basin, while near Lhasa, high on the Plateau of Tibet, the average is about 11 inches (280 millimeters). These dry conditions permit little farming, even where drought-resistant crops such as *gaoliang* (a variety of sorghum) and some of the millets are grown. Irrigation is essential, and most of the settlements in western **China** developed initially around oases where there were dependable sources of water. In Tibet less water is needed because of the lower average temperature, but irrigation is becoming increasingly important as a means of making agricultural output more reliable.

An important feature of China's climate is the annual occurrence, usually in the summer or autumn, of great storms called typhoons that sweep in from the western Pacific. These typhoons are tropical cyclones (which are called hurricanes when they occur in the Atlantic). They are accompanied by high winds and tremendous quantities of rain, usually concentrated within a few hours. The storm paths most commonly focus on the southeastern coast, though sometimes they sweep northward toward Japan. Great damage may be done by the flooding caused by typhoons, especially in low-lying coastal floodplains and basins.

Temperature

In general, temperature patterns in **China** are determined by north-south location, though there are some exceptions. South of the Qin Mountains (Qin Ling), average annual temperatures are high and winters are generally mild. For example, the middle and lower Yangtze Basin in southeastern **China** has mild winters and extremely hot summers, and the average temperature increases only gradually as one moves south into the tropical coastal areas. The average annual temperature drops rapidly north of the Qin Mountains. In much of this area there is a continental climate. This is reflected in the cold winters that occur in such cities as Beijing, X'an, and Harbin.

The length of the growing season for plants, defined as the period during which daily mean temperatures are above 43° F (6° C), varies in line with the temperature patterns. Thus, most of the area south of the Yangtze has a growing season of at least 300 days, mild enough to grow two crops a year. Along the southern and southeastern coast the growing season lasts all year round. Light frosts may occur, but they are not severe enough to kill most plants. North of the Yangtze Basin average temperatures drop sharply, and the growing season shortens rapidly as distance north increases. In the northern interior the growing season is less than 180 days.

Plants and Animals

As might be expected from its huge area and variety of regional climates, **China** has a great range of vegetation. Its animal life is likewise highly diverse.

Plant Life

Most of the types of plants that grow in the Northern Hemisphere can be found in **China**, except for those varieties common to Arctic tundra regions. Along the southern coast and on nearby Hainan Island in the South **China** Sea, there are rainforests and associated plant communities typical of the humid tropics. The high, rugged mountains of western **China** contain alpine and subalpine plants. Other regions of **China** exhibit a variety of plant life common to deserts, steppes and savannas, prairie meadows, and mangrove swamps. There are also forests of coniferous (cone-bearing) evergreen trees and deciduous trees (broad-leaved trees that lose their leaves seasonally).

It is possible, however, to divide this broad range of plants into regional



Evergreen trees grow on the rugged Huang Mountains

groupings. Thus there is a clear distinction between the character of the plant life in the humid and subhumid east and that of the dry west. The eastern part of the country can be further subdivided into four regions: (1) the tropical, humid southeast, which supports tropical rainforests; (2) the subtropical southern and central area of broad-leaved evergreens, pines, and varieties of bamboo; (3) the midlatitude forest zone of mainly deciduous species, which extends from the Yangtze north to the Northeast region, formerly called Manchuria; and (4) the less humid but cooler extreme north and northeast, with evergreen conifers and northern deciduous tree species similar to those of the taiga zone in Russia. Throughout **China** coarse grasses have grown up where forests have been removed. In parts of southern **China** there is a tough, fibrous type of grass that impedes further economic use of the land. Savanna grasslands are common in the tropics.

Evergreen trees grow on the rugged Huang Mountains of Anhui Province, **China**. (Credit: Digital Vision/Getty Images)

The large, dense population of eastern **China** has placed great pressure on the natural vegetation. Especially serious is the demand for wood and forest products. Over the centuries, the great need for firewood, construction material, and paper has led to a serious loss of trees. In many places in eastern **China** it is difficult to determine the nature of the original vegetation. Today the main commercial forests (mostly of conifers, birch, and ash) are found in northeastern and southwestern **China**.

In the mountains, deserts, and steppes of the west, where rainfall is low and winters are cold, the flora is not rich. Vegetation in the deserts and at higher elevations often consists of several species of grasses and shrubs. Three major vegetation zones of western **China** have been identified: Inner Mongolia, the Junggar and Tarim basins, and Tibet. Within these three zones, the plant life varies according to local ecological conditions rather than according to north-south location. Trees, for example, are found where precipitation is greatest and where the average annual temperature permits their growth.

On the windward, northern slopes of the Tien Shan range facing the Junggar Basin, forests of such trees as spruce, birch, ash, and aspen are found up to 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) above sea level. However, there is great variation in the extent and type of tree cover as a result of differences in slope conditions, temperature, and moisture. At higher elevations and in drier steppe and desert locations, a variety of grasses, shrubs, and sedges are common. The harshest region in western **China** is the western part of the Plateau of Tibet, a cold, forbidding desert above 14,800 feet (4,500 meters). Plant growth under such conditions is highly restricted.

Animal Life

A tremendous number of animal species are native to **China**. Many of the species are the same as or similar to those in neighboring lands, but some are found nowhere else. Distinctively Chinese species occur especially in the mountains. Some animals unique to **China**, including the giant panda and the Chinese (Yangtze) alligator, are endangered. In recent years the Chinese government has stepped up efforts to protect and preserve such animals.



The splendidly marked Mandarin duck is native

The splendidly marked Mandarin duck is native to northern **China**. (Credit: Gordon Langsbury/Bruce Coleman Inc.)

Animals of the north include Siberian tigers, wolves, badgers, lynx, sikas and musk deer, weasels, sables, stone marten, flying squirrels, hares, pheasants, ducks, and white-naped cranes. Dry areas of the northwest are home to argalis (a type of wild sheep), Asiatic wild asses, Bactrian camels, Mongolian gazelles, and Eurasian beavers. Western birds include whooper swans, pheasants, quail, and great bustards. Sikas, Tibetan antelopes, blue sheep (rock sheep), yaks, snow leopards, brown bears, and such unusual birds as Tibetan snow cocks live at high elevations in Tibet and Qinghai.

Much of the distinctive animal life of the southern and central parts of the country is associated with forested hills or



At high elevations in Tibet the yak lives

At high elevations in Tibet the yak lives in both the wild and domestic state. (Credit: Russ Kinne/Photo

aquatic environments. Giant pandas, red pandas, golden cats, clouded leopards, rhesus monkeys, and takins (a type of stocky mammal related to sheep) are found in the southwest. Giant salamanders, crocodile lizards, several types of badgers and weasels, langurs, and tigers are found in the Yangtze Basin. South **China** has hornbills, pheasants, monkeys, deer, civets, tigers, and clouded leopards.

Researchers)

This listing is by no means complete. However, it indicates the rich, if vanishing, variety of wildlife found in **China** and the importance of **China** as a preserve for the world's animals.

People and Culture

China has the largest population of any country in the world, and its population has grown rapidly in recent times. Between the 1964 and 1982 censuses **China** added more than 313 million to its population, more people than lived in the Soviet Union during that time. China's population reached 1 billion in the early 1980s and exceeded 1.3 billion in the early 21st century, expanding by several million people each year. This rapid growth occurred because sanitation and health care improved greatly, so the death rate dropped sharply. The birth rate also fell, but not as fast as the death rate.

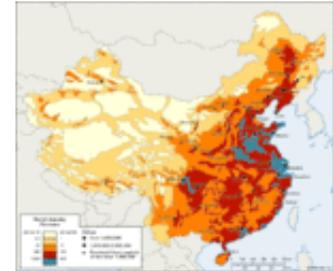
The problem of providing an acceptable quality of life for a society this large—and growing ever larger—is a major concern in **China**. In an effort to reduce the rate of population growth, the Chinese government since 1978 has promoted the so-called one-child family among the Han, or mainstream, Chinese (the group that makes up the vast majority of the population). In general, married couples are required to have no more than one child, though in rural areas they may be permitted to have two children if the first child is female. Rewards such as better opportunities for a single child are offered. Family-planning advice and birth-control devices are easy to obtain and commonly used. Some aspects of policy and policy enforcement differ from province to province. If a woman becomes pregnant with an additional child, she normally is urged to have an abortion. Sterilization after one child is also promoted.

One problem facing the government is the widespread desire for male children and thus the more lenient policy in rural **China** toward couples whose first child is a girl. Some incidents of female infanticide, the killing of baby girls, have been reported. Despite all the government's efforts, family-planning and one-child programs have had only limited success in rural areas. Peasant families still want sons to carry on the male family name, to provide the heavy labor necessary on rural farms, and to take care of them economically in old age, as there has been a lack of old-age welfare. Until rural people participate fully in family planning, China's population will continue to grow. Still, population control programs have significantly lowered the country's overall birth rate.

Ethnic and Language Groups

The concept of being Chinese is not based on race. To a certain degree, it is a cultural concept. To speak and behave like a Chinese—in short, to have and accept the Chinese system of cultural values—is to be Chinese. The mainstream Chinese refer to themselves as Han or sons of Han (as in Han Dynasty, a period of great historical significance). They account for some 90 percent of the population. Throughout history, small ethnic groups that came into contact with the Han Chinese have adopted Chinese culture and have been absorbed into the mainstream. This process continues, though there are legal guarantees designed to protect the rights and culture of most minority nationalities.

Traditionally, the definition of a minority nationality in **China** is a group of people who speak a common language, occupy a common area, and share a common sense of social values. Such groups see themselves as non-Han Chinese—not belonging to the majority Han Chinese population. Most of them speak a non-Chinese language as their first language. The government officially recognizes 55 minority nationalities. In 2005 approximately 123 million people, or nearly 9.5 percent of China's population, were members of these minority nationalities. In the 2000 census, 18 of the nationalities had populations of 1 million or more, and an additional 30 had at least 10,000 members. Their populations ranged from about 3,000 for the Lhoba, a group in Tibet, to



Population density of China.

Population density of **China**. (Credit: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.)

more than 16 million for the Zhuang, who live mainly in southern **China**.

Although the minority nationalities represent a comparatively small proportion of the total population of **China**, they have an importance in Chinese society beyond their numbers because of the strategic territories many occupy. Most minority nationalities live along China's sparsely populated frontiers, and many have cultural relationships with minority groups in neighboring countries, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, North Korea, Mongolia, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma). If these groups became hostile toward the central government, it could affect China's national security.

In part, the guarantees protecting the minority nationalities are expressed in the structure of the administrative system. In addition to the provinces, there are several administrative units with a status equivalent to a province. Among them are five autonomous regions based on the location of five of the larger minority nationalities. They include the Zhuang, who live mainly in the Zhuang Autonomous Region of Guangxi, in the south. The Hui, or Chinese Muslims, live mostly in the [Hui Autonomous Region of Ningxia](#), in the north-central part of the country. The Uighurs (or Uygurs) are a Turkic group in the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang in the northwest. The Tibetans live in the Tibet Autonomous Region and parts of Qinghai and Sichuan provinces, in the west. Finally, the Mongols are centered on the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, in the north. In addition to these five groups, many smaller minority groups are given some degree of local self-government in smaller units such as autonomous prefectures, counties, and townships.

This administrative system is designed to give the minorities political equality with the Han people and to help them maintain their distinctive identities. The government has also adopted measures to promote economic growth among minorities to enable their per capita incomes to catch up with those of the Han Chinese. At the same time, a form of Mandarin Chinese is promoted as the official language of the country. All minority peoples are urged to learn it.

Chinese Language

There are two elements to the Chinese language: the written language and the spoken language. The written language is based on thousands of individual symbols called characters, each of which represents a concept or thing. Spoken Chinese includes a number of different mutually unintelligible forms, each with numerous dialects. In other words, there is not one spoken Chinese language but several, and speakers of one form cannot automatically understand the other forms—though they all use more or less the same system of written characters.

The written language is not based on an alphabet, though a national phonetic alphabet was devised for dictionary use. Several systems of writing Chinese words in alphabets of foreign languages have also been created. Those that use the Latin alphabet are called romanization systems. Starting in the early 1950s a standard system of romanization called Pinyin was developed in **China**. It is now commonly used for teaching the language, for dictionaries, and for representing Chinese words in languages that use the Latin alphabet, including English. Most of the spellings of Chinese sounds and names in this article are based on the Pinyin system. Those that are not are generally very familiar names in common use prior to the 1980s, such as the name of the Chinese Nationalist party, the Kuomintang (Guomindang in Pinyin).

As mentioned above, some types of spoken Chinese are very different from each other. All of them use tones to distinguish different words that otherwise have the same sounds. Mandarin, which is spoken in the Beijing region and in northern **China** generally, has four common tones. Cantonese, spoken in southern **China**, has nine tones and is quite different from Mandarin. Today, a form of Mandarin based on Beijing-area speech is called *putonghua* (meaning “common language”); it is the official language of government and education, and everyone is expected to learn to speak it. The country has also implemented a simplified system of Chinese characters, which is in common use throughout **China** except for Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, where the traditional written forms remain standard.

Religion

Before the communist revolution, a number of religious and philosophical systems were practiced in **China**. Officially, the Chinese Communist party is atheist, and during the period from 1949 to about 1980 religious

observance declined. Today, it is difficult to determine exactly how many people practice various religions. A large number of people describe themselves as nonreligious or atheist. Others admit to following a local “folk religion,” Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, or Daoism (Taoism). While religion officially is permitted in **China** today, organized religion must operate within parameters dictated by the Chinese government.

Traditionally Daoism and Confucianism provided ethical guides to the proper behavior of individuals and officials. Both of these systems originated in **China** during the so-called Golden Age of Chinese thought, some 2,500 years ago. Daoism sought to promote the inner peace of individuals and harmony with their surroundings. Confucianism, based on the teachings and writings of the philosopher Confucius (Kongzi), is an ethical system that sought to teach the proper way for all people to behave in society. Each relationship—husband-wife, parents-children, ruler-subjects—involved a set of obligations which, if upheld, would lead to a just and harmonious society.

Buddhism came to **China** from India by the 1st century AD and later became quite influential there. It flourished in **China** especially in the 5th to early 9th centuries. It has been estimated that about 5 percent of Chinese admitted to being Buddhists in 2005.

Prior to 1949, practices that may best be called folk religions were common throughout **China**. Although they incorporated elements of Buddhism and, especially, Daoism, these religions were usually local, often based on local gods, and served the local people. Today, more than a quarter of the population is thought to practice a folk religion of some kind.

Islam came to **China** mainly from Central Asia, where it was practiced by many of the Turkic peoples. Two autonomous regions, [Ningxia](#) and Xinjiang, have been designated for two groups of Islamic adherents, the Hui and the Uighur, respectively.

Christian missionaries have been active in **China** since Roman Catholics belonging to the Jesuit order arrived in the early 17th century. Protestant missionaries first appeared in the early 19th century. All the Christian missionaries had difficulty converting the Chinese because Christianity was associated in the popular mind with Western imperialism. By 1949 there were only 3 or 4 million Christians in **China**, less than 1 percent of the total population.

The communists have discouraged religious practices, which they consider antisocialist. Many religious groups, such as the Falun Gong, are considered to be cults. In the early years of communist rule, many temples and churches were closed and their property taken. During the Cultural Revolution, a mass movement that lasted officially from 1966 to 1977, conditions were especially difficult, and religious practitioners were persecuted.

The situation eased after 1977. Buddhist temples have been allowed to reopen. Christian worship services have been permitted once again, but only in churches under the control of the official national Roman Catholic and Protestant organizations. Underground Catholic churches and Protestant “house churches” (privately organized in people's homes) began spreading through the Chinese countryside in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In particular Protestant groups have expanded rapidly and often incorporate unconventional practices in their faith and services. The Falun Gong meditation and exercise religious grouping has been severely repressed. The Chinese government remains cautious about all religious activity and is especially opposed to foreign missionary activity.

Society and the Family

Traditionally the family has been the most important unit of society, and this is still true. The family is also an important economic unit. In rural areas, the traditional family consisted of the head of the household, his sons, and their wives and children, often living under one roof. Common surnames gave families membership in a clan, and clans were very important in southern **China**. In some villages all families had the same surname, or four or five surname clans might account for most of the villagers.

Land, the main form of wealth in traditional **China**, was divided equally among all of a landowner's surviving sons when he died. Thus, as China's population grew, the landholdings became smaller and smaller, and many people were very poor. In the first half of the 20th century the family as a social unit came under severe stress.

Rural conditions were bad, income was low, and food was often scarce. Health care was poor or nonexistent for most peasants, and mortality rates were high. Civil unrest, warfare, and foreign invasions added to the difficulties.

After the communist revolution in 1949 rural conditions stabilized. Private ownership of land was abolished, but each peasant family was given a small plot to farm. Health care improved. The fluctuations in the food supply leveled off and life expectancy increased. Living conditions for the average peasant are generally better today than they were in 1949, and there are opportunities for at least some education.

For many years, peasant families were organized into large collectives that worked farmland together. Reforms introduced after 1978 once again made individual households the basic rural production units. Despite formal state ownership of the land, individual families now hold long-term leases of their plots for farming.

Family life is somewhat different in urban areas than in rural ones. While some rural families still have three generations under one roof, in the cities, families usually are smaller, often composed only of parents and a child. Since both parents normally work, children are left in day-care centers or schools. Today, family life for most people in the cities is stable, and family ties continue to play a major role in the lives of both parents and children.

Cities

China's urban areas began to grow greatly in the second half of the 20th century. While less than a quarter of the Chinese people lived in and around cities in 1975, by 2005 more than two fifths did. By sheer numbers, there are more urban dwellers in **China** than in the United States and Russia combined. Some of the cities are quite large. Shanghai, for example, has about 15 million people living in its built-up area; Beijing and Chongqing have more than 10 million in urban areas, and Tianjin and a few others have more than 5 million. Many other cities have more than 1 million people each.

China's cities have expanded rapidly and are continuing to expand. The government is attempting to regulate urban growth in order to avoid such problems as overcrowding, slum development, and unemployment. It remains more difficult for a person to move to a city if he or she does not have an urban household registration (*hukou*) permit. The household registration system used to slow the migration of people to cities and encourage the kind of urban and regional growth that planners wanted. This system has largely broken down since the late 1990s. People without an urban household registration can now move to the cities, but they face difficulties in finding good housing, decent education, and high paying jobs.

