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Myths and Lessons of Modern Chinese History

On June 21, 1900, the Great Qing Empire declared war on eight countries, including the United States. The Qing—the Manchu dynasty that ruled China—besieged the legations of the foreign powers in Beijing. During the "Fifty-five Days in Peking"—as Hollywood would later film it—a small band of foreigners held out against great odds before an international expeditionary force could rescue it. This 20,000-man force then subdued an empire of 450 million, making quick work of the Qing armies and the "Boxer" irregulars who joined them. The Western forces sacked and plundered Beijing, occupied its ancient palaces, and extracted an enormous indemnity. The humiliation of the Qing was complete. Eleven years later it collapsed, ending an imperial tradition of more than 2,000 years.

How the world changes. Little more than a century earlier, at the time of the American Revolution, the Qing dynasty presided over the strongest, richest, and most sophisticated civilization on the planet. It was supremely self-confident. It ruled China, and dominated East Asia, by a combination of power and cultural prestige. Through the famous examination system, it recruited the most learned men in the realm to government service. It said it did not want or need contact with the West. By 1895, however, China had been invaded, defeated, and degraded, first by Western nations and then by Japan. Such was the sudden, overwhelming power of the Industrial Revolution and the aggressive militarism of the imperialist age. The Boxer War was a final, futile act of resistance by a government, and indeed an entire system of governance, that would be blown away.

Today, over a century after the Boxer War, China is again formidable. It is an industrial power, a military power, and a growing economic power. It has become a great power because of, not despite, its relations with the rest of the world. It is a power shaped and constrained in part by its history.

China is an ancient civilization, but it is really a very young country. "China" as a political entity did not exist until 1912, when the Republic of China—Asia's first republic—was proclaimed as the successor to Manchu rule. Yet that new country was heir to a much longer history.

What do we know—or, more to the point, what do we *think* we know—about China and its history? Let us start by dispelling several myths that have been commonly articulated in earlier Western writings about China and still enjoy some currency today. Then let us examine several lessons of more recent Chinese history that help us to understand where this new country has been in its first century.

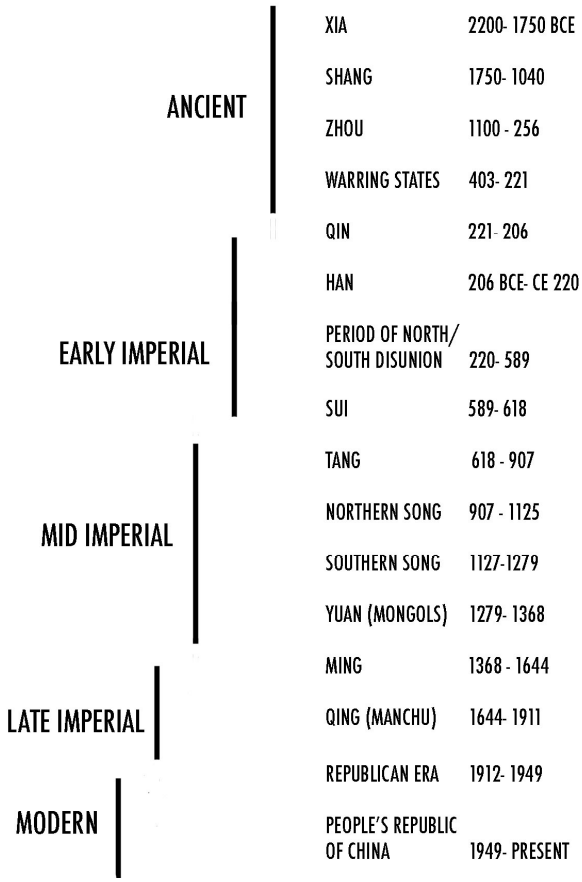
Professor William C. Kirby and Research Associate Brittany Crow prepared this note as the basis for class discussion.

1. Enduring Myths

The "new China" (and indeed several "new Chinas") of the twentieth century was founded on the ruins of the Qing, the last imperial dynasty to rule over Chinese and neighboring lands. For those not familiar with Chinese history, the Imperial period (221 BCE–1911 CE) can carry with it a variety of simplifying, totalizing generalizations, such as the following.

