

# Mathematics Level 7

## Chapter 5 — Investigation: Asia (1750–present): China

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# Qing China, 1700s–1800s: how the empire worked

**Curriculum:** VC2HH10K24

**Taught society:** China — the Qing dynasty. Chapter 5 of this book teaches the Asia investigation through China (the book’s recorded choice; see TOC decision D9).

**Linked elaborations (taught, China block):** VC2HH10K24.E01 VC2HH10K24.E02

Note: the remaining blocks of this content description (VC2HH10K24.E03–E14) cover the other society choices — India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam. They remain valid link keys for other builds and other choices, but they are not this book’s taught case.

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## Theory

This section looks inside one of the largest and most powerful states of the 1700s and 1800s: the **Qing dynasty** of China. A **dynasty** is a period of rule by one family line, passed from one ruler to the next. The Qing dynasty is the society studied here, and the section works through its main **political, economic, social** and **cultural** features, then examines the **ethnic and linguistic diversity** that made the Qing so unusual for its time.

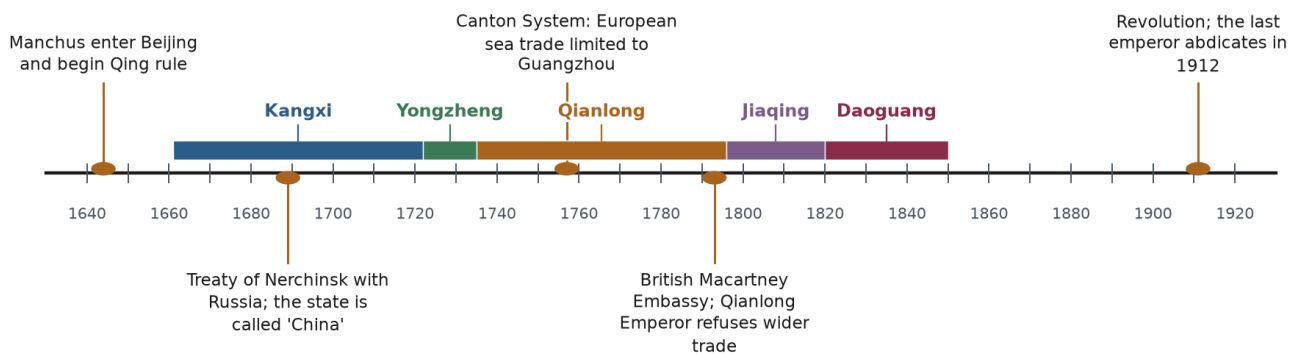
### Part 1 — Who were the Qing, and when did they rule? (context)

The Qing were not the first family line to rule China, and they were not Han Chinese. The **Manchus**, a people from the forests and plains of the north-east, built the dynasty. In the early 1600s a Manchu leader named **Nurhaci** united the Manchu clans and organised his people and soldiers into units called **banners** (the **Eight Banners**). His successors finished the conquest of China, and in **1644** the Manchus entered the capital, **Beijing**, and made it their own. The Qing then ruled China until **1911–1912**.

The 18th century was the high point of Qing strength. Three long-reigning emperors — **Kangxi** (ruled 1661–1722), **Yongzheng** (1722–1735) and **Qianlong** (1735–1796) — kept the empire strong, enlarged its borders and oversaw long stretches of peace and growth. Historians sometimes call this the era of the “High Qing”. The 19th century, by contrast, brought growing strain: a huge and rising population, corruption at court, and pressure from foreign powers. The contact and conflict with those powers are studied in the next section (5B); this section is about the features of Qing society itself.