Literature and the Arts

Chinese culture is remarkable for its duration and diversity. Chinese music, dance, theater, and visual arts have a long history. The written language and literature are central to China's culture. Scholars have identified inscriptions on pottery dating to about 4000 BC, and written Chinese has developed continuously since about 1200 BC, making it the world's oldest written language in continuous use. China's tradition of storytelling is rich.

Literature

China has a very old and rich tradition in literature. Early writings were generally philosophical or religious essays such as the works of Confucius (Pinyin: Kongzi or Kongfuzi; 551–479 BC) and Laozi (probably 6th century BC). These writings were often about how people should act and how the society and political system should be organized and operated. A strong tradition of historical writing also evolved. After the fall of a dynasty, for example, a grand history of the late dynasty was commissioned and written by scholars in the next dynasty.

In addition to philosophical, religious, and historical writings, **China** also produced poetry, novels, and dramatic writings from an early date. Poetry became well established as a literary form during the Tang Dynasty, from AD 618 to 907. Two of China's greatest poets, [Li Bai \(Li Bo\)](#) and Du Fu, wrote during this period. Poetry, often dealing with the relationship of humans to their natural surroundings, has remained an important genre in Chinese literature.

Early Chinese novels often stressed character development and usually centered on an adventure or supernatural happening; an example is the classic Ming Dynasty version of *Shuihuzhuan* (*The Water Margin*). Historical themes were also popular, as in *Sanguozhi yanyi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*), written in the late Yuan, or Mongol, period. There were also love stories such as the extremely popular *Hongloumeng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), probably China's most famous novel, written in the 18th century by Cao Zhan. Many of the early novels were written anonymously. Often these works were written in the vernacular, or everyday language, rather than literary language, and many authors felt it was beneath their station to be associated with this type of writing.

China's literary tradition continues to the present, though much 20th-century and early 21st-century writing concentrated on efforts to reform or modernize **China**. Increasingly, Chinese literature has offered glimpses into the tragic incidents since 1949, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Probably the most famous 20th-century writer was [Lu Xun](#), a poet, essayist, and novelist whose work focused on the need to modernize through revolution. Under communism, writers have been expected to uphold the values of the socialist state, though the degree of control over their output has varied.

Arts

Chinese art, like Chinese literature, goes back to early times. Early themes were developed from religious and supernatural beliefs or from the natural environment and landscape. One of the most basic forms of Chinese art is calligraphy, the painting of Chinese characters with a brush. Calligraphy has developed as a pure art form with its own standards of excellence. Building on the tradition of calligraphy, Chinese painting developed a distinctive style that differs greatly from traditional Western painting. It is more efficient in terms of brushstrokes and appears more abstract. Landscapes have always been a popular theme.

With their stress on simplicity and economy, traditional Chinese calligraphy, painting, and poetry are closely related. In all of them, the artist seeks to express both inner harmony and harmony with the natural surroundings. Chinese poets and painters often have sought inspiration by withdrawing to isolated, mountainous areas, and these landscapes have become conventional themes of Chinese art. Similarly, Chinese architecture has traditionally aimed to convey harmony with society and nature.

The army of magnificent life-size terra-cotta statues of men and horses discovered in the early 1970s in the tomb of an emperor who died in 210 BC provide some indication of the long history of Chinese sculpture. After the introduction of Buddhism into **China**, Buddhist subjects became dominant themes of the sculptor's art. Perhaps best known (and most copied) in the West, however, are the works of Chinese decorative artists, such as pottery, bronzes, lacquerware, and exquisitely detailed jade and ivory carvings.

The oldest art forms in **China** are music and dance, both of which continue to be appreciated in modern society. Drama is another old and important art form. Chinese drama usually combines vernacular language with music and song and has been popular with the common people. A variety of popular and standard themes are presented in Peking (Beijing) Opera, which developed in the mid-19th century from earlier styles. It is probably the best known of several Chinese operatic traditions. Chinese opera is a favorite artistic and cultural medium.



A Peking opera troupe



A wood bowl decorated in red and black lacquer

A wood bowl decorated in red and black lacquer with stylized birds and animals is from Changsha, Hunan Province, **China**, from about the 3rd century BC, during the late Zhou Dynasty. (Credit: Courtesy of the Seattle Art Museum, Washington)

Education and Health

The large population and vast territory of **China** pose an enormous challenge for the government in terms of meeting the basic educational and medical needs of the people. The school system in **China** is an important means for both instilling values in and teaching skills to its people. Traditional Chinese culture attached great importance to education as a means of enhancing a person's worth and career. The health of the Chinese population has improved overall since 1949, though health facilities remain unevenly distributed.

performs a scene

A Peking (Beijing) opera troupe performs a scene from *The Real and the Fake Sun Wukong*.
(Credit: Gang Wu/Liaison International)

Education



College students studying to be teachers use

College students studying to be teachers use the library at Northeast Normal University in the city of Changchun, in Jilin Province, **China**. (Credit: **China** Photos/Getty Images)

The traditional educational system in **China** was based on literacy and the ability to read and write essays about the Confucian classics. Social advancement was achieved through successful completion of the imperial examinations, leading to an appointment in the imperial bureaucracy. Therefore, the questions asked in the imperial examinations determined the nature of the educational system. Since this examination system was used for many centuries and was not discarded until 1905, the Chinese educational system changed little during that time. The emphasis was on interpretation of the Confucian classics and the writing of elegant essays. Practical and scientific subjects were excluded.

Although in theory the imperial examinations were open to any male, only the wealthy could afford to give their sons the years of schooling that were necessary for success. It is no wonder that the highest social class, the elite of traditional Chinese society, came to be called the scholar-gentry. They controlled the land and wealth, and, in general, only their sons were taught the Confucian classics, passed the imperial examinations, and became imperial officers.

In the late 19th century, as the weaknesses of the Chinese economic and social system became more obvious, calls for reforming the educational system grew louder. Peking University, in Beijing, with modern programs and courses, was founded in 1898. In 1905 the old imperial examination system was abolished. New courses in Western science and other nontraditional subjects were introduced, and new schools were established. The early 20th century was a period of rapid educational and intellectual change. Many young Chinese wanted to overturn the old society completely and reform **China** along modern, Western lines. Others advocated educational reform and social and political change, but within the framework of the traditional Confucian values.

During the first half of the 20th century vast efforts were made to promote literacy. Both the Nationalist and Communist parties supported literacy and education, and both parties used education to promote their political goals. By 1945, however, it was estimated that only 20 percent of China's people could read and write.

After the communists came to power in 1949 literacy rose rapidly. It is estimated that by the 21st century just over 90 percent of those over age 15 were literate. Educational policy, however, has varied considerably. Generally, a primary school education has been made available to almost everyone. About 75 percent of urban 10- to 18-year-olds are able to attend school, whereas about half of the rural youth in that age group attend school. The rural education figures in the poorer parts of **China** are high by world standards, reflecting a belief that basic knowledge is essential to rural development and economic progress. By the early 2000s **China** had a nine-year compulsory education system in place.

Education at the college or university level is more difficult to obtain, however. University fees have skyrocketed in recent years. Despite this, the number of college students has greatly increased, reaching about 5 million in 2005.

Since the 1950s policies on college admission have changed from time to time. During the Cultural Revolution stress was placed on “good political background” as a requirement, and technical expertise was strongly criticized. Many schools and most universities were closed at that time. The political climate changed from the late 1970s. Schools and universities were reopened. Admission came to be based on achievement, and scholastic goals emphasized technical learning and proficiency in subject matter. The political leaders who came to power after the Cultural Revolution believed that an educated group of professional managers, technicians, researchers, and teachers was essential for the modernization and development of **China**. Since 1978 the only requirement for admission to college has been a passing score on an entrance examination. The political background of an applicant's parents is no longer a factor.

Health and welfare

There has been remarkable improvement in the health and material well-being of most of China's people since the civil war. Life expectancy at birth has more than doubled, rising from an estimated 35 years in 1949 to more than 73 years in 2008. In the same period, the annual death rate declined from 23 per 1,000 population to about seven per 1,000.

Two major factors help to account for this progress. First, there has been a steady general improvement in the diet of the average citizen, resulting from larger and more reliable crop production. The old problem of periodic famine has largely disappeared, though poor harvests may still result in shortages.

The second factor is the great improvement in the nature and quality of health care. Diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, typhus, malaria, leprosy, smallpox, typhoid, and bubonic plague traditionally took a heavy toll of lives in **China**. In addition, a variety of debilitating parasites, such as hookworm and the trematode worm that causes schistosomiasis, were widespread. Dysentery and acute diarrhea were serious problems, especially among young children. Poor diet, insanitary conditions, poverty, and lack of health care made the entire population vulnerable to disease. Fatal illness was frequent and often struck babies and young children.

The communist government made a tremendous effort to improve this situation. Inoculation against some diseases was emphasized, as were cleanliness and sanitation. Health services, ranging from those provided by hospitals and clinics to “barefoot doctors”—people with some medical training who work especially in the villages—were made available to the entire population. From the 1990s, however, the cost of health care began to rise as China's social safety net was neglected.

Most of the epidemic diseases that used to sweep over **China** have been brought under control. Such diseases as tuberculosis, encephalitis, cholera, and malaria and certain parasites still present problems, but to a lesser degree than in the prerevolutionary period. Diarrhea and dysentery are likely to continue as long as human waste (referred to as night soil) is used as a type of farm fertilizer. In recent years, the incidence of cancers has increased, and it is likely that this is connected to an increase in industrial pollution. Nevertheless, the much improved figures of life expectancy indicate the tremendous progress that has been made in the fight against diseases.

Economy

China's traditional economy was based on rural activities and farm production. Ownership of land was the main form of wealth in late imperial times, and large holdings often belonged to absentee landlords who lived in nearby cities. Many peasants were poor and landless and worked as tenants for the absentee landlords or for richer peasants.

For several centuries one of China's most serious problems was the rapid growth of the population, which tended to match any increases in food production. This became especially serious after 1800, partly because the supply of farmland grew slowly and partly because the practice of dividing farm holdings among all the surviving sons resulted in ever smaller units of production. Eventually many of the holdings were so small that a family could not sustain itself without going into debt. Once this happened, it was very difficult for the family to clear itself of financial obligation. Large numbers of peasants lost their land as a result. In times of famine and hardship, such families suffered the most.

As rural poverty spread during the 19th and early 20th centuries, many poor and middle peasants were attracted to political movements that promised radical changes and the breakup of large landholdings. The programs of Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, and the Nationalist party were intended to improve the people's livelihood, but much of their political support came from landlords. Therefore, it was difficult for the Nationalists to promote effective and thoroughgoing land reform.

The Chinese Communist party had no such ties to landlords. At first the party focused its attention on urban workers, but it made little progress. One young communist organizer, [Mao Zedong](#), urged that the party concentrate its efforts on the rural peasantry, and eventually this strategy proved successful. The communists gained power in **China** partly because of the bad rural conditions that existed there.

When the communist government took over in 1949, several paths to economic development and growth were available to it. The Soviet Union's model of central direction and planning based on the development of heavy industry was one. Another was to retain central planning but to focus on agricultural development and light industry. Still another was to decentralize decision making and allow market forces to determine in part how resources were used. This last option is closest to the capitalism of Western industrialized countries.

Almost by definition any communist system must include a strong element of central direction and planning. **China** was no different from other communist states in this respect, and it moved quickly to develop a central planning body to direct the economy and determine the use of resources. Today, the main planning organs remain centrally directed by the State Council, the highest administrative body in the government. Under the State Council is the National Development and Reform Commission, which directs the various departments and offices such as the State Grain Administration, the Department of International Cooperation, and the Department of Laws and Regulations. The National Development and Reform Commission was formed in 2003. It has less power over the economy than the State Planning Commission used to have prior to the opening of market reforms in the 1980s.

Another important aspect of China's economic system after 1950 was state ownership of all land and major equipment, what Marxists call the "means of production." Initially land seized from the big landlords was given to peasants, but by 1955 all land was taken over by the state and organized into collective farms. A small fraction was later returned to the peasants as their own family plots, but there has not been any true private ownership of land in **China** since 1955.

From 1950 to 1980 and even beyond, **China** followed several strategies to promote economic growth and development, but they were all based on central planning and direction, in what is called a "command" economy. However, there were substantial variations in the amount of decision making left to individuals at the local level and in the types of incentives available to individual farmers and workers. In the early 1950s **China** followed the Soviet model, focusing on the development of heavy industry to the neglect of other sectors of the economy. Over the years, however, there were shifts in the relative emphasis placed on heavy industry, light and consumer-oriented industries, and agriculture.

Some of the changes in emphasis were tied to changes in the political orientation and thinking of the leadership. In the past such shifts were often reflected in major policy statements and associated with mass participation campaigns. Examples of mass participation campaigns are the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1959 and the Four Modernizations program beginning in 1978. The Cultural Revolution was basically a political movement, though it did have far-reaching effects on the economy and on economic development.

From the 1980s a market-based economy, in which the state plays a smaller role in planning and controlling the economy, has been steadily developed. Private enterprises are now allowed to compete in many sectors, though key industries, such as mining, remain within the state plan. By 2001 the gross domestic product (GDP) of **China** had increased twofold from that of 1990 and **China** had become the world's sixth largest economy. From 2002 to 2007, China's GDP growth averaged 10.6 percent per year and **China** emerged as the world's fourth largest economy. Although economic growth began to slow in 2008 because of a global financial crisis, it quickly rebounded. In 2010 **China** became the world's second largest economy, after only the United States.

Agriculture, Fishing, and Forestry

Agriculture and rural activities are important in **China** for several reasons. Farming provides the food and fiber needed for the sustenance of China's people. At the same time, about 50 percent of the people depend on agriculture or related rural activities for their livelihood, with about 20 percent engaged solely in agriculture. Although manufacturing contributes the largest share of the GDP, a larger number of people work in agriculture.

In addition, agriculture is seen as an important sector of the economy since food self-sufficiency has been a national goal. Moreover, if hard work, good management, and the application of sound, scientific farming make Chinese agriculture productive, capital surpluses can be created and invested in other sectors of the economy. This can accelerate the rate of economic growth and ultimately benefit all of China's people.

Traditional farming

In the thousands of years that farming has been practiced in **China**, the Chinese have refined and perfected their agricultural techniques. For example, they developed an elaborate system of maintaining the nutrient levels in the soil by collecting all organic wastes (including human wastes), fermenting them, and applying them to the fields. Traditional Chinese agriculture is labor intensive; that is, the emphasis is on using many workers to increase the crop yield per unit of land rather than on increasing the productivity of the individual worker. With each improvement in land management and crop production, the food supply increased, the land was able to support more people, and the population tended to rise accordingly until the pressure on the land became very great.

This cycle has continued in **China** throughout its history. One can say that agricultural success is responsible for China's fairly large population in relation to its arable area. At the same time, a rising population meant that the workers themselves remained in relative poverty. This situation was made worse by a system of inheritance whereby land was subdivided into smaller and smaller holdings in each succeeding generation. By the 16th century China's farm sector was lagging, and the country began to experience an economic slowdown. It became a society in need of resource-saving technology, which proved harder to develop than labor-saving technology.

Part of the problem in further developing Chinese agriculture is a shortage of farmland, relative to the population. Although **China** has a slightly larger land area than the United States, it has only about half as much land that is suitable for growing crops and more than four times the population. **China** today has about 300 million acres (120 million hectares) of cultivated land. For centuries **China** has struggled to expand the supply of farmland. In the 19th century the migration of Han Chinese into frontier areas in the northeastern and western parts of the country resulted in the opening up of much new land to agriculture. However, these areas are generally cold, dry, or both, and farm productivity there is low compared with the traditional farming areas in the east.

At the same time, a substantial amount of prime farmland has been lost over the years as cities grew, transportation networks expanded, and factories were established or enlarged. This loss has become critical since the late 1940s as a result of rapid urbanization and industrialization. One problem is that most of China's cities are located in the midst of the best farming regions. Also, the irrigation systems that have been constructed to help the farmers result in a loss of farmland, which is taken over for dams, lakes, canals, and irrigation ditches. Since 1950 the amount of available cropland per person has declined by more than half, to less than one-fourth acre (0.1 hectare). If the population continues to grow, the land reclamation projects currently under way will do no more than offset the losses of farmland around the cities.

Socialist agriculture

The communist government that came to power in 1949 was determined to promote socialist agricultural methods. Initially its approach was cautious, since it needed the support and loyalty of the peasants in order to consolidate power. In the early 1950s land was taken away from the landlords and distributed among about 300 million poor peasants. In 1952 the government initiated mutual aid teams, which organized peasants into labor groups that worked together to raise production. Three years later, the mutual aid teams were combined into producer cooperatives, which pooled the peasants' lands so they could be farmed collectively. In the following year, 1956, large collective farms were formally established and the state took over ownership of the land. The peasants were permitted to retain small "private plots" for their own use, but they were expected to derive their main livelihood by working together for the collective farm.

In 1958 [Mao Zedong](#), the country's leader, initiated a mass campaign called the Great Leap Forward, with the aim of driving the peasants to produce more. At that time, the collectives were merged into large units called communes. Initially, the Great Leap Forward involved a number of new programs, such as rural industrialization, abolition of private plots, and communal eating. However, some of them proved unpopular, and food production began to decline. Perhaps most serious was the abolition of private plots, which drastically reduced pig production and thus the amount of hog manure available for fertilizer. Private plots were restored in 1962, but the commune remained the main unit of rural economic organization.

Communes covered from 10 to 50 square miles (25 to 130 square kilometers) and averaged 15,000 people. They were subdivided into production brigades and production teams. Brigades often served as administrative and planning subunits. Production teams, the primary production units, were usually composed of 80 to 160 people charged with cultivating 20 to 95 acres (8 to 38 hectares) of land. Where possible, teams were drawn from a single hamlet, and members sometimes belonged to common surname groups (clans) or were old acquaintances.

Mao died in 1976, and in 1978 the new leadership group launched the Four Modernizations (of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense). As part of this program, the Production Responsibility System was introduced. This system permits individual families to contract with the collective unit, usually the production team (which now most closely corresponds to a village), to lease land for farm production. The family agrees to a quota and pays a certain agricultural tax. Any surplus the family produces beyond its quota and taxes may be kept for its own purposes or sold for income. The family can decide how much of each crop to plant as long as it meets its quota.

This system expanded rapidly and now covers virtually all farm families. The government acknowledged that some farmers will do better than others and that inequalities will appear. However, economic growth has been achieved for many who have chosen to remain in agriculture. Overall farm production rose rapidly in the early 1980s but slowed thereafter, with many peasants leaving agriculture for rural township enterprises and increasingly for towns and cities by the 1990s.