China has always been unified From the unification of neighboring states by the self-proclaimed "First Emperor of Qin" in 221 BCE, political unity has been a consistent ideal—one all the more stressed because it was so often lacking in practice. The borders of China-based empires were not fixed. The imperial period was, at its foundation, based on constant cycles of change, of unity and disunity (see **Chart 1**). When the Qin dynasty first conquered its neighbors and declared the first empire, it standardized the writing system, weights, measures, and currency. These measures lasted much longer than the Qin empire, whose history can be measured in decades. And when its successor dynasty, Han, fell in 220 CE, for three-and-a-half centuries there followed a period of disunion (220–589 CE) between the northern and southern territories that included the Three Kingdoms period, the Six Dynasties period in the south, and 16 Kingdoms in the north. It was not until the time of the Sui (589–618 CE) and Tang dynasties (618–907 CE) that one could speak of "reunification."

Chart 1. Dynasties of China



Source: Casewriter.

An examination of China's early imperial history shows a cyclical process of destruction and revitalization. These cycles were based on the passing of the so-called "mandate of heaven" (*tianming*), without which a dynasty could not be considered legitimate. The emperor, considered the "son of heaven," was expected to fulfill his filial duties by acting as the ritual intermediary between the cosmic and the mundane. If an emperor (and by extension, his dynasty) failed to satisfy his obligations and the government was in disarray (which was said to be indicated by natural disasters), it was considered not only justified but right for the citizenry to rebel against its government and pass the mandate on to a new dynasty. There were multiple transitions of the mandate, each resulting in a new state with unique geographic boundaries (see **Figure A**).

The expansion of the borders of the empire beyond the Chinese cultural realm during the mid and late imperial periods was led, above all, by foreign dynasties. First, during the Yuan (or Mongol era, from 1279 to 1368), China was briefly part of the Mongol-led Eurasian *imperium*. Then again, under the Qing dynasty (an era of governance by the Manchus lasting from 1644 to 1911), the empire comprised much more than the Chinese lands of the Ming (1368–1644) and came to include the Qing's Manchurian homeland, Mongolia, Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan), and Tibet, among its far-flung parts. As we discuss below, what we think of as China today is, in geographic terms, the Qing without the Manchus, an empire without an emperor.

The concept of "Chinese unity" may therefore be seen as a rather modern phenomenon: despite a few disputed territorial claims, no unified political territory has ever been so large for so long as the Qing and its Chinese successors. Even then, as in other periods of political unity, economic life centered largely upon regional economies, or "macroregions" (**Figure B**). There has never been just one "China market."