# The Qing dynasty, 1644-1912

From the Manchu conquest of Beijing to the end of imperial rule



*Reign dates follow the standard list of Qing emperors; the 'High Qing' ran through the 18th century (retrieved 26 August 2026).*

*Timeline of the Qing dynasty from the Manchu conquest of Beijing in 1644 to imperial rule ending in 1912, marking the reigns of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong, Jiaqing and Daoguang emperors and key events*

## Part 2 — Political features: the emperor and how China was governed (VC2HH10K24.E01)

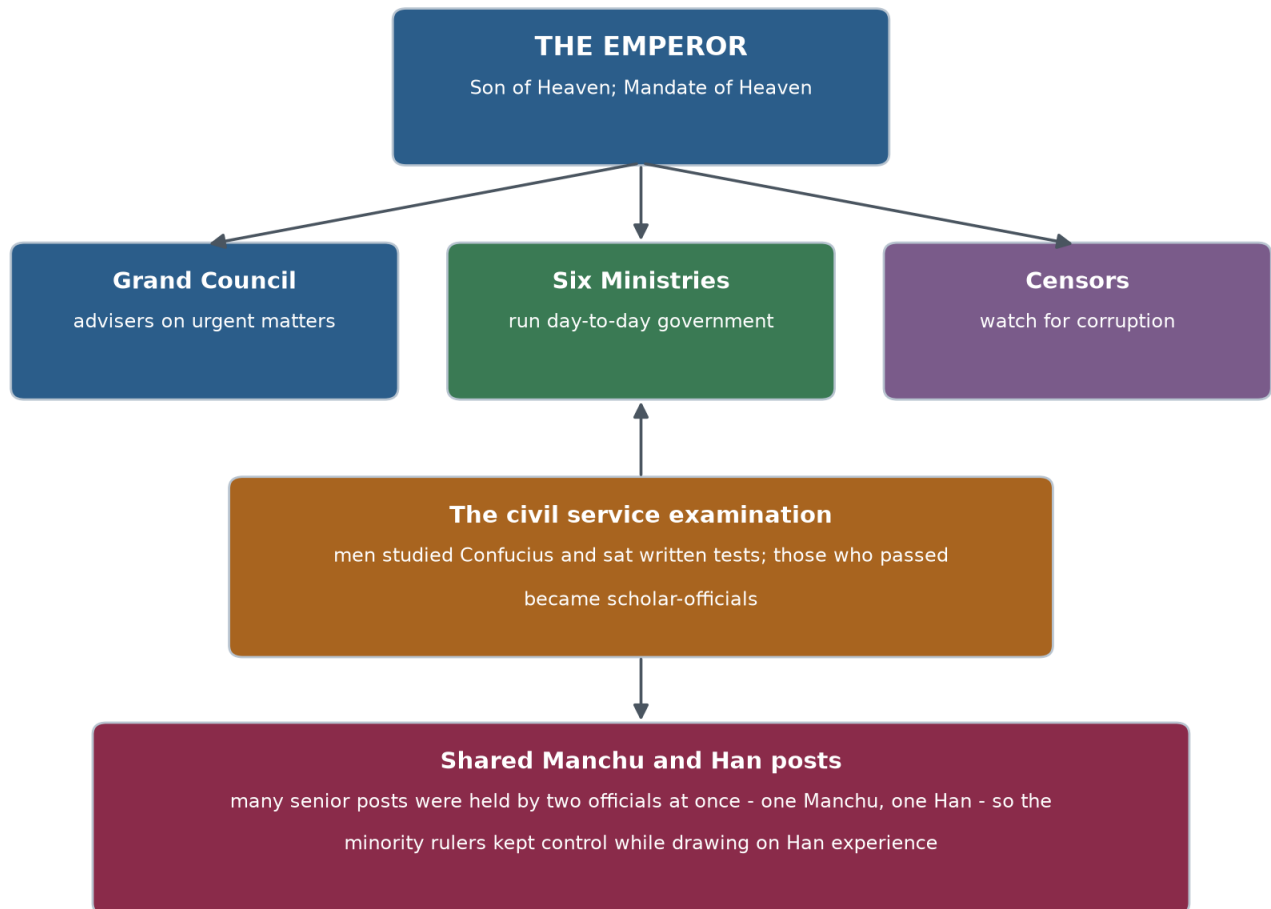
At the top of Qing government stood the **emperor**. Chinese emperors were regarded as the **Sons of Heaven**, holding a **Mandate of Heaven**: the idea that Heaven gave the right to rule to a just ruler and could take it away from an unjust one. The emperor made the final decisions on war and peace, law, taxes and the appointment of officials, and he lived in the walled **Forbidden City** palace in Beijing.