Crops and livestock

China's principal food crops are rice, wheat, corn (maize), *gaoliang* (a type of sorghum), millet, barley, potatoes, peanuts (groundnuts), apples, rapeseed, and sunflower seeds. Of these, rice is the most vital. **China** is the world's largest producer of rice, and rice accounts for about one quarter of the country's total area of cultivated land. Wheat, corn, and millet follow rice in importance. **China** has begun to grow genetically modified crops and has invested heavily in genetically modified crop research.

The most important industrial crops include cotton, oil-bearing crops (such as peanuts and rapeseed), sugar (both cane sugar and beet sugar, with sugarcane production rising rapidly from 1978), tobacco, bast fiber (for cordage, matting, and similar uses), tea, and fruits. While **China** has shown an interest in growing biofuel crops, this is likely to be hampered by the general shortage of agricultural land.

Poultry and livestock production has risen rapidly in recent years. Pork remains the favored meat of most Han Chinese. Sheep, goats, and camels are raised by nomadic herders in the interior portions of **China**.

Agricultural regions

In a sense, it is difficult to discuss Chinese agriculture as a whole, because the climate and physical features—and thus the kinds of crops that are cultivated—vary widely from one part of the country to another. In general, eight distinctive physical-agricultural regions can be considered.

The Plateau of Tibet in western **China** is a high, cold, dry, and extremely rugged area with a short growing season. Farmers there can usually grow only enough wheat, barley, and potatoes and raise enough sheep, yaks, and horses to provide for the needs of their own families.

Xinjiang, in the northwest, and Inner Mongolia, in the north, also are known for their dryness. They get less than 12 inches (300 millimeters) of precipitation annually and in some areas less than one inch (25 millimeters).

Herding is the primary economic activity, though oasis agriculture is carried on where water is available. Crops include grain, cotton, sugar beets, medicinal plants, and fruits and melons.

In north-central **China** the Loess Plateau lies largely southeast of the Great Wall and north of the Qin Mountains. The loess that covers most of the area has eroded into badlands in places. This region is dry and has long, cold winters. Drought-tolerant crops such as millet and *gaoliang* are common. Wheat, corn, and cotton are also planted extensively, especially where irrigation water is available.

In the east, the North **China** Plain lies south of the Great Wall and extends from the coast to the mountains and hills to the west and south. The floodplains of the Huang He (Yellow River) and the Huai River are the main features. Several problems exist there. There is not enough rainfall, the winters are cold and long, and some of the soils are salty because of poor drainage. The main crops are wheat, barley, cotton, corn, *gaoliang*, millet, and peanuts.

The [Northeast](#), or Dongbei (formerly called Manchuria), suffers from extremely cold winters, a short growing season, and poor drainage on the large Northeast Plain. The fields in this region are large, and heavy farm machinery has been used extensively. The chief crops include spring wheat, corn, millet, *gaoliang*, flax, and soybeans. A great deal of land reclamation has taken place in Heilongjiang Province. State farms remain the main form of agricultural organization in the northern land reclamation areas.

The middle and lower [Yangtze River](#) (Chang Jiang) basin in central **China** is the country's richest and most productive agricultural region, the "rice bowl" of **China**. The lowlands contain extensive areas of rich, river-borne alluvial soils. Precipitation is abundant, and the winters are mild. Rice is the main crop, but cotton, tea, and oilseeds are also important. The farming methods are very intensive and yields are high. Much of the fertile land of this region is farmed all year-round.

South **China** includes the region south of the Yangtze River basin along China's southern and southeastern coasts, a land of rugged hills and low mountains interspersed with river basins. Much of this region lies within the tropics. Precipitation is abundant and the growing season is long, but only 10 percent of the area is flat enough to permit row cropping. The main crops are rice, sugarcane, mulberries (grown primarily for silkworm culture), fruit, and freshwater fishes raised in ponds or rice paddies. The Pearl (Zhu) River delta plain around Guangzhou (Canton) is one of the most productive farming regions in **China**.

The southwestern region contains the Sichuan Basin and extends south to include the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. Much of this region consists of rugged hills and mountains. Except for the Yuan (Red) River basin and the large Chengdu Plain of Sichuan, it is not very productive. Two crops per year of rice is common where the terrain and soil conditions are right. Shifting cultivation of the slash-and-burn (swidden) type is practiced among isolated peoples in the extreme southwest.

Fishing

China has a long tradition of ocean and freshwater fishing and of aquaculture. The country is by far the world's leading producer of fish, though severe shortages of seafood have been occurring in its rivers and lakes and along its coasts in recent years. Fish farming has always also been important and has been increasingly emphasized to supplement coastal and inland fisheries threatened by overfishing.

Most of China's total catch is from the ocean. The coastal zone is rich in fish variety. All the coastal seas (Bo Hai, Yellow Sea, East **China** Sea, and South **China** Sea) have extensive areas of shallow water over the continental shelf. In these seas, especially the Yellow and East **China**, cold and warm ocean currents mix, creating an environment that is especially suitable for many species of ocean fishes, including croakers, mackerels, tuna, herring, and sharks. Several varieties of shellfish and specialties such as squid and octopus are also produced. Unfortunately, fish stocks have been depleted in recent years.

Fish farming on ponds and lakes in the interior of **China** is also important. This type of food production, called aquaculture, has a long history in some parts of the country. It is common in the moister southeastern portions of **China**. For example, southwest of Guangzhou there is an area of fishponds, mulberry orchards, and sugarcane fields. The fish are fed the leaves from the sugarcane and the waste from the silkworms, which feed on the mulberry leaves. The mud in the bottom of the fishponds is scraped up and used to fertilize the cane and

the mulberry trees. In this way many of the nutrients are recycled. The fishponds produce several varieties of carp, a favorite food in southern **China** and Hong Kong. Such fish production is a regionally important dietary supplement. The government has identified fishing as an important area for continued research and development.

Forestry

Despite China's large land area, its forests are modest. Much of the western interior is too high or too dry to support dense forest stands. In the humid east, the forests were harvested for centuries for building material and firewood, and little or no effort was made to regenerate them. In 1949 it was estimated that about 8 percent of the total surface of the country was covered with forests. Since then, an active program of forestation has been undertaken, and it is estimated that the forested area has been increased to 18 to 19 percent. Still, harvested timber probably exceeds annual growth, with larger trees becoming scarce. The government's goal is to reach 26 percent forest coverage by 2050. By contrast, more than 30 percent of the United States is forested.

As China's population and economy have grown, demand for wood and paper products has risen rapidly. **China** has been unable to meet this demand, and it seems doubtful that it will be able to do so in the foreseeable future. For example, there is a great need for railroad ties, electric utility poles, mine props, and building joists. **China** has increased timber imports. The country also has had to seek out substitutes, such as concrete poles or steel beams, but these require energy to produce and are expensive. The destruction of forests has also had an effect on watersheds, leading to the creation of barren land, soil erosion, and the silting up of stream channels. This, in turn, can result in flooding and raise the cost of irrigation.

China's main forests are located in the Da Hinggan and Changbai mountains of the Northeast region and in southwestern **China**, with other forests largely in central and southeastern **China**. Northern conifers, larch, and birch are common trees of the Northeast. Southwestern China's forested area is a mix of deciduous and evergreen species. The forests of central and southeastern **China** are poorer, partly because they have been harvested so extensively, but there are stands of eucalyptus and tropical hardwoods there in addition to other deciduous and evergreen species. Bamboo is an important forest plant that has a variety of uses in both building construction and furniture making.

Industry

Mining and energy

The total extent of China's mineral resources is not known, but as of 2006 **China** had discovered 171 minerals of all sorts with the reserves of 158 verified. Many of these deposits were discovered after 1950, and new ones are still being found. China's reserves of coal, tungsten, antimony, tin, mercury, salt, fluor spar, and magnesite are among the largest of any country in the world. It also has sizeable reserves of iron and manganese ores, bauxite (aluminum ore), limestone, copper, lead, zinc, molybdenum, graphite, and gold, as well as some petroleum reserves. There are some significant deficiencies, such as nickel, cobalt, titanium, and platinum group metals, but generally **China** has one of the largest and richest stocks of minerals of any country. Per capita, however, China's mineral resources are only about 58 percent of the world's average. In the early 21st century, its demand for petroleum and several other minerals surpassed production.

More than a tenth of the world's coal reserves are found in **China**. It is the world's leading producer of coal, supplying about two fifths of global total production. Coal is mined throughout **China**, though the main production is concentrated in Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Hebei, and Liaoning provinces in the north and northeast. Both open-pit and underground mining are practiced. Coal is the chief energy resource of the country and is likely to remain so at least through the first half of the 21st century. In many local areas it is also the main material used to produce fertilizers. The government plans to continue expansion of coal production, though it is shutting down small-scale coal mining operations, which are seen as unsafe and polluting.

Iron and steel manufacturing are major industries in **China**. There are extensive iron-ore deposits, as well as the coal and limestone needed for steel production. Much of the iron ore is concentrated in the Northeast, the

traditional center of the heavy metals industry. Mining of all types of minerals is expanding rapidly. Such minerals as tungsten and yttrium are exported, though rapid economic growth in the early 2000s led to a sharper rise in mineral imports than exports.

For many years it was believed that **China** lacked significant petroleum reserves. Production before 1950 was small, and most petroleum products were imported. After 1952 a good deal of effort was spent on petroleum exploration, and deposits were found both on land and offshore. The main production centers are in the North **China** Plain and in the Northeast, in Heilongjiang Province at Daqing. Offshore deposits are located in the Bo Hai, South **China** Sea, East **China** Sea, and Yellow Sea.

Oil production rose steadily from the 1960s, and since the mid-1970s **China** has ranked as one of the 10 leading oil-producing countries in the world. For many years, a small quantity of this output was exported to earn foreign currency. **China** became a net importer of oil in the mid-1990s, however, and the proportion that has been imported has grown rapidly since then. Along with the growth of imports, **China** began to explore and drill for oil overseas.

China has also developed its enormous hydroelectric potential so that a larger share of its domestic demand for electric power can be met with renewable hydropower. Hydropower is tapped from moving water such as waterfalls and fast-moving streams. Many projects have been undertaken in the southwestern part of the country. The most famous hydroelectric project in **China** is the Sanxia, or Three Gorges, Dam in central **China**, which is the world's largest dam in terms of the volume of poured concrete. Such large projects are now being questioned within **China** because of the ecological damage they can do. However, the Chinese government seems to prefer hydroelectric projects to building coal-fired power plants, which can produce considerable pollution and greenhouse gasses.

Manufacturing

Before the introduction of Western technology in the 19th century, **China** had a long tradition of local industry going back almost 2,000 years. During that period the Chinese developed many technical innovations. From an early date they produced paper, gunpowder, and silk and printed from movable type. The tradition of making fine porcelain dates at least from the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907). The production of luxury goods, fine handicrafts, metalwork, and tools were all well-established industries long before the arrival of Western entrepreneurs and engineers.

In the 19th century European industrial technology was introduced into **China**. New factories and manufacturing enterprises were established in the so-called treaty port cities, where the Western countries had obtained certain rights. Shanghai became an industrial center, as did some cities along major rivers such as the Yangtze. During the 20th century the [Northeast](#) region developed rapidly as a center for coal and iron-ore production and the heavy metal and machine-building industries. The Soviets and Japanese, who controlled the area at various times, both invested heavily in the region's transportation and industry. It became the most industrialized part of the country. Other cities that developed into important industrial centers were Tianjin and Qingdao.

One of the first goals of the communists after 1949 was to promote the growth of heavy industry, following the model of the Soviet Union. They attempted to encourage industrial development in the interior and to avoid concentrating more wealth in the old treaty port cities. New steel mills were constructed at Wuhan on the Yangtze and at Baotou in Inner Mongolia. Other interior cities, such as Zhengzhou, Xi'an, Lanzhou, Ürümqi, Taiyuan, Beijing, and Shijiazhuang, also grew rapidly. At the same time, large coastal cities such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin, and [Lüda \(now Dalian\)](#) continued to attract industries that wished to take advantage of their good transport systems and physical facilities. These cities also provided a skilled labor force and access to international markets.

The whole range of industrial goods is produced in **China** today. The output of China's factories extends from textiles, shoes, and toys to railway locomotives, aircraft, automobiles, and computers. **China** is the world's largest producer of cotton and cotton textiles, and it exports large quantities of textiles and garments. Food processing is important, and many agricultural goods are exported. **China** is also the world leader in the production of cement, iron, and steel. Other industrial products include televisions, bicycles, washing machines, and cars and trucks. In 2007 **China** was the third largest motor vehicle producer in the world after

Japan and the United States. The processing and manufacture of chemicals, including fertilizers, petroleum products, and pharmaceuticals, is another large segment of Chinese industry. The quality of Chinese exports has improved in recent years, despite safety problems in the early 21st century with certain goods such as low-end toys and some foodstuffs.

In the 1970s and 1980s **China** began to develop joint ventures with foreign manufacturers. The foreign concerns provided the technology, capital, and expertise, while **China** provided the materials, plant location, facilities, and labor. Special tax benefits and other policies favorable to businesses have been used to attract foreign investment in various kinds of economic zones, which are concentrated along the southeastern coast and in major cities. The zones are often associated with the production of goods for export. The most famous of them are the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) next to Hong Kong; the Zhuhai SEZ bordering Macau; the Xiamen SEZ across the Taiwan Strait from Taiwan; and the Shantou SEZ in eastern coastal Guangdong and the Hainan SEZ, the original homes of many of the Chinese who live overseas in Southeast Asia. The goal of these initial zones was to attract funds from the ethnic Chinese capitalists in the nearby or culturally related territories. While the efforts in the 1980s and the early 1990s did not attract high-tech industries, they did generate lots of employment and profits. They also spearheaded industrial growth up the **China** coast and into parts of the interior. By the early 21st century a lot of high-tech industries had located in Shenzhen.

From the 1990s **China** began to develop overseas joint ventures using Chinese capital and technology. In particular, Chinese manufacturing expanded into Africa but also to all other continents.

Services

With the market reforms of the late 20th century and the growth of the economy, the service sector began to expand. In the 2000s services accounted for more than a third of the country's GDP, making it second only to manufacturing. The share of the GDP contributed by services was lower, however, than in more-developed countries. Public administration, retail and wholesale trade, tourism, real estate, finance, and transportation and communications are important components of this sector. Foreign trade has grown tremendously.

From 1949 to the 1990s goods and money were exchanged within localities and regions in **China** to satisfy local needs and to meet government quotas. At the national level, goods were moved to meet the needs and demands of the overall economy through a national plan. Internationally, **China** bought scarce goods to meet critical needs and sold goods that it could market at competitive prices in order to pay for imports.

While the planned economy continues today, its importance has shrunk drastically. **China** now has many privately owned corporations run by individual entrepreneurs. As **China** sought to modernize its economy, foreign trade was used to bring in new equipment and technologies as well as to meet scarcities in the domestic economy. Exports were used to produce foreign earnings to pay for the imports. Until the early 1990s, the Chinese sought to maintain an even balance of trade so they could pay for imports rather than buying on credit. As the Chinese economy took off in the 1990s, exports grew faster than imports. Economic growth was so fast that maintaining a trade balance no longer was seen as an issue. China's foreign trade as a whole grew from 4.8 billion dollars in 1971 to more than 2.1 trillion (2,100 billion) dollars in 2007. In 2009 **China** became the largest exporter in the world.

China's trading partners changed after 1949. Initially, the communist government traded mainly with the Soviet Union and other communist-bloc countries and also provided Hong Kong and Macau with fresh food. Later, when China's relations with the Soviet Union became less friendly, there was less emphasis on trade with other communist countries. Japan, Hong Kong, West Germany, Australia, and Canada became increasingly important as trading partners. Trade with the United States rose dramatically after U.S. President Richard Nixon visited **China** in 1972.

By the early 2000s the United States was the largest destination country for Chinese goods, accounting for about a fifth of China's total export trade. Other major export destinations included Japan, countries of the European Union (EU), South Korea, and Singapore. The largest share of China's imports came from Japan, followed by the EU, South Korea, the United States, Malaysia, and Australia. Taiwan also became one of the mainland's main trading partners. **China** and Taiwan signed a historic free-trade agreement in 2010 to gradually reduce or eliminate tariffs on many goods and commodities exported from one side to the other.

China's key exports include machinery and equipment, textiles and clothing, footwear, toys, mineral fuels, plastics, optical and medical equipment, and iron and steel. Major imports include machinery and equipment, oil and other fuels, plastics, optical and medical equipment, organic chemicals, and iron and steel.

Transportation and Communications

China's transportation system traditionally was poor. Moving people and goods was a slow, expensive, and sometimes dangerous process. Despite large investments in railroad, highway, waterway, and air travel construction, transportation continues to be a bottleneck slowing economic growth. This situation has produced significant variations in regional economic growth.

Historically, the only convenient and relatively inexpensive transportation arteries were a few large, deep rivers, such as the Yangtze, Sungari (Songhua), Amur, and Xi (West), and the well-traveled barge canals such as the Grand Canal, a series of waterways linking Hangzhou and Beijing. Even on these waterways travel was slow, and the conditions were sometimes difficult or hazardous. Nevertheless, the river and canal system provided the best means of transportation before the 20th century, and China's waterways still carry about a tenth of the country's total freight traffic in tons. A large share of this traffic is on the Yangtze.

Railways

Railway construction began in **China** late in the 19th century, and the first line, between Shanghai and Beijing, was opened in 1903. By World War II more than 15,500 miles (25,000 kilometers) of track had been built, primarily in the eastern and northeastern parts of the country. Much of the network was destroyed during the war, but rail construction began anew after 1949 and has continued ever since. In 2007 **China** had an estimated 48,500 miles (78,000 kilometers) of railroads. (By comparison, the United States had about three times as much trackage in that year.) By 1983 every province-level administrative unit except Tibet was served by rail, and in 2006 the Qinghai-Tibet railway was completed. Railways have become a very important form of transportation in **China**, though they have not grown as much as highway transport in recent years. In the 2000s the railroad system moved about a seventh of the country's total freight traffic in tons.

China's rail network consists of a series of north-south trunk lines, crossed by a few major east-west lines. Most of the large cities are served by these trunk lines, but the density of the network is low relative to some other countries. Compared with India, which has roughly 40,000 miles (65,000 kilometers) of railways, **China** has only about 20 percent more track to serve about three times the area. Many of the trunk lines cannot meet the demand for service.