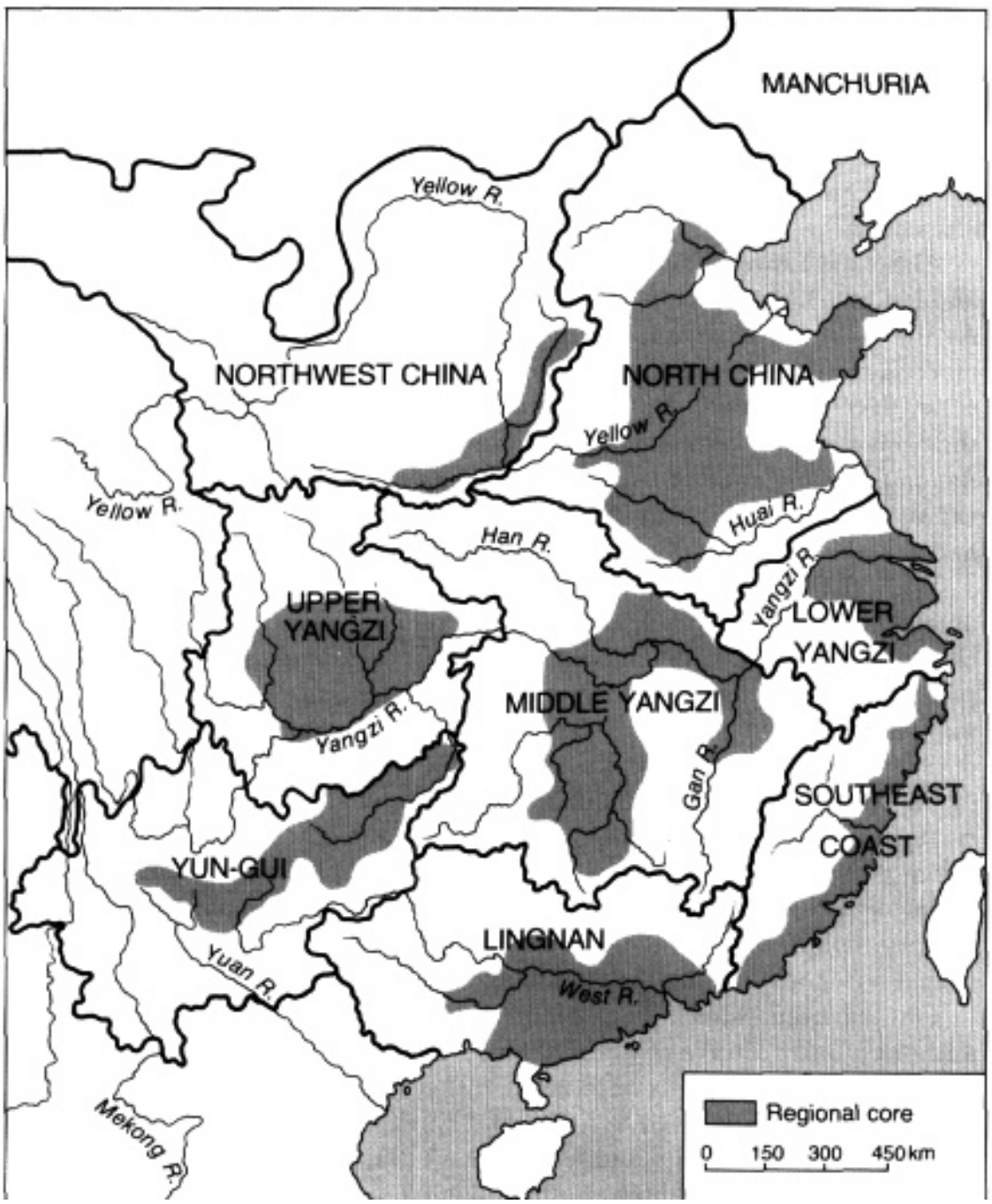
Institutions and practices that sought to promote the unity of the realm in imperial times had influences, however, outlasting any single dynasty. Great empires could rule large and differentiated landscapes with very small bureaucracies because of enduring systems of shared values. Even as empires waxed and waned, China became home to the world's longest continuous civilization, with the longest continuing (if periodically reinterpreted) sets of philosophical and literary traditions. In the last millennium in particular, the study of that tradition defined not only what it meant to be a scholar, but also what it meant to be powerful. One's success in these two areas was determined through an educational and examination system that aimed to bring the most learned men in the realm into the service of the state—not because they had been trained in statecraft, or tax collection (just the opposite)—but because of a deep learning in what we would today call the "humanities" and a belief in the perfectibility of man through moral education and proper conduct according to one's status. Imperial officials had studied, memorized, chanted, and metaphorically consumed classical texts, and in office they were expected to act according the principles of human behavior set out by the *Analects,* the *Mencius*, and other great works. There has perhaps never been a higher ideal for government: good people embarking on the living study of great books in order to do good work in society. Even in periods of imperial decay, the ideals of Chinese culture spread far, deeply, and enduringly across East Asia.

China has been isolated Particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholarship on China (and indeed *in* China) emphasized China's insularity vis-à-vis other cultures before being blown open to the world in the era of Western imperialism. There are, to be sure, both symbols and monuments of Chinese defensiveness, such as the Great Wall, built mostly as an anti-Mongol defense perimeter during the Ming dynasty. But for the large majority of the imperial era, China-based empires crossed (often loosely defined) borders routinely, and for good reason: to engage in trade; to adjudicate diplomatic disputes; and to fight wars against external threats—perhaps, unhappily, the most common of human "international relations."

Figure A Changing Borders of Chinese Dynasties

Source: Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Figure B Macroregions of China



Source: Esherick, J. W. & Rankin, M. B., eds. 1990. *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

The Han dynasty, for example, held trade and political relations with what are now Manchuria, Korea, and Vietnam, and sent envoys along what much later would be called the "Silk Road." Before and during the Tang period, travelers from all over the world, including Japan, India, and West Asia, were welcomed into the realm. With merchants and monks came new cultural and religious influences, the most important of which was Buddhism, whose transformative influence can be compared only to that of the much later "opening" to the West in the nineteenth century. In the era of the Southern Song (1127–1279), its capital of Hangzhou was among the most cosmopolitan cities on earth and a center of Eurasian trades in silk and spices. Under the Yuan, even an Italian (Marco Polo!) could famously travel, trade, and serve the court of Kublai Khan. In the Ming, the great naval expeditions of Admiral Zheng He far surpassed in scope and ambition those of contemporary Spanish and Portuguese explorers.