The emperor could not run an empire this large alone, so the Qing built an organised government around him.

- **The Grand Council.** Under the Yongzheng Emperor a small body called the **Grand Council** became the emperor's main group of advisers. It dealt with urgent matters such as war and frontier affairs, and reported straight to the emperor.
- **The Six Ministries.** Day-to-day government was carried out by six ministries — for officials, for revenue (money and taxes), for rites and ceremonies, for war, for justice, and for public works.
- **The civil service examination.** This is one of the most important political and social features of Qing China. For over a thousand years China had chosen many of its officials through written **examinations**. Boys and men studied the works of the thinker **Confucius** and his followers, then sat hard written tests. Those who passed earned the status of **scholar-officials** and could be appointed to govern. The system meant that status could be won by learning, not only by birth.
- **Shared Manchu and Han posts.** Because the Manchus ruled a mostly Han Chinese population, many senior posts were held by **two officials at once** — **one Manchu and one Han**. This helped the minority Manchu rulers keep control while drawing on Han officials' experience.
- **Censors.** A group of officials called **censors** watched for corruption and could report officials who did their jobs badly.

# How Qing China was governed

The emperor stood at the top, with bodies below to advise, decide and carry out policy



*Structure as commonly described for Qing government (retrieved 26 August 2026).*

*Diagram of Qing government with the emperor at the top, linked to the Grand Council and the Six Ministries, and with the civil service examination feeding scholar-officials into the system*

## Part 3 — Economic features: farming, population and trade (VC2HH10K24.E01)

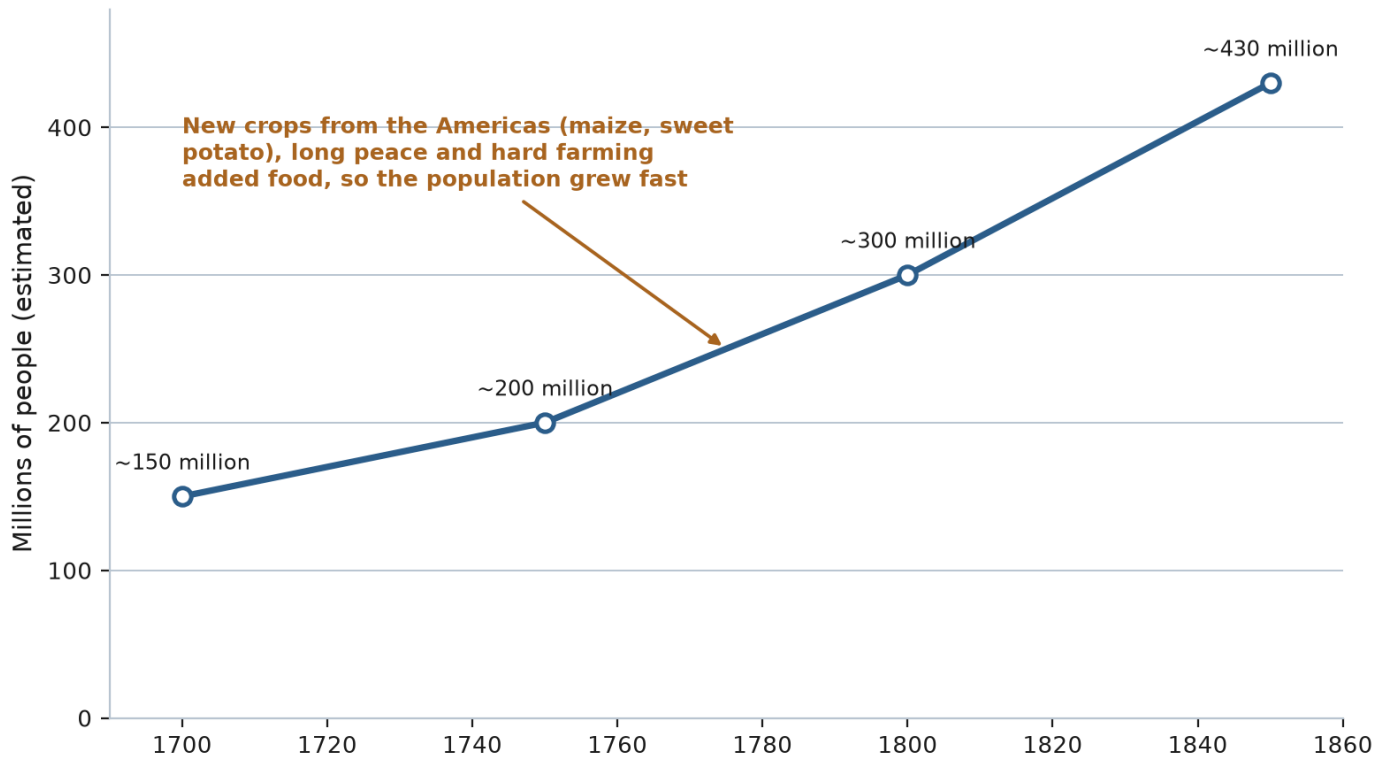
The Qing economy was, above all, an economy of the land. Its most striking features were its farming, its fast-growing population, and the way it managed trade with Europeans.