Roads and highways



Automobile traffic clogs a highway in Beijing

Automobile traffic clogs a highway in Beijing, **China**. (Credit: AP)

Although it has been in use for many centuries, the road and path network in **China** was always poor. Conditions were bad, and travel was slow and costly. Not until the introduction of automobiles and trucks in the 20th century was there much improvement. The road and highway system expanded rapidly after World War II, but by Western standards it was still primitive. The network of all-weather roads and highways was not a unified national system with consistent standards by 1990, and many of the roads were poor. There were also gaps and bottlenecks.

By the early 21st century, the road network was inadequate to meet the country's needs. Still, the highway network accounted for more than two thirds of the yearly total freight traffic in tons (but less than a seventh of the freight in ton-miles). Domestic automobile manufacture grew rapidly after 1990 as individual car ownership became increasingly possible, and it emerged as one of China's major industries. The number of cars on the roads increased dramatically. **China** still has a small number of cars per capita (about 3 per hundred persons in the 2000s) when compared with the United States, the European Union, or Japan, so there is more room for expansion if **China** allows.

Air transportation

Civil air transportation in **China** dates from World War II and the efforts of Claire Chennault, a retired U.S. colonel, to build a Chinese air force. After 1949 the new government set up the General Administration of Civil Aviation of **China** to serve as the country's air carrier. It is now a regulatory body, and there are several Chinese airlines (some run by the state and others by private companies).

By 2001 China's daily volume of air passenger transport was 17 times that for the whole year of 1950. Today a few million tons of freight is transported by air each year and there are several international carriers within **China**. There are even direct flights between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan. **China** has over 450 airports. The main international hubs are Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, and Hong Kong.

Shipping

Ocean shipping has grown rapidly since 1970. **China** now has 130 ports open to foreign shipping and eight major port terminals handling billions of tons of freight. The ports at Shanghai and Hong Kong are the busiest. There are thousands of Chinese merchant ships, some now registered overseas. **China** also has a domestic fleet serving inland and coastal waters. It handles well over a trillion tons of freight annually and also includes a huge number of passenger ships plying China's major river networks.

China builds most of its own ships, some of which are exported. For example, many of the containerships (as well as containers) being built are for export.

Communications

Since 1949 considerable effort has been expended on the postal, telecommunications, and later Internet systems in **China**, but they are generally not as widespread as in Western countries. By the end of 2007 **China** had over 210 million Internet users. On a per capita basis, however, the number remained below that of most Western countries, and Internet access was more restricted than in Western countries. Still, this meant that more people in **China** were logging in at any one time than in any other country in the world. Mobile telephone penetration had reached over one third of the population, with more than 460 million users by 2007. A smaller number of people, more than 360 million, had standard telephone lines.

Government

The government of the People's Republic of **China** is highly centralized and operates in a top-down manner—at least on the surface. This means that in many cases, decisions and laws that are not explicitly delegated to local governments are dictated by the state. However, local government has often been able to ignore commands coming down from the central authorities.

Communist Party

The Chinese Communist party (CCP) is the primary political force in **China**. Unlike parties in Western democracies, it is a tightly organized movement that controls and leads society. The party sets policy and controls its execution through government officials who are also party members. The effect is to make the government an organ of the party.

At the time of its founding in 1921, the CCP focused on organizing urban workers, but it achieved only limited success in this effort. Orthodox Marxism expected the communist revolution to begin among industrial workers. However, Karl Marx had developed his theories based upon highly industrialized economies, and the industrial sector in **China** was small and relatively primitive. It was [Mao Zedong](#) who adapted Marxist theory to the conditions of an underdeveloped, primarily agricultural society. Marxism as interpreted by Mao is known as Maoism. Although Mao's immediate successors downgraded some of his more radical ideas, Maoism was still designated as the official philosophy behind both the party and the government through the 20th century and beyond, alongside new official concepts introduced by subsequent leaders Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu

Jintao. After Mao, however, Maoism was gradually replaced with authoritarian market capitalism, which is formally referred to as “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.”

The CCP is organized as a hierarchy, with power concentrated at the top. Above the local units, or cells, is a pyramid-like structure of party congresses and committees at various levels, culminating in the National People's Congress, with more than a couple thousand members. When it is not in session, direction of the party is in the hands of a Central Committee of about 200 full members plus more than 150 alternates, all elected by the congress. The Central Committee, in turn, technically elects the Politburo (Political Bureau), which has about two dozen members, though the decision is generally made in advance by key leaders. It is within the Politburo and its elite Standing Committee that power is concentrated and the highest level decisions of state are made. The Secretariat carries on the day-to-day business of the party.

Prior to 1982, the highest party office was that of chairman, held for more than 25 years, through most of the People's Republic's history to that time, by Mao Zedong. In an effort to ensure that the power Mao had enjoyed was never again concentrated in one person, a new party constitution adopted in 1982 abolished the chairmanship and replaced it with the administrative position of general secretary to the Secretariat. The Secretariat, which has about a half dozen members, manages the work of the Politburo and makes personnel decisions for the party.

Theoretically, party membership is open to anyone over 18 who accepts the party program and is willing to work actively in one of its organizations. Members are expected to abide by the party's discipline and to serve as model workers. There were more than 70 million members, roughly 5 percent of the total population, in 2007. The backbone of the party consists of full-time paid workers known as cadres (Chinese, *ganbu*). The term cadre is also used for public officials holding responsible positions who may or may not be members of the party.

National Government

The People's Republic was first governed according to the “Common Program” and organic laws adopted in 1949. Four constitutions followed, each reflecting shifts in policy and the balance of power among factions of the top leadership. The 1982 constitution was designed to solidify the position of the leadership after Mao.

Like the party, the government is structured like a pyramid, ranging from local units such as residents' (urban) and villagers' committees through counties and prefectures to the 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, and four special status municipalities (Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, and Tianjin), each with its own people's congress and administrative organs. (The 22 provinces are Anhui, Fujian, Gansu, Guangdong, Guizhou, Hainan, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Jilin, Liaoning, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Shandong, Shanxi, Sichuan, [Yunnan](#), and [Zhejiang](#). The 5 autonomous regions are Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, [Ningxia](#), Tibet, and Xinjiang.) The two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and [Macau](#) each have a local assembly with local parties. Their chief executives are appointed by Beijing. At the top of the Chinese government structure is the national government in Beijing.

Legislative authority is vested in the National People's Congress, and the Standing Committee of the Congress exercises its functions between sessions. The highest administrative organ is the State Council (similar to the United States Cabinet), headed by the premier. The 1975 constitution abolished the post of president (chairman of the republic), and for a time the chairman of the Standing Committee served as nominal head of state. The presidency was reinstated by the constitution of 1982. The president is once again head of state, while the premier is head of government.

The court system parallels the administrative system. However, the Chinese have traditionally tended to resolve conflicts through social rather than legal or judicial mediation, and the rule of law as it is known in Western countries is not well established. Despite the training of many lawyers in recent years, legal methods remain underused.

International Relations

The People's Republic has undergone several shifts in foreign policy since 1949. Initially, it was closely tied to the Soviet Union and firmly identified as a member of the socialist camp. By the late 1950s, however, the Sino

(Chinese)-Soviet relationship had begun to deteriorate. This resulted from differing national interests, differing interpretations of Marxism, and Chinese resentment over heavy-handed Soviet attempts at control, among other factors. By the mid-1960s **China** and the Soviet Union had become openly hostile toward each other.

China was largely isolated from the rest of the world during the height of the Cultural Revolution, but when the upheavals subsided in the 1970s it began to take a more practical foreign policy line. Trade was opened up with a number of Western countries, and **China** started to play an active role in international organizations. **China** established diplomatic relations with countries willing to recognize the People's Republic—rather than the Nationalist government on Taiwan—as the government of **China**. Most dramatically, contacts were begun with the United States, leading to full diplomatic recognition on Jan. 1, 1979.

While China's political system had changed little by the 1990s, its economy had become the fastest-growing in the world. Relations with the United States became unstable on two fronts. The Chinese government refused to allow human rights concerns to become an issue in trade talks. Trade itself became a major issue, as exports to the United States exceeded imports from that country. In the 2000s China's trade relations with the United States strengthened, with robust exports to the United States and only modest imports from the United States. This led China's growing economy to invest more and more in the growing U.S. debt.



Chinese and Russian amphibious tanks participate

Chinese and Russian amphibious tanks participate in a joint military exercise near China's Shandong Peninsula, in August 2005. (Credit: **China** Newsphoto/Corbis)

Although from the early 1990s China's relationship with India improved both diplomatically and economically, geostrategic and economic problems still remained in the early 21st century. The countries have seen themselves locked in mutual suspicion over boundary disputes and, more important, nationalistic rivalries. China's relations with Japan remained strained by a territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, competition for the leadership of East Asia, and the history of the Second World War. The two Koreas both had warm but tenuous relations with **China**, Taiwan remained an unsettled matter, and Vietnamese-Chinese distrust continued a centuries-old relationship. In contrast, China's relationship with Russia improved in the 1990s and 2000s owing to the delimitation of borders and increasing trade, though the Russians had some concern over China's rising economic influence in Russia's Far East region.

History

With more than 4,000 years of recorded history, **China** is one of the few modern countries that also flourished economically and culturally in the earliest stages of world civilization. Indeed, despite the political and social upheavals that frequently ravaged the country, **China** is unique among nations

in its longevity and resilience.

Beginnings

Archaeological evidence suggests that **China** was one of the cradles of the human race. Remains, tools, and other artifacts of the early humans called "Peking man" (or "Beijing man") were excavated at Zhoukoudian, near Beijing, starting in the 1920s. They date back to 770,000 to 230,000 years ago, to the Lower Paleolithic period (Old Stone Age). Peking man was of the species *Homo erectus*. Remains of *Homo erectus* have been unearthed at sites in several other provinces, indicating that these early humans spread over a fairly wide area in **China** (as well as in other parts of the world). Fossils of early *Homo sapiens*, or modern humans, have also been found at many sites in **China**. These humans made tools out of stones and bones, made clothes out of animal hides, and knew how to make fire.

In about the 4th or 3rd millennium BC, in the Neolithic period (New Stone Age), great changes occurred in the lives of the ancient Chinese. Larger numbers of people began living together at settled places, cultivating land, and domesticating animals. These people made polished stone tools and built shelters in pit dwellings and beehive-shaped huts that were covered with reed roofs. Such villages were found mostly in the area of the great bend of the Huang He (Yellow River) on the North **China** Plain. Despite its severe winters, this area was well suited to agriculture. In fact, it closely resembled the other cradles of ancient civilizations, such as the valley of

the Nile in Egypt.

The people of this period (3000–2000 BC) also developed the art of making pottery for storing food and drink. Two distinct types have been discovered: red clay pots with swirling black designs of the Yangshao culture in north-central **China** and smooth black pottery of the Longshan culture in northeastern and north-central **China**.

Xia (2070?–1600?BC) and Shang (1600?–1046 BC) Dynasties

The Shang Dynasty is the first Chinese dynasty for which definite archaeological evidence and historical records exist. Chinese tradition mentions an earlier Xia Dynasty, but for lack of evidence, the Xia was considered a legendary period. In 1959 discoveries at Erlitou, in Yanshi Municipality, Henan Province, suggested that the site was the capital of the Xia, but this is still in debate. Until the late 1920s the Shang Dynasty itself was thought to be legendary, but discoveries made near the modern city of Anyang (the site of the Shang capital) in Henan Province proved that the dynasty existed. The most important of these discoveries were over 100,000 bones and shells inscribed with still-recognizable characters. These oracle bones and shells, originally used as religious objects, represent the earliest known form of the Chinese writing system.

In addition to the oracle bones and shells, the superb Shang bronzes and the tombs of the Shang rulers reveal a highly developed society. The Shang used bronze to make weapons, daily tools, and elaborately decorated sacrificial vessels.

The last Shang ruler was reportedly evil and tyrannical. He was overthrown by a revolt of the people, who were aided by the neighboring Zhou people. Wuwang, the leader of the Zhou, defeated the Shang and founded the Zhou Dynasty.

Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BC)

The Zhou conquest of the Shang was given an important meaning by later moralistic interpretations of the event. The Zhou kings, whose chief deity was heaven, called themselves “Sons of Heaven,” and their success in overcoming the Shang was seen as the “mandate of heaven.” From this time on, Chinese rulers were called “Sons of Heaven” and the Chinese Empire, the “Celestial Empire.” The transfer of power from one dynasty to the next was based on the mandate of heaven. Zhou rule in **China** continued for nearly eight centuries. During that time great advances were made. The long period of the Zhou Dynasty is divided into two subperiods: Western (Early) and Eastern (Later) Zhou, named for the locations of the capitals.

Western (Early) Zhou (1046–771 BC)

Western Zhou territory covered most of the North **China** Plain. It was divided into about 200 princely states. The Zhou political system relied on a network of alliances with local rulers, especially those based on extended family relationships. It was similar in some ways to the feudal system of medieval Europe. The capital was located near what is now Xi'an, Shaanxi Province.

The Zhou people combined hunting and agriculture for a living. Associating the success or failure of crops with the disposition of nature, the people prayed to numerous nature gods for good harvests. One of the ruler's duties was to placate heaven and Earth for all people. Failure to do so deprived him of the right to rule. Such beliefs are still widely held today among the Chinese people. Ancestor worship also developed during the Zhou period and has been important in East Asia for the last 2,000 years.

The Zhou were invaded in 771 BC by a less cultured, more militaristic people from the northwest. The capital was moved east to Luoyang, in what is now Henan Province. The manner in which the Western Zhou fell followed a pattern that was repeated throughout Chinese history. People who led a nomadic, or wandering, life in the northern steppe land would invade settled agricultural communities to solve periodic food shortages. Settled Chinese called the



A dou, an ancient Chinese ceremonial bronze vessel

A dou, an ancient Chinese ceremonial bronze vessel for food, dates to the middle or late Zhou Dynasty, about

nomads “barbarians,” a term applied to all peoples of non-Chinese culture up to the 20th century. From this concept an idea developed that **China** was the center of the civilized world, hence the traditional name “Middle Kingdom” or “Middle Country” referring to **China**.

900-256/255 BC. (Credit: Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

Eastern (Later) Zhou (770–256 BC)

The Eastern Zhou is itself divided into two periods. The first period is named Chunqiu, or Spring and Autumn, after a book credited to Confucius. The second is the Zhanguo, or Warring States, period.

The Spring and Autumn period lasted from 770 to 476 BC. During this time, iron replaced bronze for tools and weapons. The use of iron led to an increase in agricultural output, population growth, and warfare among the many different princely states.

The Warring States period began in 475 BC. By the 4th century BC the number of states had shrunk to seven. In 256 BC the princes of those states assumed the title of king, stopped paying homage to the Zhou king, and continued to fight for supremacy. The strongest of the seven states was Qin. Although the Zhou Dynasty fell in 256 BC, the Warring States period lasted until the Qin conquered the other six states and established a new dynasty, in 221 BC.

The disruption caused by this prolonged warfare had a number of long-range consequences. One was the rise of a new social group, the scholars (*shi*). They were forerunners of the scholar-officials of the Chinese Empire, who became the most influential group in **China**. In the Eastern Zhou period, however, they were a relatively small group of learned people. Often wandering from state to state in search of permanent employment, the *shi* worked as tutors to the children of the princes and as advisers to various state governments. The most famous of these scholarly *shi* was Confucius.

Age of philosophies

Confucius



Confucius.

Confucius. (Credit: RischgitzHulton Archive/Getty Images)

is a latinized form of the honorific title Kongfuzi (Master Kong), given to a wandering scholar from the state of Lu, in what is now Shandong Province in northeastern **China**. He lived from 551 to 479 BC. Although little known in his lifetime, he was revered as the greatest of sages throughout most of China's history. His teaching, Confucianism, was the dominant state teaching from the mid-2nd century BC, during the Han Dynasty, to the end of the imperial period in 1911/12.

Disturbed by constant warfare among the states, Confucius taught that most of the ills of society happened because people forgot their stations in life and rulers lost virtue. He advocated a return to the values of the golden age of antiquity of the legendary emperors Yao and Shun, when rulers were virtuous and people knew their places. Therefore, Confucius' primary concern lay in social relations, proper conduct, and social harmony. Confucius defined five cardinal relationships: between ruler and ruled, between husband and wife, between parents and children, between older and younger brothers, and between friends. He defined all these relationships, except for the last case, as being between superiors and inferiors. He emphasized the complete obedience and loyalty of the inferior to the superior but also mentioned the benevolence of the superior to the inferior. The ideal Confucian family was an extended one of three or four generations, in which authority rested with the elderly male members. Filial piety (obedience to parents) was one of the most important

virtues emphasized by later Confucians.

Confucius reportedly spent his last years compiling, editing, and completing some of the books that came to be known as the Five Classics. These include the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Classic of History*, the *Spring and*

Autumn annals, the *Record of Rites*, and the *Classic of Changes*, or *Yijing (I-Ching)*. Memorized by scholars for generations in **China**, these books and four other works, including the *Analects*, a compilation of Confucian teachings, were the subjects of civil service examinations for over 2,000 years.

Confucianism commanded a greater following some 200 years later, during the time of [Mencius](#), or Mengzi (371?–289? BC). He was second only to Confucius himself in shaping Confucianism. His three main tenets were the basic good nature of human beings, the notion of society with a distinct distribution of functions, and the ruler's obligation to the people. On the last point, Mencius elaborated on the concept of the mandate of heaven, which allows that rulers lose support of heaven when they cease to be virtuous. The concept served as the basis of revolts in **China** and the succession of new rulers.

Two other philosophies that have had an enduring influence on Chinese thought—Daoism and Legalism—also arose in this period. Daoism, with an emphasis on spontaneity and letting things take their natural course, gave the Chinese an alternative to Confucianism. Legalism, which stressed the importance of social conformity and the absolute power of rulers, provided the Chinese state with one of its basic doctrines.

Qin Empire (221–207 BC)

The state of Qin (Ch'in) unified **China** and established the first Chinese empire in 221 BC. The Qin empire did not last long, but it left two enduring legacies: the name **China** and the idea and structure of the empire. This heritage outlasted the Qin Dynasty itself by more than 2,000 years.

The first Qin emperor was called Shihuangdi. The title of emperor was used for the first time in Chinese history to set the Qin ruler apart—as the ruler of the unified land—from the kings, the heads of the earlier, smaller states. The construction of massive palaces and the ceremony of the court further enhanced the power of the emperor by inspiring awe in the people.