In the late imperial period, Chinese entrepreneurs also moved abroad, maintaining ties with their mainland families. Today, the Chinese diaspora population has reached approximately 40 million and while it is most concentrated in Asia—in such places as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Burma, and the Philippines—the Americas (6 million) and Europe (2 million) also have long- and well-established "overseas Chinese" populations. Beyond this, perhaps 750,000 citizens of the People's Republic are currently working in African countries. As we shall see, modern and contemporary Chinese history would be defined above all by China's determination to interact with, and learn from, the wider world. Modern efforts to isolate China, notably by Mao Zedong in the "Cultural Revolution," would prove futile and short-lived.

China could not develop capitalism The conventional view of earlier Chinese and Western scholarship was that imperial states denigrated commercial activity and kept China from realizing all but the "sprouts" of capitalism. In the ideal social hierarchy there were indeed four major categories of people, in which merchants were placed on the lowest rung. This ordering reflects a Confucian bias against profit and hence against capitalists, though perhaps no more so than the invocations against profit and usury that marked Christian Europe. Late imperial China, however, was an autocracy with sizeable realms of freedom, and—certainly compared to Europe until the nineteenth century—a remarkably free economy. China under the Qing dynasty developed a highly commercialized economy; and the Chinese under Qing rule had the freedom to "transact" to a degree that was greater than that of most European states, at least until the nineteenth century. Land was freely alienable. It was bought and sold, rented and worked, all subject to the forces of the market. Late imperial China had its landed elites, to be sure, but no *Junkertum* or similar class of hereditary estate holders. Nor did serfdom exist in any measure like that of Eastern Europe, where it persisted into the second half of the nineteenth century. The population was registered, but it was essentially free to move throughout much of the realm, and even to areas officially off-limits, such as Manchuria, there were enormous migratory flows. Not just land and people, but goods flowed largely unimpeded by government regulation. State monopolies all but disappeared. Domestic trade was subject to few administrative barriers and—by any comparative measure—remarkably low taxes. Local and long-distance banking systems grew.

Central to all of this was the development and protection of property rights and the *de facto* sanctity of the contract. Even without a formal commercial code and in the absence of a system of legal precedents, rights and obligations negotiated in contract were normally upheld in magistrates' courts. This upholding in turn facilitated the growth of more extended forms of private enterprise, such as shareholding partnerships—be they in farming, mining, or commerce. "Corporations" formed around guilds and family lineages would be joined by joint-stock business partnerships, several of which developed into very sizeable commercial firms long before the establishment of the company laws of the twentieth century.

In short, by the late imperial period, China was a lively and dynamic setting for various commercial pursuits, from mobile street peddling and small shops to massive domestic trade in bulk commodities, long-distance banking, "chains" of retail stores, and large flows in international commerce. What's more, the institutional framework surrounding the vibrant capitalism of late imperial China was well developed, with high levels of commercialization, monetization, and accepted regulatory guidelines. This great commercial economy—and, more accurately, the large regional economies that composed it—played a significant role in global flows of goods and specie, and would be further internationalized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All this could be—and would be—destroyed by Chinese Communism, but not, as it turns out, for long.

2. *Lessons of Modern Chinese History*

The collapse of the Qing in 1911 ushered in an era of enormous uncertainty, challenge, and opportunity. To make the point again: "China" as a political entity did not exist until 1912, when the Republic of China—Asia's first republic—was proclaimed as the successor to Manchu rule. It was not yet a nation-state. To be sure, if we look at certain distinguishing attributes of nineteenth century European nation-states, such as professional standing armies, investment in economic development, and the articulation of "national" goals promoted from generation to generation, then it can surely be argued that the Qing was becoming such a state. But of course the Great Qing Empire was not a simply Chinese state. It was also comprised of the Manchurian homeland, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, among its far-flung parts. It borrowed freely from Inner-Asian and Manchu as well as from Chinese political traditions. In the nineteenth century, moreover, the Qing was in the process of reinventing itself again with the appropriation of European institutions and officials. In its final years in the early twentieth century, modern "state-building" reforms were accompanied by an effort to reassert the Manchu-ness of Qing leadership.

"China," then, had to be created as a new country. The great scholar Liang Qichao had lamented in 1900 that his compatriots had no idea what "country" they were living in. They referred to it by *chaodai,* by the name of the ruling dynasty. "China" (*zhongguo*), Liang wrote unhappily but accurately, "is what people of other races call us. It is not a name the people of this country have selected for themselves."[1] Indeed, as late as the 1930s, farmers near the national capital of Nanjing still referred to their country simply as The Great State (*daguo*).

The world into which the Chinese Republic was born was still a world of empires. These multinational, multicultural, spatial regimes included the Ottoman, Romanov, and Habsburg empires, which had their roots in medieval and early modern times; they included the "new" *imperia* of the British and the French, who together governed most of Africa, all of the Indian subcontinent, and much of Indo-China; and they included the *Da Qing Guo*, the Great Qing Empire of the Manchus. In the first half of the twentieth century, these imperial regimes would be joined by more cohesive states, such as Germany and Japan, that sought to be, and claimed the title of, empires.

Today, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, all but one of these empires has disappeared. The Ottomans have given way to a small and secular Turkish national state, as well as to a series of ethnic and religious states and proto-states in contemporary North Africa and the Middle East. The Romanov and later Soviet empires have broken up into a multitude of national or ethnic regimes. Austria and Hungary have long since gone their separate ways, while the Habsburg lands in the Balkans can look back on nearly a century of murderous nationalisms. The British have lost their entire empire, which is feebly remembered in the form of the "Commonwealth," and even the future

[1] See John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China* (Stanford, 1996), 117, 366n.

of the United Kingdom as a unified state is open to question. And *la France d'outre-mer* no longer crosses the Mediterranean.

Today, of all the world's empires that existed a century ago, only the Qing remains as a bordered political community, albeit without the Manchus. This is a remarkable achievement, but it has not come easily. For the empire gave way not to one but to several Chinas, to at least four alternative conceptions of a republic, and to decades of contestation, still ongoing, as to what "China" should or will be. Here we might reflect on several questions that were unanswered when the empire fell in 1911. Who would constitute the "Chinese" people of the new Chinese nation-state? How large would "China" be? How would China interact with the wider world? How would China be governed?

Who is Chinese? The post-imperial era may be defined, in part, as one defined by the quest to build a modern nation-state, in particular by extending the boundaries of the Chinese nation (in the sense of *minzu*, or national-racial identity) to be coterminous with the reach of the sovereign power of the state. The first republic took, in 1912, a liberal and inclusive approach, emphasizing in its five-bar national flag that the Republic of China consisted of Han (i.e., Chinese), Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, and Muslims—such generosity perhaps befitting a China-based government whose real political reach into non-Han areas of the old Qing was quite limited. At the same time, even a weak republic had ambitions for cultural and, especially, linguistic unity: the principle of "one state, one people, one language."

The reach of the later Nationalist (Kuomintang) state, which ruled the mainland from 1927 to 1949, was limited too, yet it pursued a more strongly racial nationalism, symbolized by Sun Yatsen's one-sun flag and his belief that, just as the Chinese "race" had defeated the alien Manchus, "the authority to rule China was placed back in the hands of the Han people and China's territories were all bestowed on the Han race."[2] Even though the People's Republic of China (PRC), established in 1949, would promise to restore "autonomy" to selected "national minorities," and would in its own flag attempt to symbolize the country's diversity, its rule, too, would be marked by the overwhelming political dominance of Han Chinese in the governance of the former Qing realm. (So much so that in recent years, great Qing emperors such as Kangxi and Qianlong could be posthumously elevated in film and textbook to the status of Chinese patriots.) In the PRC, after all, one could be Tibetan, Uighur, or Mongolian, and still be a *zhongguoren*, a "Chinese" and a citizen of the People's Republic of *China*. The presumption of Han dominance would extend even to overseas "Chinese" until the 1960s. Although members of the Chinese diaspora might well include non-Han emigrants, all were nonetheless citizens of "China"—should they wish to claim that right and that passport.

Yet that assertion of extended sovereignty over "Chinese" the world over has been withdrawn in recent decades, and the question of "who is a Chinese?" has been re-opened by cultural and political debates across the Taiwan Strait in the 1990s. Former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's *liangguo lun* might be translated by the PRC as a theory of two "states," but it could be equally well understood (and was more likely intended) as a theory of the coexistence of two "nations" on either side of the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan's linguistic distancing from "China" is clear to anyone who follows official rhetoric on that island. As late as the 1980s the PRC would be referred to as *zhonggong* ("the Chinese Communists") or *dalu* ("the mainland"). Now—and for all political parties—it is simply *zhongguo* ("China"), as distinct from Taiwan. We are all *huaren*, says Taiwan's president, Chen Shui-bian (coining a fuzzy term for anyone descended of the Chinese cultural realm), but we are not all *zhongguoren*. So the covers of passports of the Republic of China will now tell the world, in English, that they are "Issued in Taiwan."

[2] Cited in Fitzgerald, 183.