A centralized bureaucracy replaced the old system based on extended family ties. The empire was divided into provinces and counties, which were governed by centrally appointed governors and magistrates. The former ruling families who had inherited their places in the aristocracy were uprooted and forced to live in the capital of Xianyang. Other centralizing policies included census taking and standardization of the writing system and of weights and measures.



The Great Wall of China stretches

The Great Wall of **China** stretches across the Chinese countryside.
(Credit: Keren Su/Corbis)

The Qin army conducted massive military campaigns to complete the unification of the empire and expand its territory. The Qin empire stretched from the Mongolian plateau in the north to Vietnam in the south. As with rulers before and after him, the first emperor was preoccupied with defending his territory against northern nomads. After waging several successful campaigns, the emperor ordered the building of the wall of “ten thousand *li*” (a *li* is a Chinese unit of distance more or less equal to a third of a mile, or half a kilometer) to protect the empire. This task involved connecting the separate walls that were built by former northern states to form the famous Great Wall, which is known in **China** as the Ten Thousand Li Long Wall. Although closely linked with the first ruler of the Qin empire, the wall as it stands today dates mainly from the later Ming Dynasty. It is about 5,500 miles (8,850 kilometers) long and ranges from 15 to 50 feet (5 to 15 meters) high and from 15 to 25 feet (5 to 8 meters) wide.

Shihuangdi's harsh rule provoked much opposition. The emperor feared the scholars most. He had them rounded up and put to death or sent into exile. Many went into hiding. Moreover, all books, except technical ones, were burned. In his last years, Shihuangdi became fearful of threats on his life and lived in complete secrecy. He also became obsessed with obtaining immortality. He died in 210 BC in what is now Shandong Province, far from the capital of Xianyang, during one of his long quests to find the elixir of life.



Mencius.

Mencius. (Credit: Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of **China**)

The Qin empire disintegrated rapidly after the death of the first emperor. The legitimate heir was killed in a palace intrigue, and a less able prince was put on the throne. Conditions worsened throughout the empire. In 209 BC rebellions erupted all over **China**. Two men had the largest following. Xiang Yu was a general of aristocratic background; Liu Bang was a minor official from a peasant family. By 206 BC rebels had subdued the Qin army and destroyed the capital. The struggle between Xiang Yu and Liu Bang continued, however, until Liu Bang emerged as the victor in 202 BC. Liu Bang became the first emperor of the Han Dynasty. He is known to history by the name Gaozu, meaning “High Progenitor.” (Many Chinese emperors are best known today by names bestowed on them after their deaths.)

Han Empire (206 BC–AD 220)

The four-century-long Han rule is divided into two periods: the Western (Earlier) Han and the Eastern (Later) Han, named for the sites of their capitals. In between these two was the short-lived Xin Dynasty.

Western (Earlier) Han (206 BC–AD 9)

Gaozu preserved many features of the Qin imperial system, such as the administrative division of the country and the central bureaucracy. But the Han rulers lifted the Qin ban on philosophical and historical writings. Gaozu called for the services of men of talent, not only to restore the destroyed classics but to serve as officials in the government. From that time, the Chinese Empire was governed by a body of officials theoretically selected on merit. Such a practice has few parallels elsewhere at this early date in human history.

In 124 BC, during the reign of Wudi (141–87 BC), an imperial university was set up for the study of Confucian classics. The university recruited talented students, and the state supported them. Starting with 50 when the university first opened, the number of government-supported students reached 30,000 by the end of the Han Dynasty. Wudi also established Confucianism as the official doctrine of the state. This designation lasted until the end of the Chinese Empire.

The Western Han faced two major difficulties: invasions by the barbarian people known as the Xiongnu and the influence of the imperial consort families. The nomadic Xiongnu (who may have been the same people known as the Huns in Europe) threatened the expanding Chinese Empire from the north. Starting in Wudi's reign, costly, almost century-long campaigns had to be carried out to establish Chinese sovereignty along the northern and northwestern borders. Wudi also waged aggressive campaigns to incorporate northern Korea in 108 BC and northern Annam (Vietnam) in 111 BC into the empire.

The Western Han's other difficulty started soon after the first emperor's death. The widowed Empress Lü dominated politics and almost succeeded in taking the throne for her family. Thereafter, families of the empresses exerted great political influence. In AD 9 Wang Mang, a nephew of the empress, seized the throne and founded a new dynasty of Xin.

Wang Mang's overambitious reform program alienated him from the landlords. At the same time the peasants, disappointed with Wang's inability to push through the reform, rose in rebellion. In AD 17 a rebel group in Shandong painted their faces red (hence their name, Red Eyebrows) and adopted religious symbols, a practice later repeated by peasants who rebelled in times of extreme difficulty. Wang Mang's force was defeated, and he was killed in AD 23.

Eastern (Later) Han (AD 25–220)

The new ruler who restored peace and order was a member of the house of Han, the original Liu family. He ruled from AD 25 to 57 and later became known as Guangwudi, which means “Shining Martial Emperor.” During the Eastern Han, which lasted another 200 years, a concerted but unsuccessful effort was made to restore the glory of the former Han. The Eastern Han scored considerable success in recovering lost territories, however. Sent to befriend the tribes on the northwestern frontier in AD 73, a great diplomat-general, Ban Chao, eventually led an army of 70,000 almost to the borders of eastern Europe. Ban Chao returned to **China** in 102 and brought back information about the Roman Empire. The Romans also knew about **China**, but they thought of it only as the land where silk was produced.

The Eastern Han period was particularly plagued with evils caused by eunuchs, castrated males recruited from the lower classes to serve as bodyguards for the imperial harem. Many of them were ruthlessly ambitious once they were placed within reach of power. Toward the end of the period, power struggles between eunuchs and landlord-officials were prolonged and destructive. Peasant rebellions of the Daoist-leaning Yellow Turbans in 184 and the Five Pecks of Rice in 190 led to the rise of generals who massacred over 2,000 eunuchs, destroyed the capital, and one after another became dictators. By 207 General Cao Cao had emerged as dictator in the north. When he died in 220 his son removed the powerless emperor and established the kingdom of Wei. The Eastern Han came to an end, and the empire was divided into the three kingdoms of Wei, Shu-Han, and Wu. The pattern of the rise and fall of Han was to be repeated in later periods. This characteristic came to be known as the dynastic cycle.

Han culture

The Chinese show their pride in Han accomplishments by calling themselves the Han people. Philosophies and institutions that began in the Zhou and Qin periods reached maturity under the Han. During Han times, the Chinese distinguished themselves in making scientific discoveries, many of which were not known to Westerners until centuries later. The Chinese were most advanced in astronomy. They invented sundials and water clocks, divided the day equally into 10 and then into 12 periods, devised the lunar calendar that continued to be used until 1912, and recorded sunspots regularly. In mathematics, the Chinese were the first to use the place value system, whereby the value of a component of a number is indicated by its placement. Other innovations were of a more practical nature: wheelbarrows, locks to control water levels in streams and canals, and compasses.

The Han were especially distinguished in the field of art. The famous sculpture of the “Han flying horse” and the carving of the jade burial suit found in Han period tombs are only two superb examples. The technique of making lacquerware was also highly developed.

The Chinese are proudest of the tradition of historical writing that began in the Han period. Sima Qian (145?–87? BC) was grand historian (an office that combined the duties of court recorder and astronomer) during the time of Wudi. His *Historical Records*, which took 10 years to complete, established the pattern and style followed by subsequent histories. In the Eastern Han, the historical tradition was continued by the Ban family. Ban Biao, the father, started to bring Sima Qian's *Records* up to date. The work was continued by his children: first by his son Ban Gu (twin brother of the general Ban Chao) and later by his daughter Ban Zhao, China's earliest and most famous woman scholar. Unlike Sima Qian, the Ban family limited their work to 230 years of the Western Han. This was the first of the dynastic histories, subsequently written for every dynasty. Ban Zhao also wrote a highly influential work on the education of women, *Lessons for Women*. It emphasized the “virtues” of women, which restricted women's activities.

The Confucianism that the Han Dynasty restored differed from the original teachings of Confucius. The leading Han philosophers, Dong Zhongshu and others, used principles derived from the early Chinese philosophy of nature to interpret the ancient texts. The Chinese philosophy of nature explained the workings of the universe by the alternating forces of [yin and yang](#)—dark and light—and the five elements: earth, wood, metal, fire, and water. The Han period was marked by a broad eclecticism. Many Han emperors favored Daoism, especially the Daoist idea of immortality.

Period of Disunity (220–589)

After the fall of the Han, the Chinese Empire remained divided for three and a half centuries. The first half-century began with the domination of the Three Kingdoms: Wei under the Cao family in the north, Shu-Han under Liu Bei in the southwest, and Wu under Sun Quan in the southeast. The Three Kingdoms period was later made famous by the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which glamorized it as an age of chivalry.



The bronze sculpture Horse and Swallow, also known

The bronze sculpture Horse and Swallow, also known as the "flying horse," was found in the tomb of a general in Wuwei, Gansu Province, **China**. The tomb dates to the 2nd century AD, during the Eastern Han period. (Credit: Robert Harding Picture Library)

Invaders from the north soon overran the kingdoms and set up their own states, but the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534/35), established by one of the barbarian tribes, the Tuoba, was the only one to last. Four successive dynasties established by the Chinese ruled in the south during much of the 5th and 6th centuries.

Although Buddhism entered **China** from India during the Eastern Han, in the time of Mingdi (AD 57–75), it did not become popular until the end of the 3rd century. The prevailing disorders, aggravated by barbarian invasions and the flight of northern Chinese to the south, heightened the attraction of Buddhism with its promise of personal salvation, despite its lack of affinity with the society-oriented thought of the Chinese.

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, a prince of the Shakya kingdom on the borders of what are now India and Nepal and a contemporary of Confucius. Intent on finding relief for human suffering, he is said to have received a moment of enlightenment while meditating under a tree. The Buddha taught that desires are the source of pain, and that by overcoming desires, pain can be eliminated. To this end, he advocated meditation and pursuing certain ways of thinking and acting, as he outlined in the Eightfold Path. The objective was to reach Nirvana, the condition of serenity of spirit, where all cravings, strife, and pain have been overcome, giving way to a merging of the spirit with eternal harmony.

At an early stage of its development, Buddhism split into two major trends, Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) and Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle). Hinayana remained closer to the original Buddhism, and one of its sects, Theravada, is still the form of Buddhism practiced in most of Southeast Asia. The Buddhism of **China** and Tibet, as well as of Korea, Japan, Nepal, and Vietnam stems largely from Mahayana. Mahayana Buddhism contained more popular elements, such as belief in repetitive prayers, heaven, and deities—bodhisattvas—who would help people gain salvation. In **China**, it split into several schools, including Chan (Zen in Japan), Tiantai (Tendai in Japan), and Pure Land.

Sui Dynasty (581–618)

The Sui Dynasty, though relatively short in time span, reunified **China** after nearly four centuries of political fragmentation, during which the north and south had developed in different ways. The Tang Dynasty, which succeeded the Sui Dynasty developed a successful form of government and administration and stimulated a cultural and artistic flowering that amounted to a golden age. The relationship of the Sui to the Tang was much like that of the earlier Qin to the Han. It served as the unifying foundation on which its successor could build.

The Sui Dynasty was founded in 581 by a general in the north. He became the first Sui emperor Wendi. By 589 he had taken control of a united **China**, thereby ending the prolonged period of disunity. Wendi introduced a series of economic reforms, such as reduction of the peasants' taxes, a careful census for equitable tax collection, and restoration of the equal allocation system used in the Northern Wei Dynasty. Every taxable male received a grant of land, part of which was returnable when he ceased to be a taxpayer at age 60 and part of which he could pass on to his heirs. He also revived the Han system of examinations based on Confucian classics.

Wendi's premature death might have been caused by his ambitious son Yangdi, whose grandiose projects and military campaigns ultimately led to the Sui's downfall. Some of his projects were productive, especially the construction of the Grand Canal, which linked up the Huang, Huai, and Yangtze (Chang) rivers and connected north and south **China**.

Yangdi's overly ambitious scheme of expanding his empire led to disastrous wars against Korea. After a series of futile expeditions, the Chinese army of over a million was defeated and forced to flee. In 618 Yangdi was assassinated in an army coup; one of the coup leaders, Li Shimin, installed his father as emperor, founding the Tang Dynasty. After securing his father's abdication, he took the throne himself in 626. He is known to history as the emperor Taizong.

Tang Dynasty (618–907)

The Tang emperors set up a political system in which the emperor was supreme and government officials were selected on the bases of merit and education. The early Tang rulers applied the equal allocation system rigorously to bring about a greater equity in taxation and to insure the flow of taxes to the government. A

census was taken every three years to enforce the system, which also involved drafting people to do labor. These measures led to an agricultural surplus and the development of units of uniform value for the principal commodities, two of the most important prerequisites for the growth of commerce and cities.

The Tang capital of Chang'an, in what is now Shaanxi Province, was one of the greatest commercial and cosmopolitan cities in the world at that time. Like most capitals of **China**, Chang'an was composed of three parts: the palace, the imperial city, and the outer city, separated from each other by mighty walls.

The Tang was a period of great imperial expansion, which reached its greatest height in the first half of the 8th century. At that time, Chinese control was recognized by people from Tibet and Central Asia in the west to Mongolia, Manchuria (now the Northeast region of **China**), and Korea in the north and Annam (Vietnam) in the south.

Religion

Confucianism was restored as the official doctrine after a period of chaos, but other religions were allowed during most of the Tang period. Religious institutions, represented by Muslim mosques, Christian churches, Buddhist temples, and others, were established in Chang'an.

Buddhism flourished during most of the Tang period, especially under Empress Wu, the only woman to rule **China** in her own name, in the late 7th and early 8th centuries. Buddhist monasteries received endowments of land and treasure. They became important landowners and rich agricultural communities and also acquired many other functions. The monasteries acted as sanctuaries, inns, hospitals, and places to register births and deaths. In time, they came to represent a challenge to the state and to the accepted order.

By the 9th century government's sporadic imposition of restrictions on Buddhism had turned into full-scale persecution. The motivating forces were financial problems (and thus the desire to seize the land and wealth of the Buddhist monasteries) and the activities of Daoist priests competing for imperial patronage. In the persecutions that took place during the 840s, over 4,000 monasteries and 40,000 shrines were destroyed, and more than 250,000 monks and nuns were defrocked by the imperial forces.

An Lushan rebellion

Most of the Tang accomplishments were attained during the first century of the dynasty's rule, through the early part of the emperor Xuanzong's long reign from 712 to 756. However, late in his reign he neglected government affairs to indulge in his love of art and study. This led to the rise of viceroys, commanders responsible for military and civil affairs in the regions. An Lushan was a powerful viceroy commanding the northwest border area. He had both connections at the imperial court and hidden imperial ambitions. In 755 he rose in rebellion.

The emperor fled the capital with an ill-equipped army. These troops soon rebelled and forced the emperor to abdicate in favor of his son. The new emperor raised a new army to fight the rebels. An Lushan was assassinated in 757, but the war dragged on until 763. Afterward, the Chinese Empire virtually disintegrated once again. The provinces remained under the control of various regional commanders. The dynasty continued to linger on for nearly another century and a half, but the Tang empire never fully recovered the central authority, prosperity, and peace of its first century.

The most serious problem of later Tang rule was the rise of great landlords who were exempt from taxation. Unable to pay the exorbitant taxes collected twice a year after the An Lushan rebellion, peasants would place themselves under the protection of a landlord or become bandits. Peasant uprisings, beginning with the revolt under the leadership of Huang Chao in the 870s, left much of central **China** in ruins.

In 881 Huang Chao's rebels, then numbering over 600,000 people, destroyed the capital, forcing the imperial court to move east to Luoyang. Another rebel leader founded a new dynasty, called Later Liang, at Kaifeng in what is now Henan Province in 907, but he was unable to unify all **China** under his rule. This second period of disunity lasted only half a century. Once again, however, **China** was divided between north and south, with five dynasties in the north and 10 kingdoms in the south.

Tang culture

Buddhist influence in art, especially in sculpture, was strong during the Tang period. Fine examples of Tang-era Buddhist sculpture are preserved in rock temples, such as those at Longmen and Tianlong Shan, in northern **China**. (The Buddhist cave temples of the earlier Northern Wei period at Yungang are also notable.) The invention of printing and improvements in papermaking led to the printing of a whole set of Buddhist sutras (discourses of the Buddha) by 868. By the beginning of the 11th century all of the Confucian classics and the Daoist canon had been printed. In secular literature, the Tang is especially well known for poetry. The great Tang poets such as [Li Bai \(Li Bo\)](#) and Du Fu were nearly all disillusioned officials.

The Tang period marked the beginnings of China's early technological advancement over other civilizations in the fields of shipbuilding and firearms development. Both reached new heights in the succeeding dynasty of the Song.

Song Dynasty (960–1279)

The more than 300 years of Song history is divided into the two periods of Northern and Southern Song. Because of a barbarian occupation of northern **China**, the second half of the Song rule was confined to the area south of the Huai River.

Northern Song (960–1127)



Taizu was the founder of China's Song Dynasty.

Taizu was the founder of China's Song Dynasty. (Credit: Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of **China**)

General Zhao Kuangyin, later known as Taizu, was said to have been coerced to become emperor in order to unify **China**. Wary of power-hungry commanders, Taizu made the military into a national army under his direct control. Under his less capable successors, however, the military increasingly lost prestige. Unfortunately for **China**, the weakening of the military coincided with the rise of successive strong nomad nations on the borders.

In contrast to the military's loss of prestige, the civil service rose in dignity. The examination system that had been restored in the Sui and Tang was further elaborated and regularized. Selection examinations were held every three years at the district, provincial, and metropolitan levels. Only 200 out of thousands of applicants were granted the *jinshi* degree, the highest degree, and appointed to government posts. From this time on, civil servants became China's most envied elite, replacing the hereditary nobles and landlords.

Song dominion extended over only part of the territories of earlier Chinese empires. The Khitan controlled the northeastern territories, and the Xi Xia (Western Xia) controlled the northwestern territories. Unable to recover these lands, the Song emperors were compelled to make peace with the Khitan in 1004 and with the Xi Xia in 1044. Massive payments to the barbarians under the peace terms depleted the state treasury, caused hardship to taxpaying peasants, and gave rise to conflict in the court between advocates of war and of peace and between those who favored and opposed reforms.