China's borders The question of who is "Chinese" is directly related to the capacity of the Chinese state to demarcate and defend borders. As we have seen, Chinese history has seen much disunity as well as unity, and no *Chinese* empire had ever been as big for so long as the Qing realm of the Manchus. The first decade of the twentieth century was full of portends of its dissolution. But the striking fact of the twentieth century was that this space was not only redefined as "Chinese" and as the sacred soil of "China," but also defended diplomatically and militarily to such a degree that the borders of the People's Republic of China today are essentially those of the Qing, minus only Outer Mongolia. The Qing fell but its empire remained.

The legitimacy of this national project was recognized by the world at large in bilateral agreements and in multilateral organizations (such as the League of Nations). These borders have enjoyed international diplomatic recognition since 1912, because the great powers of the day continued to believe—rightly—that a divided China would be a source of international instability. But it was the job of Chinese governments, not foreigners, to defend these borders. They did so with impressive success.

Chiang Kaishek's Nationalist government held on to at least nominal title to areas that the Manchus had governed but where the Chinese Republic had little power: in Tibet, for example, where the Nationalists, like the Communists after them, would undermine a stubbornly autonomous Dalai Lama by playing up the authority of a (China-friendly) Panchen Lama; or in the Muslim region of Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan), in the far northwest, where Chinese rule was reasserted in the mid-1940s after a period of Soviet occupation. In each instance China used forms of what we would call the nonrecognition doctrine: refusing to recognize anyone else's sovereignty until matters could be settled in China's favor. The non-recognition of unpleasant realities was carried to an art form in the case of Manchuria, which Japan occupied in 1931. It speaks volumes about the power of modern Chinese nationalism that China would mobilize for war—as it did in the 1930s—in defense of the *Manchu* homeland into which Chinese settlement had been permitted only since 1907. And it convinced the rest of the world not to legitimize Japan's conquest. If the case of Outer Mongolia turned out differently, this was perhaps because this was the one part of the old Qing Empire where people actually got to vote whether they would be part of the Chinese nation. Mongolians ratified their independence in the Stalinesque plebiscite of October 1945. With the Russians counting, the vote was 487,000 to nothing. (Chinese leaders may be forgiven for being wary of plebiscites ever since.)

This agenda of national unification was perpetuated not only by successive political leaders but also by strong continuity among foreign policy elites across regimes. The success of this enterprise is due in no small measure to the professionalism and tenacity of a Foreign Ministry whose bureaucratic lineage dates back to the reforms of the late Qing and to the first republic. Anyone who has received an official protest from China's Foreign Ministry (as our university once has, in protest against Harvard's alleged "two China" policies) must stand in awe of an indefatigable sense of mission, across generations.

Here, too, as in the case of "Chineseness," the big test remains the question of Taiwan. Curiously enough, for most of the first half of the twentieth century, Taiwan was not *terra irredenta*, like Manchuria, but quite literally off China's map. Taiwan was not part of the Qing when it collapsed, because it had been ceded to Japan as the victor in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. No republican government challenged Japan's right to Taiwan until 1943, when Japan's defeat in World War II seemed likely. Indeed, the second republic established a Chinese consulate on Taiwan in the 1930s, and permitted tens of thousands of Taiwanese to live on the mainland as Japanese citizens. Only when the Nationalists made it their last bastion in 1949, and when the Americans intervened to protect them in 1950, did Taiwan's "liberation" become a national cause on the Chinese mainland. Yet the tenacity, obduracy, and overall *success* of China's twentieth-century diplomacy, which made

the most distant regions of the Manchu realm part of "China," help to explain the People's Republic's unyielding determination to "recover" an island that it has never governed for a single moment.

China's internationalization The demarcation of China's borders took place in a century of onrushing, inescapable, internationalization at home. There is a great misperception, particularly among businesspeople, that China "opened its doors" only in the last 30 years. This is not true. Not only did modern China inherit a rich tradition of interaction with the wider world, its own years of isolationism (ca. 1960–1972) were the great exception to the rule of China's international engagement in the twentieth century.

Engagement was essential, for example, if China was to rid itself of the humiliations of the imperialist era. At the beginning of the century, foreigners in China enjoyed extraordinary privileges, extracted at gunpoint and by treaty. Through tough, relentless negotiations, by the mid-1940s China had regained full control of its "inner borders," that is, over the territorial concessions, monopolies, and special legal rights once held by foreigners.