In 1069 Emperor Shenzong appointed Wang Anshi as chief minister. Wang proposed a number of sweeping reforms based on the classical text of the *Rites of Zhou*. They were aimed mainly at stimulating the economy. Many of his "new laws" were actually revivals of earlier policies, but officials and landlords opposed his reforms. When the emperor and Wang died within a year of each other, the new laws were withdrawn. For the next several decades, until the fall of the Northern Song in 1126–27, the reformers and antireformers alternated in power, creating havoc and turmoil in government.

In an effort to regain territory lost to the Khitan, the Song sought an alliance with the newly powerful Juchen from Manchuria. Once the alliance had expelled the Khitan, however, the Juchen turned on the Song and occupied the capital of Kaifeng. The Juchen established the dynasty of Jin, a name meaning "gold," which lasted from 1115 to 1234, in the north. They took the emperor and his son prisoner, along with 3,000 others,

and ordered them to be held in Manchuria.

Southern Song (1127–1279)

Another imperial son fled south and settled in 1127 at Hangzhou, where he resumed the Song rule. He is known to history as the emperor Gaozong. The Song retained control south of the Huai River, where they ruled for another one and a half centuries.

Although militarily weak and limited in area, the Southern Song represented one of China's most brilliant periods of cultural, commercial, maritime, and technological development. Despite the loss of the north, trade continued to expand, enabling a commercial revolution to take place in the 13th century. Cut off from the traditional overland trade routes, Song merchants turned to the ocean with the aid of such improvements as compasses and huge oceangoing ships called junks. The development of a paper money economy stimulated commercial growth and kept it going.

Song cities

Oceanic and coastal trade was concentrated in large ports such as Guangzhou (Canton), Hangzhou, and Quanzhou (Marco Polo's Zayton), where large foreign trading communities developed. Koreans dominated the trade with the eastern islands, while Persians and Arabs controlled commerce across the western seas. Along with commercial expansion came the urbanization, or increasing importance of cities, in Song society. Hangzhou, the Southern Song capital, had a population of more than 2 million. Commercialization and urbanization had a number of effects on Chinese society. People in the countryside faced the problems of absentee landlordism. Although many city residents enjoyed luxury, with a great variety of goods and services, poverty was widespread.

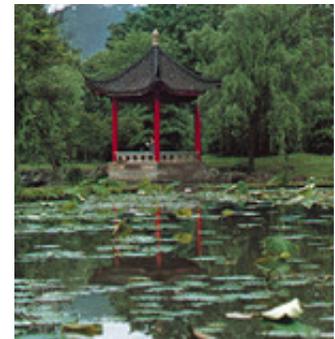
A change associated with urbanization was the decline in the status of women of the upper classes. With the concentration of the upper classes in the cities, where the work of women became less essential, women were treated as servants and playthings. This was reflected in the practices of concubinage and of binding girls' feet to make them smaller. Neither practice was banned until the 20th century.

Song culture

The Song period was noted for landscape painting, which in time came to be considered the highest form of classical art. The city-dwelling people of the Song period romanticized nature. This romanticism, combined with a mystical, Daoist approach to nature and a Buddhist-inspired contemplative mood, was reflected in landscape paintings showing people dwarfed by nature.

In philosophy, the trend away from Buddhism and back to Confucianism, which had begun in the late Tang period, continued. Pure and simple restoration of the ancient teaching was impossible, however, because Confucianism had been challenged by Buddhism and Daoism. Confucianism needed to explain humanity and the universe as well as to regulate human relations within society. In the late Tang and early Song, several strands of Confucianism emerged. The great scholar Zhu Xi synthesized elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. This reconstituted philosophy became known as Neo-Confucianism, and it was the orthodox state doctrine until the end of the imperial system. Zhu Xi's philosophy was one that stressed the goodness of human nature and self-cultivation by education through the continuing "investigation of things."

The Song scholars and historians also attempted to synthesize history. Sima Guang made the first effort at producing a comprehensive history since Sima Qian of the Han. In 294 chapters, he wrote a chronological account of the period from 403 BC to AD 959, which was abridged by Zhu Xi in the 12th century. Another first in Song scholarship was the creation of encyclopedias. *Assembled Essentials on the Tang*, a collection



The city of Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province, China

The city of Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province, **China**, is renowned for its gardens. (Credit: A.ToppingRapho/Photo Researchers)

completed in 961, became the example for the various types of encyclopedic literature that followed.

The Song period is famous for porcelain with a celadon glaze, which was one of the most desired items in foreign trade. The development of gunpowder led to the invention of a type of hand grenade. In shipbuilding, the great seagoing junks were admired and imitated by Arab and Western sailors. By far the largest ships in the world at the time, they had watertight compartments and could carry up to 1,000 passengers.

Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty (1206–1368)

While the Song ruling class and the imperial court indulged themselves in art and luxurious living in the urban centers, the latest nomad empire arose in the north. The formidable [Mongol](#) armies, conquerors of Eurasia as far west as eastern Europe and as far east as Korea, descended on the Southern Song.

The Mongols were the first of the northern barbarians to rule all of **China**. The dynasty was founded by Genghis Khan in 1206. After creating an empire that stretched across the Eurasian continent and occupying northern **China** and Korea in the first half of the 13th century, the Mongols continued their assault on the Southern Song. By 1276 the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou had fallen, and in 1279 the last of the Song loyalists perished and the dynasty fell.

Before this, Kublai Khan, the fifth “great khan” and grandson of Genghis Khan, had moved the Mongol capital from Karakorum in Mongolia to Beijing (which the Mongols called Dadu). In 1271 he declared himself emperor of **China** and renamed the dynasty Yuan, meaning “beginning,” to signify that this was the beginning of a long era of Mongol rule.

In Asia, Kublai Khan continued his grandfather's dream of world conquest. Two unsuccessful naval expeditions were launched against Japan in 1274 and 1281. Four land expeditions were sent against Dai Viet (now Vietnam) and five against Burma (now Myanmar). However, the Mongol conquests overseas and in Southeast Asia were neither spectacular nor long enduring.

Mongol rule in southern **China** lasted less than a century. The Mongols became the most hated of the barbarian rulers because they did not allow the Chinese ruling class to govern. Instead, they gave the task of governing to foreigners. Distrusting the Chinese, the Mongol rulers placed the southern Chinese at the lowest level of the four classes they created. The extent of this distrust was reflected in their provincial administration. As conquerors, they followed the Qin example and made the provincial governments into direct extensions of the central chancellery. This practice was continued by succeeding dynasties, resulting in a further concentration of power in the central imperial government.

The Chinese despised the Mongols for refusing to adapt to Chinese culture. The Mongols kept their own language and customs. The Mongol rulers were tolerant about religions, however. They also made use of some aspects of Confucian order during their rule.

The Mongols were regarded with mixed feelings in the West. Although Westerners dreaded the Mongols, the Crusaders hoped to use them in their fight against the Muslims and attempted to negotiate an alliance with them for this purpose. Friar John of Carpini and William of Rubruck were two of the better known Christian missionaries sent to establish these negotiations with the Mongol ruler.

The best Western account of the Mongols was left by a Venetian merchant, Marco Polo, in his *Marco Polo's Travels*. It tells of Polo's travels over the long and perilous land route to **China** and his experience as a trusted official of Kublai Khan. Dictated in the early 14th century, the book was translated into many languages. Although much of medieval Europe did not believe Polo's tales, some, such as Christopher Columbus, were influenced by Polo's description of the riches of the East.



A Chinese porcelain wine jar and cover

A Chinese porcelain wine jar and cover with a celadon glaze dates to the 12th century, during the Song Dynasty. It was produced at Longquan, in Zhejiang Province, **China**. (Credit: Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

After the death of Kublai Khan in 1294, successive weak and incompetent khans made the already hated Mongol rule intolerable. Secret societies became increasingly active, and a movement known as the Red Turbans spread throughout the north during the 1350s. In 1356 a rebel leader named Zhu Yuanzhang and his peasant army captured the old capital of Nanjing, on the lower Yangtze River. Within a decade he had won control of the economically important middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze, driving the Mongols to the north. In 1368 he declared himself the emperor, thereby founding the Ming Dynasty, and established his capital at Nanjing. Later the same year he captured the Yuan capital of Beijing. He took Hongwu (meaning “Vastly Martial”) as the name of his reign, so he is commonly called the Hongwu emperor. (The other Ming and Qing emperors are also typically identified by their reign names.)

Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)

Having restored Chinese rule to **China**, the first Ming emperor tried to model his rule after that of the Han, but the Ming fell far short of the Han's accomplishments. The land under Ming domination was less than that under either the Han or the Tang. The Ming dominion changed little after the first two decades. It was confined mostly to what is known as **China** proper, south of the Great Wall and east of Xinjiang and Tibet.

In culture, as well, the Ming did not attain the Han's level of creativity and brilliance. Coming after almost a century of foreign domination, the Ming was a period of restoration and reorganization rather than a time of new discovery. In a sense, the Ming followed a typical dynastic cycle: initial rehabilitation of the economy and restoration of efficient government, followed by a time of stability and then a gradual decline and fall.

The Hongwu emperor modeled his government on the Tang system, restoring the doctrine and practices of traditional Confucianism and continuing the trend toward concentration of power in the imperial government, especially in the hands of the emperor himself. He tried to conduct state affairs single-handedly, but the workload proved overwhelming. To assist him, he gathered around him several loyal middle-level officials, thus creating an extra-governmental organization, the Grand Secretariat. The central bureaucracy was restored and filled by officials selected by the examination system. That system was further formalized by the introduction of a special essay style called the eight-legged essay, to be used in writing the examination. In addition, the subject matter of the examinations was restricted to the Five Classics, said to have been compiled, edited, or written by Confucius, and the Four Books, published by Zhu Xi.

In the field of provincial government, the Hongwu emperor continued the Yuan practice of limiting the power of provincial governors and subjecting them directly to the central government. The empire was divided into 15 provinces. The first capital at [Nanjing](#) was in the economic heartland of **China**, but in 1421 the Yongle emperor, who took the throne after a civil war, moved the capital to Beijing, where he began a massive construction project. The imperial palace complex known as the Forbidden City was built at this time.

The Ming produced two unique contributions: the maritime expeditions of the early 15th century and the philosophy of Wang Yangming. Between 1405 and 1433, seven major maritime expeditions were launched under the leadership of a Muslim eunuch, Zheng He. Each expedition was provided with several seagoing vessels, which were 400 feet (122 meters) high, weighed 700 tons (635 metric tons), had multiple decks and 50 or 60 cabins, and carried several hundred people. During these expeditions, the Chinese sailed the South Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. They traveled as far west as eastern Africa and as far south as Java and Sumatra. But these missions ended just as suddenly as they had begun.

In Confucian philosophy, Wang Yangming developed a system of thought that ran counter to the orthodox teaching of Zhu Xi. While Zhu Xi believed in learning based on reason and the “investigation of things,” Wang Yangming believed in the “learning of the mind,” an intuitive process.

During the second half of the Ming Dynasty, European expansion began. Early in the 16th century Portuguese traders arrived and leased the island of [Macau](#) as their trading post. In 1582 Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit missionary, arrived in Macau. Because of his knowledge of science, mathematics, and astronomy and his willingness to learn the Chinese language and adapt to Chinese life, he was accepted by the Chinese and became the first foreigner allowed to live in Beijing permanently. Jesuits followed him and served the Ming emperors as mapmakers, calendar reformers, and astronomers.

Unlike earlier brief contacts with the West or the later Western incursions into **China**, the 16th-century Sino-

Western relationship was culturally oriented and mutually respectful. Both the Chinese and the Jesuits tried to find common ground in their thinking. The Jesuits' activities produced 300,000 converts in 200 years, not a great number among a population of more than 100 million. Among them, however, were noted scholars such as Xu Guangqi and Li Zhizao, who translated many of the works that Jesuits brought to **China**. The Jesuits wrote over 300 Chinese works.

In the last century of its existence, the Ming Dynasty faced numerous internal and external problems. The internal problems were tied to official corruption and taxation. Because the Ming bureaucracy was relatively small, tax collection was entrusted to locally powerful people who evaded paying taxes by passing the burden on to the poor. A succession of weak and inattentive emperors encouraged the spread of corruption and the greed of eunuchs. In the 1620s a struggle between the inner group of eunuchs and the outer circle of scholar-officials led to the execution of about 700 scholars.

Externally, the security of the Ming empire was threatened from all directions. The Mongols returned and seized Beijing in 1550, and the Ming recognized their control of Turkestan and Tibet in a peace treaty of 1570. Pirates preyed on the east coast, and Japanese pirates penetrated as far inland as Hangzhou and Nanjing. In the 1590s the Ming sent expeditionary forces to rescue Korea from invading Japanese soldiers under Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The Ming drove back the Japanese forces, but not without depleting the Chinese treasury and weakening their defensive network against neighboring Manchuria to the northeast.

In [Manchuria](#) the Manchu (Pinyin: Manzhou) had organized a Chinese-style state and strengthened their forces under a unique form of military organization called the banner system. However, it was not the Manchu who overthrew the Ming but a Chinese rebel, Li Zicheng, the leader of peasants made desperate by a famine in the north in 1628. By 1642 Li had become master of northern **China**, and in 1644 he captured Beijing. There he found that the last Ming emperor had hanged himself, ending the dynasty. Li, however, was not destined to rule. The rule was to pass once again into the hands of a people from beyond the Great Wall, the Manchu. They were invited into **China** by the Ming general Wu Sangui to eliminate the rebels. After driving the rebels from the capital, the Manchu stayed and established a new dynasty, the Qing.

Qing Empire (1644–1911/12)

Like the Mongols in the 13th century, the Manchu (formerly the Juchen) were foreigners who succeeded in ruling the whole of **China**. Unlike the 13th-century conquerors, the Manchu became largely assimilated into Chinese culture and so made their rule more acceptable to the Chinese. As a result, Qing rule lasted 268 years, compared with 89 years for the Yuan.

Pax Sinica (1683–1795)

The Manchu took Beijing with relative ease in 1644, but they did not gain control of the whole of **China** until 1683. Thereafter, the Manchu enjoyed more than a century of peace and prosperity, a period that came to be called Pax Sinica (Peace in **China**). By the end of that period the dynasty had reached the height of its power.

Two strong emperors who were considered models of all Confucian ideals ruled for much of this period: the Kangxi (1661–1722) and Qianlong (1735–96) emperors. By recruiting the well-educated in government and promoting Confucian scholarship, these two Manchu rulers firmly established themselves as Confucian rulers in **China**. Outside of **China** proper, both were successful conquerors. All of what became the Qing empire's vast territories, including Mongolia in the north, Xinjiang in the northwest, and Tibet in the southwest, were incorporated into the expanding Chinese Empire during this period.

The Qing generally adopted the Ming system of government with two exceptions: initially only the Manchu held the most important government posts, and the Grand Council was created in the time of the Yongzheng emperor. The Grand Council superseded the Grand Secretariat and became the most powerful body in the government. The Qing created 18 provinces from the 15 Ming provinces. A governor, usually Chinese, headed each province, and a governor-general, usually a Manchu before the 19th century, headed every two provinces. Local landlords and administrators were generally left alone if they submitted to the new rule.

The Kangxi era marked the height of Jesuit success in **China**, with more than 200,000 Christian converts.

Thereafter, Jesuit influence waned rapidly because of the rivalry between the Jesuits and other Roman Catholic missionaries and the so-called Rites Controversy, which concerned the Jesuits' willingness to tolerate the converts' performance of ceremonies honoring Confucius. The pope denounced the Jesuit view and prohibited the ceremonies.

The long period of peace and prosperity had some adverse effects on Chinese society. There was a shortage of land, resulting from an increase in the population from 100 million to 300 million at the end of the 18th century. Decadence and corruption spread in the imperial court. There was a decline of the Manchu military spirit, and the Qing military organization deteriorated. The long and illustrious reign of the Qianlong emperor was marred by the first of many serious rebellions in the Qing era, the White Lotus Rebellion. It began in 1796 and was not put down until 1804, so **China** entered the 19th century rocked by revolt. More devastating were the incursions of Western powers, which shook the foundation of the empire.

Invasions and rebellions

The first of many Sino-Western conflicts in the 19th century was the first [Opium War](#), fought from 1839 to 1842. It was more than a dispute over the British opium trade in **China**; it was a contest between **China** as the representative of ancient Eastern civilization and Britain as the forerunner of the modern West. Free trade advocates in the West had protested against the restrictive trading system in force at Guangzhou. They demanded free trade in **China**, the opening of more ports to Westerners, and the establishment of treaty relations. The Treaty of Nanjing, which ended the first Opium War, opened five ports to the British—the first of the “treaty ports” where Western countries were granted various privileges. It also gave the island of Hong Kong to the British. A second Opium War, also known as the *Arrow War*, fought from 1856 to 1860, pitted **China** against Great Britain and France.

The Opium Wars disrupted the old life and economy of southern **China**. A number of peasant revolts occurred in the 1840s, coming to a head in the Taiping Rebellion, the biggest rebellion in Chinese history. The leader of the Taipings was Hong Xiuquan, who was from a village near Guangzhou. Believing that God had chosen him to save the world, he adopted a confused version of Christianity as his guiding doctrine and set out to overthrow the Manchu and change society. He planned, in part, to divide up the country's land equally among all the people. The combination of religious fervor, anti-Manchu sentiment, and the promise of land redistribution attracted a following that rose to more than a million. In 1851 Hong proclaimed the creation of a new state, the Taiping Tianguo (Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace). In 1853 the rebels took the city of Nanjing and made it their capital.

Other revolts erupted at about the same time: the Nian Rebellion in the northeast and Muslim rebellions in the southwest and the northwest. Fearing a linkup among the rebels that would engulf all of **China**, the Qing government created regional armies manned entirely by Chinese and commanded by Chinese of the scholar-gentry class. The commanders of the new forces, all loyal supporters of the dynasty—Zeng Guofan, Zuo Zongtang, and Li Hongzhang—suppressed the rebels with the help of Western weapons and leadership. They annihilated the Taipings in 1864, the Nian by 1868, and the Muslims by 1873.

The internal rebellions were suppressed, but external threats continued. After a brief period of “cooperation” with **China** in the 1860s, foreign powers renewed their assault on the country, reacting to widespread antiforeign violence there. Again, **China** became embroiled in a series of conflicts: the Tianjin Massacre with France in 1870, the Ili (Yili) crisis with Russia in 1879, the Sino-French War from 1884 to 1885, and the Sino-Japanese War from 1894 to 1895. Each brought further humiliation and greater impairment of sovereignty. In the last two incidents territory was lost, and an indemnity had to be paid to the victor in the Sino-Japanese War.