China's industrialization in the twentieth century is unthinkable without internationalization, for it was founded on an unprecedented opening to international economic influences. The 1910s and 1920s witnessed a new "golden age" of Chinese capitalism and the creation of a distinctly Chinese bourgeoisie. Although the Communist revolution would force Chinese capitalism into temporary exile on China's periphery, its return to China after 1978, in the form of investments from Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia, would be the driving force in the great boom of the 1980s and 1990s. The growth of modern state capitalism from the 1930s onwards was similarly dependent on foreign partners and investment. In the late twentieth century, when, as Chinese state industries rusted and decayed, foreign capital was sought to save them through "corporatization."

Chinese higher education has similarly been shaped by the world at large. Beijing University, China's most venerable, is little more than a century old, and resides on the campus of the old Yenching University, which began as a missionary college. American, European, and Soviet models of higher education have each had their impact on the training of modern Chinese intellectuals. And waves of Chinese students have studied abroad: in Japan in the 1900s; in America in the 1910s and 1920s; in Germany in the 1930s; in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1950s; and again, on a massive scale, in the United States and elsewhere since the 1980s. Only in the last case can one speak of a "brain drain" from China; and to judge from the case of Taiwan, which sent thousands of students to the U.S. beginning in the 1950s, it will be a temporary phenomenon.

Political partnership with foreign powers was vital to China's very survival in the middle decades of the century. In the 1930s and 1940s, China entered into alignments with three of the world's most powerful countries—Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States—in order to defend itself against the fourth, Japan. From 1942 to 1960, China sought security through formal alliances with two "superpowers," first with the United States, and then, after the Communist revolution, with the Soviet Union, in part to defend China *from* the United States.

Although, from an American perspective, China was "isolated" in the 1950s, China was never so deeply incorporated into an international system as it was in the hottest years of the Cold War. The Sino-Soviet alliance was the most fully articulated military alliance in China's history. It was an intense cultural and educational alliance, confirmed by the thousands of Chinese who studied in the USSR and the thousands of Russians who taught in China. And it was an economic alliance of greater depth and complexity than any of modern China's foreign economic relationships.

Most striking of all in the twentieth century was the self-conscious attempt to overhaul Chinese culture, particularly political culture, according to international categories. Every government sought

legitimacy in the context of one or another internationally authenticated "ism," from constitutionalism to communism.

Governing China It is ironic but inevitable that modern China, in seeking to be master of its own fate, has so consistently looked abroad for its models of government. No government believed that China's twentieth-century crises could be solved by a return to the Qing state. There were certainly no clear precedents in Chinese political history for the task of integrating a new set of social groups—among them a bourgeoisie, a proletariat, an intelligentsia, and a permanent, professional military—into the altogether new structure of a nation-state. Therefore, the twentieth century was a century of continual experimentation with political forms, not one of which was indigenous in origin: the parliamentary republic of 1912–1913; the military dictatorship of 1913–1916; the attempt at constitutional monarchy in 1916; the "Confucian fascism" of Chiang Kaishek; and the several forms of communism under Mao Zedong and his successors.

Since the 1920s this experimentation has taken place within the framework of one enduring institution, the Leninist Party-State, of which there have been two incarnations—Nationalist and Communist. The Party-State is a *one*-party state. Sun Yatsen, the father of the Nationalist state, defined its mission as that of tutoring the Chinese people for democracy. "Tutelage" was to last six years. For Chinese under Nationalist rule on the mainland and on Taiwan, it lasted sixty. And when the Nationalists were ousted from the mainland in 1949, they were replaced by the other Chinese Party-State, that of the Communists, in an intensification of Party-State rule that has survived until the present day.

The Party's purpose was not only to lead the government, but also to remake the Chinese people, to forge a citizenry for the new nation-state. Chiang Kaishek's New Life Movement of the mid-1930s aimed to discipline an undisciplined populace, to give it a sense of obligation to the nation. Mao Zedong would take this transformative effort in a much different direction in his "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" of the 1960s.

The Party-State was a developmental state. It aimed to mobilize and industrialize China from the top down. Sun Yatsen's famous work, *The International Development of China* (1921), was the first attempt to plot out the integrated economic development of a reunified China. It remains the most audacious and—still today, many Three-, Four-, Five-, and Ten-Year Plans later—the most memorable of national development programs. Sun's faith that international capital could be mobilized to construct Chinese socialism would be shared widely by Nationalist and Communist leaders. Sun's more concrete plans also left their mark. His two-paragraph proposal to "improve the upper Yangzi" with an enormous dam spawned 75 years of effort and debate before work on the Three Gorges Dam finally began in the mid-1990s.