Reforms and revolutions

The dynasty itself had fallen into the hands of the empress dowager Cixi, who dominated the central government for the rest of the Qing period. Both a schemer and an archconservative, the empress dowager considerably delayed China's modernization.

The first steps toward modernization in **China** were taken in the 1860s with the establishment of factories to make Western-style armaments for the regional armies. After the rebellions, modernization in other sectors

continued under regional leaders. Unlike Japan's modernization effort, however, China's lacked overall planning and central guidance. It was the country's disastrous defeat at the hands of the Japanese that jolted concerned Chinese scholars into forming "Self-Strengthening" societies. Not until 1898, when the Chinese mainland was being carved into spheres of influence by foreign powers, was the young Guangxu emperor convinced of the need for drastic reform.

With the scholars Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao as his advisers, the emperor in 1898 issued a number of decrees called the Hundred Days of Reform. These were to begin a wide range of changes, including reform of the educational system. However, Yuan Shikai, who had led the modernization of the military, betrayed the project to the empress dowager, who had gone into retirement. The emperor was seized and detained until his death 10 years later, and Cixi took over the administration. Members of the reforming group who could not escape were executed. The old order remained.

The next attempt at change took the form of a peasant rebellion. It was led by an anti-Manchu secret society, the Righteous and Harmonious Fists, known to Westerners as the Boxers. The Boxers aimed at expelling all foreigners, including the Manchu. After a year of unsuccessful attempts to suppress the Boxers, the imperial court officially enlisted them to fight the Westerners. In the summer of 1900 the Boxers attacked the foreign diplomatic quarters in Beijing, and the government under the empress dowager declared war on the foreign powers.

Once again the Qing Dynasty was saved by loyal officials, who managed to convince the Western powers that the war was not official policy, but the result of rebellious forces. They were able to limit the Boxer catastrophe to northern **China**. The aging Li Hongzhang conducted peace negotiations. The resulting Boxer Protocol of 1901 marked the low point of the Chinese Empire; **China** was to pay an indemnity of 330 million dollars and to allow foreign garrisons on its soil.

After 1901 even the empress dowager was converted to reform. Much of the program proposed in the Hundred Days of Reform of 1898 was enacted in the years 1901 to 1910, including reform of education and abolition of the civil service examinations, the creation of provincial assemblies, and a promise to establish a constitutional assembly. But the dynasty—and with it the 2,000-year-old dynastic system—was fast coming to an end. The personalities that had held the dynasty together disappeared from the scene. The empress dowager died in 1908, one day after the Guangxu emperor. The empress dowager had designated as his successor her 3-year-old grandnephew.

Revolutionary ideas and organizations

The reforms that were sponsored by the imperial government were too little and too late. A drastic change was necessary. The idea of overthrowing the Manchu was suggested by Liang Qichao in his concept of *xin min* (new people). Publishing a magazine in Japan, where he had fled after the Hundred Days, Liang called for the Chinese people to renew themselves and also indicated that the Chinese nation was distinct and separate from the ruling dynasty of the Manchu. Although he did not advocate overthrowing the dynasty, the more radical leaders who were already leaning toward revolution quickly picked up the message.

One such leader was Sun Yat-sen (Pinyin: Sun Yixian), who is now revered as the father of modern **China** by Nationalists and Communists alike. He was born into a peasant family near Guangzhou, the traditional stronghold of anti-Manchu rebels. He was educated in Hawaii, converted to Christianity, and had a short-lived medical career before switching to politics and attempting to propose a reform program to Li Hongzhang in 1894. After forming a secret revolutionary society and plotting an unsuccessful uprising in Guangzhou in 1894, Sun began a long period of exile outside **China**. He gained wide recognition as a revolutionary leader in 1896, when his arrest in the Chinese legation in London and subsequent rescue were reported sensationally in newspaper articles.

In 1905, in Japan, he brought together several revolutionary groups and formed the Revolutionary Alliance Society. Its program consisted of the now famous Three People's Principles: nationalism, or freeing all **China** from foreign



Sun Yat-sen.

control; democracy, or overthrowing the Manchu and introducing a democratic political system; and people's livelihood, or striving to bring about economic equality through socialism. Although Sun himself could not live in **China**, members of the alliance infiltrated many social organizations there. The revolutionary spirit that Sun had developed flourished especially among students' and soldiers' groups.

Sun Yat-sen.(Credit:
Brown Brothers)

Revolution of 1911/12

In the industrial city of Wuhan, a soldiers' group with only a loose connection to Sun's alliance rose in rebellion in the early morning of Oct. 10, 1911 (since celebrated as Double Ten, the 10th day of the 10th month). The Manchu governor and his commander fled, and a Chinese commander, Li Yuanhong, was pressured into taking over the leadership. By early December all of the central, southern, and northwestern provinces had declared independence. Sun Yat-sen, who was in the United States during the revolution, returned and was chosen head of the provisional government of the Republic of **China** in Nanjing.

The Manchu court quickly summoned Yuan Shikai, the former commander of the reformed Northern Army. Personally ambitious and politically shrewd, Yuan carried out negotiations with both the Manchu court and the revolutionaries. Yuan was able to persuade the Manchu to abdicate peacefully in return for the safety of the imperial family. On Feb. 12, 1912, the regent of the 6-year-old emperor formally announced the abdication. The Manchu rule in **China** ended after 268 years, and with it the 2,000-year-old imperial system.

Republican Period (1912–1949)

Early in March 1912, Sun Yat-sen resigned from the presidency and, as promised, Yuan Shikai was elected his successor at Nanjing. Inaugurated in Beijing, the base of his power, Yuan established a republican system of government with a premier, a cabinet, a draft constitution, and a plan for parliamentary elections early in 1913. The Kuomintang (KMT), or Nationalist party, the successor to Sun Yat-sen's organization, was formed in order to prepare for the elections. (The party's name is spelled Guomindang in Pinyin.)

Despite Yuan's earlier pledges to support the republic, he schemed to assassinate his opponents and weaken the constitution and the parliament. By the end of 1914 he had made himself president for life and even planned to establish an imperial dynasty with himself as the first emperor. His dream was thwarted by the serious crisis of the Twenty-one Demands for special privileges presented by the Japanese in January 1915 and by vociferous opposition from many sectors of Chinese society. He died in June 1916 a broken man. After Yuan's death, a number of his protégés took positions of power in the Beijing government or ruled as warlords in outlying regions.

In August 1917 **China** entered World War I, as the Beijing government joined the Allies and declared war on Germany. At the peace conference in Versailles, France, the Chinese demand to end foreign concessions in **China** was ignored.

May Fourth Movement

The Chinese felt betrayed. Anger and frustration erupted in student demonstrations on May 4, 1919, in Beijing. Joined by workers and merchants, the movement spread to major cities. The Chinese representative at Versailles refused to endorse the peace treaty, but its provisions remained unchanged. Disillusioned with the West, many Chinese looked elsewhere for help.

The May Fourth Movement, which grew out of the student uprising, attacked Confucianism, initiated a vernacular style of writing, and promoted science. Scholars of international stature, such as John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, were invited to lecture. Numerous magazines were published to stimulate new thought. Toward the end of the movement's existence, a split occurred among its leaders. Some, such as Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, were beginning to be influenced by the success of the Russian Revolution of 1917, which contrasted sharply with the failure of the 1911–12 revolution in **China** to change the social order and improve conditions. By 1920, people associated with the Comintern (Communist International) were disseminating literature in **China** and helping to start communist groups, including one led by Mao Zedong. A meeting at

Shanghai in 1921 was actually the first party congress of the Communist Party of **China** (CCP).

The CCP was so small that the Soviet Union looked elsewhere for a viable political ally. A Comintern agent, Adolph Joffe, was sent to **China** to approach Sun Yat-sen, who had failed to obtain assistance from the United Kingdom or the United States. The period of Sino-Soviet collaboration began with the Sun-Joffe Declaration of Jan. 26, 1923. The Soviet Union recognized Sun's Nationalist party, the KMT, and the communists were admitted to it as members. With Soviet aid, the KMT army was built up. A young officer, Chiang Kai-shek (Pinyin: Jiang Jieshi), was sent to Moscow for training. Upon returning, he was put in charge of the Whampoa (Pinyin: Huangpu) Military Academy, established to train soldiers to fight the warlords, who controlled much of **China**. Zhou Enlai of the CCP was deputy director of the academy's political department.

Sun Yat-sen, whose power base was in the south, had planned to send an expedition against the northern warlords, but he died before it could get under way. Chiang Kai-shek, who succeeded him in the KMT leadership, began the northern expedition in July 1926. The Nationalist army met little resistance and by April 1927 had reached the lower Yangtze. Meanwhile, Chiang, claiming to be a sincere follower of Sun Yat-sen, had broken with the left-wing elements of the KMT. After the Nationalist forces had taken Shanghai, they suppressed a communist-led general strike there with bloodshed. Following suppressions in other cities, Chiang set up his own government at Nanjing on April 18, 1927. He professed friendship with the Soviet Union, but by July 1927 he was expelling communists from the KMT. Some left-wingers left for the Soviet Union.

The northern expedition was resumed, and in 1928 Chiang took Beijing. **China** was formally unified. Nationalist **China** was recognized by the Western powers and supported by loans from foreign banks.

Nationalist era (1928–1937)

The Nationalist period began with high hopes and much promise. More could have been accomplished had it not been for the problems of communist opposition and Japanese aggression. In his efforts to combat them both, Chiang neglected the land reform needed to improve the lives of the peasants. Driven from the cities, the communists concentrated on organizing the peasants in the countryside. On Nov. 1, 1931, they proclaimed the establishment of the Chinese Soviet Republic in the southeastern province of Jiangxi, with [Mao Zedong](#) as chairman. The first units of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army had been formed during a failed communist uprising at Nanchang in 1927. Carrying out an agrarian revolution, the soldiers began conducting guerrilla warfare in the southeastern countryside. Mao believed that the best way to win the conflict was to isolate the cities by gaining control of the countryside and the food supply.

A military man by temperament and training, Chiang sought to eliminate the communists by force. He defined his anticommunist drive as "internal pacification before resistance to external attack," and he gave it more importance than opposition to the increasingly aggressive Japanese. With arms and military advisers from Nazi Germany, Chiang carried out a series of "extermination campaigns" that killed about a million people between 1930 to 1934. Chiang's fifth campaign, involving over half a million troops, almost annihilated the communists. Faced with the dilemma of being totally destroyed in Jiangxi or attempting an almost impossible escape, the communists decided to risk the escape. On Oct. 15, 1934, they broke through the tight KMT siege. Over 100,000 men and women set out on the Long March of about 6,000 miles (9,600 kilometers) through China's most rugged terrain to find a new base to the northwest, in Shaanxi Province.

In the meantime, the Japanese had made steady inroads into **China**. In the Mukden (Pinyin: Shenyang) Incident of 1931, Japanese troops occupied the northeastern city of Shenyang. They then occupied the rest of [the Northeast \(Manchuria\)](#) and created the puppet state of Manchukuo (Pinyin: Manzhouguo) in 1932. By the mid-1930s the Japanese had seized Inner Mongolia and parts of northeastern **China** and had created the North **China** Autonomous Region with no resistance from the Nationalists. Anti-Japanese sentiment mounted in **China**, but Chiang ignored it and in 1936 launched yet another extermination campaign against the communists in Shaanxi. Chiang was forced to give up the anticommunist drive when his troops mutinied and arrested him as he arrived in Xi'an in December 1936 to plan strategy. He was released after he agreed to form a united front with the CCP against the Japanese.



Chiang Kai-shek meets with his staff

Chiang Kai-shek meets

In **China**, World War II broke out on July 7, 1937, with a seemingly insignificant little battle between Chinese and Japanese troops near Beijing, called the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. Within a few days, the Japanese had occupied Beijing, and the fighting spread rapidly. The war in **China** fell into three stages. The first (1937–1939) was characterized by the phenomenally rapid Japanese occupation of most of China's east coast, including such major cities as Shanghai, Nanjing, and Guangzhou. The Nationalist government moved to the interior, ultimately to Chongqing in Sichuan, and the Japanese established puppet governments in Beijing in 1937 and in Nanjing in 1940. The second stage (1939–1943) was a period of waiting, as Chiang blockaded the communists in the northwest (despite the united front) and waited for help from the United States, which had declared war on Japan in 1941.

with his staff during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45). (Credit: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.)

In the final stage (1944–1945), the United States provided massive assistance to Nationalist **China**, but the Chongqing government, weakened by inflation, impoverishment of the middle class, and low troop morale, was unable to take full advantage of it. Feuds among the Nationalist party generals and between Chiang and his U.S. military adviser, General Joseph Stilwell, further hampered the KMT.

When Japanese defeat became a certainty in the spring of 1945, the communists seemed in a better position to take over from the Japanese garrisons than the KMT, which was far away in the rear of the formation. A U.S. airlift of Nationalist troops enabled them to occupy many cities, but the countryside stayed with the communists.

After the end of World War II in Europe in May 1945, the Allied war effort moved to the east. The Soviet Union joined the war against Japan at the end of July. On August 6 and 9 the United States dropped the world's first atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On Aug. 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered. In **China**, however, civil war raged over who should take charge of the Japanese arms and equipment. At the end of August the CCP and the KMT reached an agreement, but the truce was brief.

In January 1946 a cease-fire was negotiated by U.S. general George C. Marshall. The Nationalist government returned to Nanjing, and the United Nations recognized **China** as one of the world's five Great Powers. The United States supplied the Chiang government with an additional 2 billion dollars (1.5 billion dollars had been spent for the war). Although the KMT's dominance in weapons and supplies was enormous, it was kept under guard in the cities, while the communists held the surrounding countryside. As inflation soared, both civilians and the military became demoralized. The communists, sensing the national mood, proposed a coalition government. The Nationalists refused, and fighting erupted again.

The short and decisive civil war that followed was resolved in two main places: the Northeast (Manchuria) and the Huai River area. Despite a massive airlift of KMT forces by the United States, the Northeast was lost in October 1948 after 300,000 Nationalist forces surrendered to the communists. By the end of 1948 the KMT had lost over half a million men, more than two thirds of whom had defected. In April 1949 the communists moved south of the Yangtze.

After the fall of Nanjing and Shanghai, Nationalist resistance evaporated. By autumn, the communists had taken all mainland territories except Tibet. Chiang Kai-shek and a number of his associates fled to the island of Taiwan, where they set up what they claimed was the rightful government of **China**.

People's Republic of China

On Oct. 1, 1949, [Mao Zedong](#) proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of **China**. The CCP hailed its takeover of **China** as a people's victory over and liberation from imperial domination (especially that of the United States) and the oppressive Nationalist regime. The Red Army was renamed the People's Liberation Army. During the early days of the People's Republic, the troops were restrained, foreign-educated Chinese returned to help the country, and most local administrators remained in office.

The first communist government, the People's Consultative Council, included noncommunists among its 662 members. However, in the top committee, 31 out of 56 seats were occupied by communists, and the constitution of 1954 drastically curtailed the role of noncommunists. After 1954, more authority was concentrated in the central government under the State Council. Real power, however, lay with the Communist

party, especially the Central Committee, then composed of 94 members. This committee held together the triad of power—army, government, and party. The inner circle of the Central Committee was the 19-member Politburo and its seven-member Standing Committee.

Land reform

One of the first tasks of the communist government was land reform, redistributing land from landlords to the peasants. The Agrarian Law of 1950 began the nationwide land reform, which was almost completed by the beginning of 1953.

Social reform

Land reform erased the social distinction between landlord and peasant. The new marriage law of 1950 and the campaigns of the early 1950s removed distinctions within the family. Women were given full equality with men in matters of marriage, divorce, and property ownership. Children were encouraged to denounce parents if they failed to support the communist line.

Thought reform

Believing that the revolution could not be carried on without the reform of the people, the CCP launched a massive campaign to change China's entire psychology. The Four Olds campaign was launched to eradicate old ideas, habits, customs, and culture. The Three Anti's movement was directed at officials, with the aim of eliminating corruption, waste, and "bureaucratism." The Five Anti's campaign, directed at businessmen and the bourgeoisie, opposed bribery, tax fraud, cheating, and stealing state property and economic information. For Chinese Christians, the Three Selves movement stressed self-government, self-support, and self-propagation, the object being to separate the churches in **China** from their parent denominations abroad. Church leaders were forced into denouncing religion as cultural imperialism. The idea of cultural imperialism was extended to art and literature, which henceforth were to serve the people, the class struggle, and the revolution.

Economic planning

Along with the reforms of land tenure, society, family, and even thought, the CCP announced the first five-year plan in 1953 to speed up the socialization of **China** through a planned economy. The plan's aim was to produce maximum returns from agriculture in order to pay for industrialization and Soviet aid. The means chosen was the collectivization of agriculture. Land and farm implements were pooled into cooperatives and later into collective farms, which controlled the production, price, and distribution of products. By May 1956, 90 percent of the farmers were members of cooperatives.

Similarly, 80 percent of heavy industry and 40 percent of light industry were in government hands by October 1952. The government also controlled all the railways and most steamship operations. To speed China's development even more, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and others, after overcoming some opposition within the leadership, launched the Great Leap Forward in 1958.

Great Leap Forward (late 1950s and early 1960s)

Designed to overcome the backwardness of China's economy, industry, and technology, the Great Leap Forward was to be achieved through use of the vast labor force and indomitable spirit of the Chinese. Steel production was to be increased by setting up small-scale "backyard furnaces," and agricultural output was to be raised by combining the collective farms into communes. The communist government created about 26,000 communes, each composed of approximately 5,000 households.

After a year, the leaders admitted that the success of the program had been exaggerated. The steel produced by the backyard furnaces was of low quality, and the quantity fell short of the projected goal. The people's reluctance to join communes was stronger than expected, and the size of the communes had to be reduced. Domestic life in homes, as well as private plots of land for family use, had to be restored. The effect of the Great

Leap Forward on the people and the economy was devastating. Coupled with three straight years of poor harvests, it resulted in a severe food shortage, leading to millions of deaths (as many as 30 million by some estimates), and industrial decline. For the next several years, while lip service was paid to Mao's thought and to Great Leap-type activism, the real power was in more conservative hands.