The Party-State was also a military state. Both the Nationalists and the Communists fought their way to power in the first half of the twentieth century, when China had more men under arms than any other part of the world. Western militarism (in its Soviet, German, and American national forms) was undoubtedly the single most successful cultural export from the West to China. Militarily defeated on the mainland, the Nationalists governed Taiwan on the formal basis of martial law until 1987. It was under Communist rule, however, that militarization would be taken furthest. Whereas the Nationalist military took oaths to defend the nation, the People's Liberation Army swore to uphold the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. This they did in the Tiananmen Incident of 1989. Through the 1990s, a significant part of the state sector of the economy (no one knows for sure how much) was owned and operated directly by the military. The People's Liberation Army, Incorporated, had become a state within the Party-State.

The Party-State had a Leader. The formal titles given first to Sun Yatsen, Chiang Kaishek, and Mao Zedong hardly capture the spirit and scope of these leaders' domination over their followers. Until very recently, both the Nationalist and Communist Party-States were led by a series of leadership cliques that are understood better as conspiratorial brotherhoods rather than as political factions. In short, for much of the twentieth century China was ruled by a very small group of men (one to two dozen) under one Leader. Whether as a continuation of monarchical political culture or as an example of Soviet and fascist influence, the Chinese Party-State demanded a single head, a *yuanshou*—as the term *Führer* used to be translated into Chinese. Whether the Party-State can survive political competition (as in Taiwan) or collective leadership (in the PRC) remains to be seen.

Lessons The emphasis on personal leadership reveals the greatest weakness of the Party-State: its inability to work together with civilian elites to erect an enduring, self-replicating system of government. Civilians could serve the Party-State, but could not govern separately from it. Like the Nationalist Party-State that preceded it (and the Manchu conquerors that preceded it), the People's Republic began as a military conquest regime. But as the old political wisdom goes: one conquers from horseback, but one cannot rule from horseback. Unlike the Manchus, who ruled China for 267 years, and unlike every other successful ruling house in Chinese history, by the early twentieth century the Chinese Communist Party had yet to show that its power could be transferred to, or even shared with, civilian political and legal institutions with enduring legitimacy. By contrast, the Nationalists, who moved to Taiwan after their defeat on the mainland in 1949, learned to cohabit with the sober-minded, authoritarian technocrats who guided Taiwan's economic miracle. But even these elites never exercised political power independent of the Party-State and never fundamentally challenged it. Even after the end of Party "tutelage" on Taiwan in 1987, certain habits of the Party-State died hard: in the late 1990s, after a decade of democratic reforms, the Kuomintang's Central Executive Committee still met every Wednesday to set the agenda for the government Cabinet meetings on Thursday.

Pressures for Taiwan's eventual democratization would come from other quarters, above all from the Taiwanese majority who had long chafed under Nationalist Chinese rule. Is this a portent for other regions? Will ethnic challenges lead the process of political change in China itself? It is too early to say. But the evolution of a democratic, autonomous Taiwan in the past decade allows us to recast the question of China's "reunification." From the perspective of history, we may ask not how soon will Taiwan become enfolded in the arms of the motherland, but how long can China hold on to historically non-Chinese areas that were captured as part of the old empire, like Tibet, or Xinjiang? In the short run, the Chinese state is surely strong enough to retain these regions. But from a longer perspective, we must remember that no Chinese empire, ever, has been so big, for so long, as the empire of the Great Qing and its twentieth-century successors. If it is ultimately to get smaller, like all Chinese dynasties that preceded it, or simply "looser"—the Qing's great genius was to rule these territories with a "loose rein"—how it does so, and if it can do so peaceably, will be of enormous importance.

Ultimately the key to China's future lies in the great, unresolved question of the twentieth century: what kind of political system will, in the long run, take the place of the old empire? Chinese governments have been much more successful in defending territory and sovereignty than they have been in erecting stable political systems. Save for the 1990s, every decade in the twentieth century witnessed a major political upheaval. If twentieth-century history is any guide, when political change comes in China, it will be closely related to international political and intellectual currents.

For the present, as the immediate successor in our century to the old imperial system, the Chinese Party-State has shown that it can do many things better. It can organize. It can industrialize. It can militarize. And it can terrorize. But unlike that system that disappeared in 1911, it has not yet shown

that it can *civilize*. One may use that term in two senses: first, to re-establish a lasting system of *civil* service, and indeed to institutionalize civilian rule, using the great talent of the Chinese people; and, second, to stand for something enduring in human values—for a civilization that goes beyond political control, material development, and martial strength. This was the great strength of the old empire, for all its limitations. This was how its influence radiated throughout East Asia. Perhaps this will be the quest of political structures still unformed, once the Party-State has finally had its day.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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