Cultural Revolution (mid-1960s to mid-1970s)

A radical movement that closed schools and slowed production, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution virtually severed China's relations with the outside world. Mao launched the movement in part to instill a revolutionary spirit in China's youth and to make Chinese society less elitist. He also wanted to purge the CCP leadership of people who did not agree with his current ideology. The movement was called proletarian (of the working class) because it was a revolution of working-class youths against party officials. It was cultural because it meant to alter the values of society. It was great because it was on a mammoth scale. It lasted for two years in its intense form, lingered on for another year and a half, and was not officially declared over until 1977.

The Cultural Revolution had its roots in a power struggle between Mao and his supporters, including his wife, Jiang Qing, and Lin Biao—who believed that the initial fervor of the revolution was being lost—and more conservative, bureaucratic elements within the leadership. One point at issue was the educational system, and particularly the fact that urban youth (especially the children of privileged officials) appeared to have a better chance of getting a university education than the children of rural peasants. Mao feared that Chinese society was becoming rigid, and to prevent this he relied for support on the military and on youth.

In the summer of 1966, a group of Beijing high school girls protested against the system of college entrance examinations. The Central Committee acceded to the students' demand by promising a reform and postponing the 1966 enrollment for half a year. Freed from their studies, students demonstrated in Beijing in August, touching off demonstrations of young people in general. Mobilized by Mao, youths wearing red armbands and flashing copies of the "little red book" containing Mao's thought (*Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*), marched through the streets shouting the slogan, "To bypass the Communist party apparatus and force the hierarchy's political foes into submission." These Red Guards, as they were called, were given free railway passes, and they poured into Beijing and other cities in great numbers throughout 1967.

In early 1967 some of the highest ranking leaders, former close revolutionary associates of Mao himself, were criticized and dismissed. Liu Shaoqi, who had been president of the republic, Zhu De, and Deng Xiaoping were among the better known victims. Confucius was attacked as having been a hypocritical supporter of the bourgeoisie. Throughout the country, revolutionary committees sprang up, seized power from the local government and party authorities, and harassed—and in some cases physically attacked—those suspected of being disloyal to Mao's thought, especially bureaucrats, managers, and teachers and other intellectuals.

The disorders reached a climax in July 1967 in the city of Wuhan, when the local military commander tried to rally the people against the radicals and troops had to be sent in to restore order. From that time on, steps were taken to quiet the more disruptive portions of the Cultural Revolution, though it was not until 1968 that society returned to something resembling normality. In March 1969 the government issued a directive to open all schools. The situation was so chaotic, however, that the universities were not reopened until September 1970.

The Cultural Revolution greatly affected the CCP leadership. When the long-postponed ninth congress of the CCP was finally convened in April 1969, two thirds of the old members of the Central Committee were missing. Mao's attempt to maintain a state of permanent revolution had been immensely costly. Years of work and progress were sacrificed: A whole generation of youth went without education; factories and farms lay idle. **China** fell even further behind the industrialized powers of the world.



Mao Zedong, 1965.

Mao Zedong, 1965.
(Credit: Keystone/Hulton
Archive/Getty Images)



Zhou Enlai, 1973.

Zhou Enlai, 1973. (Credit: AFP/Getty Images)

As the Cultural Revolution died down, Zhou Enlai, who had been premier since the founding of the People's Republic, quietly took control. Deng Xiaoping and other “pragmatic” leaders were reestablished. The party and government relaxed their control over the people and granted certain civil rights in a new constitution adopted in 1975.

Passing of the old guard

The year 1976 marked the end of an era. Zhou Enlai died in January. Zhu De, who as chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress had been serving as nominal head of state, died in July. Finally, Mao himself, the chairman of the party and the embodiment of the revolution, died in September. Although many elderly leaders remained in positions of power, the old guard—the veterans of the Long March and the civil war—was clearly passing from the scene.

There were no provisions for automatic succession. At one time, Lin Biao had been Mao's designated successor, but Lin reportedly had died in an airplane crash under mysterious circumstances in 1971. The stage was set for a power struggle, with the initial advantage going to the radical faction. Zhou's death left

the moderate pragmatists in a weakened position, and Deng Xiaoping, as their most visible leader, came under immediate attack.

In April the people staged an unusual demonstration to protest the removal, by the police, of memorial wreaths honoring Zhou Enlai from Beijing's Tiananmen (the Gate of Heavenly Peace leading to the old Forbidden City). With this as an excuse, the radicals blamed Deng for the disorders and dismissed him from office. But the radicals, in turn, lost their protector when Mao died. Within a month, under the brief leadership of Hua Guofeng, the “Gang of Four” radical leaders, including Jiang Qing, Mao's widow, were arrested, and Deng was reinstated as vice-premier. The Gang of Four were subsequently tried and convicted of various crimes against the state. They became a convenient scapegoat for the new leadership, which did not wish to blame China's ills on Mao directly.

In the following years, the pragmatists consolidated their position. Although Deng did not take any of the main party or government positions, he emerged as the outstanding figure within the leadership. An elderly man himself, he brought in younger men who shared his views. Hu Yaobang became general secretary of the CCP, and [Zhao Ziyang](#) became premier. Deng's new policies were confirmed in the party and state constitutions adopted in 1982. These included accelerating China's economic development by the best possible means; for example, by rewarding good work, even if this resulted in some inequalities in society. Steps were also taken to prevent the concentration of power that had marked Mao's time. Thus, the new state constitution limited state leaders to two consecutive terms.

Nevertheless, the new leadership remained firmly committed to communism. The 1982 constitution stated again the Four Fundamental Principles that should guide the society: the leadership of the communist party, the “people's democratic dictatorship,” the socialist road, and Maoism. The new constitution allowed a greater measure of political freedom and civil rights, and legal safeguards were introduced. It was evident, however, that there were limits to the new liberalization. After an early period during which considerable freedom of speech was allowed, the post-Mao leadership began to warn against destructive criticism.



Deng Xiaoping.

Deng Xiaoping. (Credit: Wally McNamee/ Wally McNamee/Corbis)

The Four Modernizations

The new regime's goal was the development of China's economy by means of the Four Modernizations: of

agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. The Four Modernizations were first announced by Zhou Enlai at the 10th party congress in 1973, when the country was just starting its slow recovery from the Cultural Revolution. The new leadership under Deng Xiaoping placed great stress on them, with the aim of bringing **China** into the front rank among the world's nations.

To achieve the ambitious aims of the program, the new leadership replaced the Maoist dogma of stressing the revolutionary spirit, the “red,” with the practical value of the “expert.” In education, academic achievements were emphasized, and nationwide college entrance examinations were reinstated. In industry, the authority of experts was reasserted. In agriculture, peasants were again allowed private plots. Some overambitious projects were begun, and some adjustments to planning proved necessary. Nevertheless, the Chinese were cautiously optimistic that they would attain their goals. They aimed for a reasonable economic growth rate and began a rigorous campaign to slow the rate of population increase.

Foreign affairs

In December 1949 the Soviet Union and **China** signed a 30-year alliance for defense against Japan and any ally associated with Japan (with the latter provision aimed at the United States). In addition to providing military aid, the Soviet Union extended economic and technical assistance. Many Soviet technicians came to **China**, and many Chinese went to the Soviet Union for training. Good feeling between the two communist powers reached a high point in 1953, when the Soviet Union relinquished its joint control over the railways in the Northeast (Manchuria). Two years later the Soviet Union withdrew from Lüshun (now part of Dalian), which it had jointly used with **China** as a naval base after World War II.

After the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in the same year, however, **China** became increasingly independent of the Soviets. The reversal of many of Stalin's policies in the Soviet Union, tension along the border, and nationalism in both countries led to differences between the two powers. A complete break came when, with no warning, the Soviet Union withdrew its technicians from **China** in 1960. Relations between the two countries deteriorated until Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985. After that both countries more actively pursued the possibilities for reduced tensions and expanded contact with one another until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Soon after it was established, the People's Republic had been recognized by a number of Western countries, with the United Kingdom taking the lead. The United States continued to recognize the Nationalist Republic of **China** government on Taiwan as the government of all **China**, however, and it led the opposition to the admission of the People's Republic to the United Nations. There was a strong emotional attachment in the United States to the Nationalists. This was solidified when the People's Republic of **China** entered the Korean War later in 1950 on the side of North Korea. The Chinese action deprived the United Nations (chiefly United States) forces of a victory against the North Koreans and led, eventually, to a stalemate.

Through the 1950s and 1960s relations between **China** and the United States remained frozen. The United States, locked in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, tended to see all communist countries as part of the same monolithic bloc. Sentiment against “Red **China**” was kept alive within the United States by the so-called **China** Lobby of Chiang Kai-shek's supporters, many of whom had long-standing ties to the Nationalists or missionaries who had been ejected from **China** after the revolution. Meanwhile, the Chinese did little to develop relations with the United States.

Outside the communist bloc, China's main foreign relations efforts were directed toward the Third World, though the Chinese had established relations with France as early as 1964 and the United Kingdom in 1950. **China** gave aid to a number of African countries, but its relations with its Asian neighbors were frequently strained by its support of radical insurgency movements. A border dispute erupted into a short war with India in 1962.



As the years passed, it became apparent that the Nationalists were unlikely to reconquer the mainland. China's split with the Soviet Union shattered the picture of a communist monolith. Zhou Enlai, taking control after the Cultural Revolution, began to increase contacts with the West. His reasons were both political—to obtain support in the face of Soviet hostility—and economic—to gain access to Western trade and technology.

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, right, meets

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, right, meets with Henry Kissinger, then the head of the U.S. National Security Council, in 1972. (Credit: White House Photo)

In the early 1970s **China** began to indicate a willingness to establish contacts with the United States. After intense behind-the-scenes negotiations, U.S. President [Richard M. Nixon](#) went to **China** in early 1972, and, in a joint communiqué, the two countries declared their intention to normalize relations. This procedure, however, took nearly seven years to accomplish. By that time, most of the countries of the world, including Japan, had established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of **China**.

The main reason for the delay was Taiwan. The Beijing government insisted that the United States cease to recognize the Nationalist government on Taiwan, but the United States was reluctant to break with its old ally. In the

end it did so with the understanding that it could maintain unofficial contacts. It also agreed to terminate its defense treaty with Taiwan. The solution of the Taiwan problem seemed distant, however. Since 1949, Taiwan had become prosperous and begun rapidly industrializing. It had little desire to rejoin the mainland, where the standard of living was much lower. However, both the Nationalists and the People's Republic insisted that Taiwan was an integral part of **China**, ruling out any solution that involved making Taiwan a separate country. From the 1990s a Taiwanese movement for independence for Taiwan has threatened to disrupt relations between them.

Political developments of the late 20th century

The modernization programs brought about great changes in the economic and social life of the Chinese. The reformers also began to reduce the level of political coercion in Chinese society. Millions of people who had been sent to labor camps in past political programs were released. More and more the Chinese people began to come into contact with foreign ideas and standards of living.

Some people in **China** began to call for a faster pace of reform. Unrest broke out in late 1986, as students held demonstrations that lasted several weeks. Hu Yaobang, general secretary of the CCP, did not crack down on the demonstrations, which made him a hero among Chinese liberals. He was soon forced to resign. The disgraced leader's death in April 1989 triggered a series of student rallies in several cities to honor him. The rallies grew into massive demonstrations by students and later also others demanding greater political freedoms as well as economic reforms.

Among the largest demonstrations were those in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Despite government warnings, the peaceful protests continued for weeks, drawing hundreds of thousands of protesters. The government imposed martial law on May 20, urged citizens to turn in dissidents, and sent military convoys to Beijing. On June 3–4 the military forcibly cleared the square of protesters. Thousands of tanks and heavily armed troops stormed the area in an attempt to regain order, crushing or opening fire on those who tried to block their way. The Chinese government gave an official death toll of 241 people, including soldiers. According to various other estimates, hundreds, if not thousands, of people died. In addition, by the end of June thousands of people had been arrested for taking part in what the government called rumor-mongering, hooliganism, and counterrevolutionary activities, and a number of them had been executed.

In the government shake-up following the Tiananmen Square incident, Zhao Ziyang, who had replaced Hu Yaobang as CCP general secretary, was ousted. He was replaced by Jiang Zemin. Li Peng, who had become premier in 1988 and had advocated using force to suppress the protests, retained his position. Although Deng Xiaoping had retired from all his official duties, he remained the "paramount leader" of the country. He designated Jiang Zemin as his choice for successor, and after Deng's death in February 1997, Jiang took over his role.

One of the issues facing Jiang's government was to improve China's international relations after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, which had been widely condemned by countries around the world. The United States,



A Chinese man temporarily blocks a line of tanks

A Chinese man temporarily blocks a line of tanks on June 5, 1989, the day after demonstrators were forcibly cleared from Beijing's Tiananmen Square. (Credit: Jeff Widener/AP)

Europe, and Japan imposed economic sanctions on **China** for a while. **China** succeeded in mending its relations with most countries within the next couple of years, however, and with the United States within the next several years. Still, foreign governments and international agencies continued to press **China** over allegations of human rights abuses, including the taking of political prisoners, the torture of prisoners, and the use of forced labor to produce goods for export.

Reunification with Hong Kong and Macau



Members of China's armed forces stand

Members of China's armed forces stand under the Chinese and British flags during a ceremony marking the return of Hong Kong to **China** on July 1, 1997. (Credit: Dylan Martinez/AFP/Getty Images)

Jiang Zemin's government also oversaw the return of two European colonial territories to **China**. The territory of Hong Kong reverted to Chinese control on July 1, 1997, after more than 150 years of British rule, and the smaller territory of [Macau](#), which had been administered by Portugal since the mid-16th century, was returned on Dec. 20, 1999. Both are now special administrative regions of **China**.

Prior to the return of Hong Kong, foreign governments, international businesses, and residents of Hong Kong expressed concern over how **China** would incorporate the largely autonomous and highly profitable territory into the Chinese economic, social, and political landscape. Significant progress had been made in the 1990s in opening political institutions and granting civil rights there. **China** pledged that it would not radically change the internal governing of the territory. Instead, according to a new Basic Law, **China** and Hong Kong would exist as one country with two distinct economic systems and Hong Kong would retain a large degree of political autonomy (except in foreign policy and defense) for a period of 50 years.

The Chinese government chose Tung Chee-hwa, a business magnate with pro-**China** sympathies, to serve as the first chief executive of Hong Kong following the transfer of power. In 1997 Tung announced that certain civil rights—such as the freedom to assemble and stage mass protests—would be repealed or modified. Hong Kong residents staged numerous demonstrations to protest this. The first elections for an independent legislature for Hong Kong were held in May 1998, though only a portion of the legislators were popularly elected. The Chinese government selected Donald Tsang to be the second chief executive in 2005. Ultimately, however, according to the Basic Law, the chief executive and all legislators were to be elected by the people.

The Chinese often contrasted the relatively smooth transition of tiny Macau with that of Hong Kong up to 1997. Portugal in effect had already ceded sovereignty of Macau to **China** and was in a weaker position than the United Kingdom to press for any say in the process. The documents for the transfer of Macau mostly mirrored those of Hong Kong, with a concession that Portuguese, which was not widely used by the public in Macau, remain an official language during the 50-year transition period. As in Hong Kong, the Chinese government selected a business magnate with pro-**China** sympathies, Edmund Ho Hau Wah, to serve as the first chief executive of Macau following the transfer of power.

Emergence of capitalism and early 21st century China

Jiang Zemin led **China** into a new era of economic liberalization. In 1997 he announced that the government would further modernize the burgeoning Chinese economy by selling state-owned small- and medium-size factories and industries to private investors. The measure led to an unprecedented degree of private ownership, which has been expanding ever since. Jiang also promoted a new political philosophy, the Three Represents, which asserted that the CCP represented advanced productive forces, advanced Chinese culture, and the basic interests of the people. This philosophy generally fell flat among much of the leadership and the Chinese public in general.

In 2002 Hu Jintao, who had been expected to be Jiang Zemin's successor, became general secretary of the Communist party, and in 2003 Hu became president of the People's Republic. Wen Jiabao became premier in

2003. With Hu and Wen's rise, the leadership of **China** passed to the so-called fourth generation leadership and from traditional communist leaders to a group of technocrats. The new philosophical focus for the Hu era became creating a "harmonious society," which showed a concern for growing frustrations over income gaps between rich and poor Chinese and other issues. Hu also advocated a concept known as "scientific development," to be employed to solve social and environmental problems. In the international sphere, the push was toward "peaceful development."

China continued to promote various sorts of economic zones to stimulate growth along the coast and attempted to shift the emphasis in manufacturing to the production of high order, better quality goods. A plan was launched in 1999 to develop the relatively backward economy in the western regions of the country. In December 2001 **China** joined the World Trade Organization as the economy continued to grow.

Labor organizations and industrialists in developed countries began to worry as trade patterns shifted in China's favor. Relations between the United States and **China** were strained by cases of alleged Chinese and U.S. espionage and the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on May 7, 1999, during a NATO air strike against Yugoslavia. Despite these problems, American frustration with the ballooning U.S. trade deficit soon replaced ideological and military confrontation as the stumbling point in U.S.-**China** relations.

Beijing's hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games was seen as a national "coming out party," with a major infrastructure remake for the city. Many people found the city's transformation extremely impressive. Others found it depressing since many benefits were either at the expense of poorer Beijing residents or, as in the case of forced reduction in automobile traffic and pollution, temporary.

As the economy has grown and changed, so have social problems. **China** introduced reforms to household registration—a system designed to control migration that made it difficult for people to move from rural areas to cities, or at least to obtain full urban residency rights—but the changes did not completely free up mobility. Corruption became endemic. **China** launched a series of "Strike Hard" campaigns, nominally to clean up crime and corruption but also to repress dissent. The number of AIDS cases exploded, and the state finally recognized them publicly after a period of denial. Several incidents weakened confidence in the government's ability to protect the people. Among them were epidemics of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and bird flu, alleged faulty school construction leading to student deaths in the 2008 Sichuan-Wenchuan earthquake zone, and a tainted-milk scandal, also in 2008. Groups also protested about economic exploitation, and pollution continued to increase. Unrest among religious and ethnic groups not favored by the government, such as the Falun Gong, Uighurs, and Tibetans, continued to be severely repressed.

Liberalization of the economy has lifted many Chinese out of poverty. Nevertheless, higher expectations of living standards coupled with growing income gaps between rich and poor and a slowdown in economic growth suggest that China's future is more mixed than some predict.

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