**Farming was the base.** Most people worked the land. In the wet south farmers grew **rice**; in the drier north they grew **wheat** and millet. China also produced **tea**, **silk** (from silkworms) and cotton. Farming was seen as the most important kind of work, and emperors sometimes took part in ceremonies to honour it.

**New crops fed more people.** During this period, crops first grown in the Americas — **maize (corn)**, the **sweet potato**, the **potato**, **peanuts** and chillies — spread across China. These crops grew on poor soils and on hillsides where rice could not grow, so they added a great deal of food.

**Population grew fast.** More food, long peace and hard work on the land meant the number of people rose quickly. Historians estimate the population roughly doubled between 1700 and 1800, and kept rising after. This growth was a source of strength, but by the 19th century it also put pressure on the amount of land available.

## Estimated population of Qing China, 1700-1850



*Estimates for Qing China as commonly recorded by historians (figures retrieved 26 August 2026).*

*Chart showing estimated population of Qing China rising from about 150 million in 1700 to about 200 million in 1750, 300 million in 1800 and 430 million in 1850*

*Population estimates for Qing China as commonly recorded by historians (figures retrieved 26 August 2026).*

**Manufactures and trade.** China was famous for goods made by skilled hand-work: **silk**, **tea** and **porcelain** (fine ceramic ware, often called “china”). These were prized across Asia and, increasingly, in Europe. Inside China, the **Grand Canal** carried grain from the rice-growing south up to Beijing, and rivers and roads linked busy market towns.

**The Canton System.** In 1757 the Qianlong Emperor limited European sea trade to a single southern port, **Guangzhou** (known in English as **Canton**). There, a group of licensed Chinese merchants called the **cohong** dealt with the foreign traders. The system let the Qing keep a close watch on outside contact and control what was bought and sold.

## The Canton System of trade (from 1757)

The Qianlong Emperor limited European sea trade to one port and kept close control



### Why the Qing did this

Keeping trade in one place through licensed merchants let the court watch outside contact closely, control what was bought and sold, and keep foreigners from moving freely through China.

*The Canton System as commonly described (retrieved 26 August 2026).*

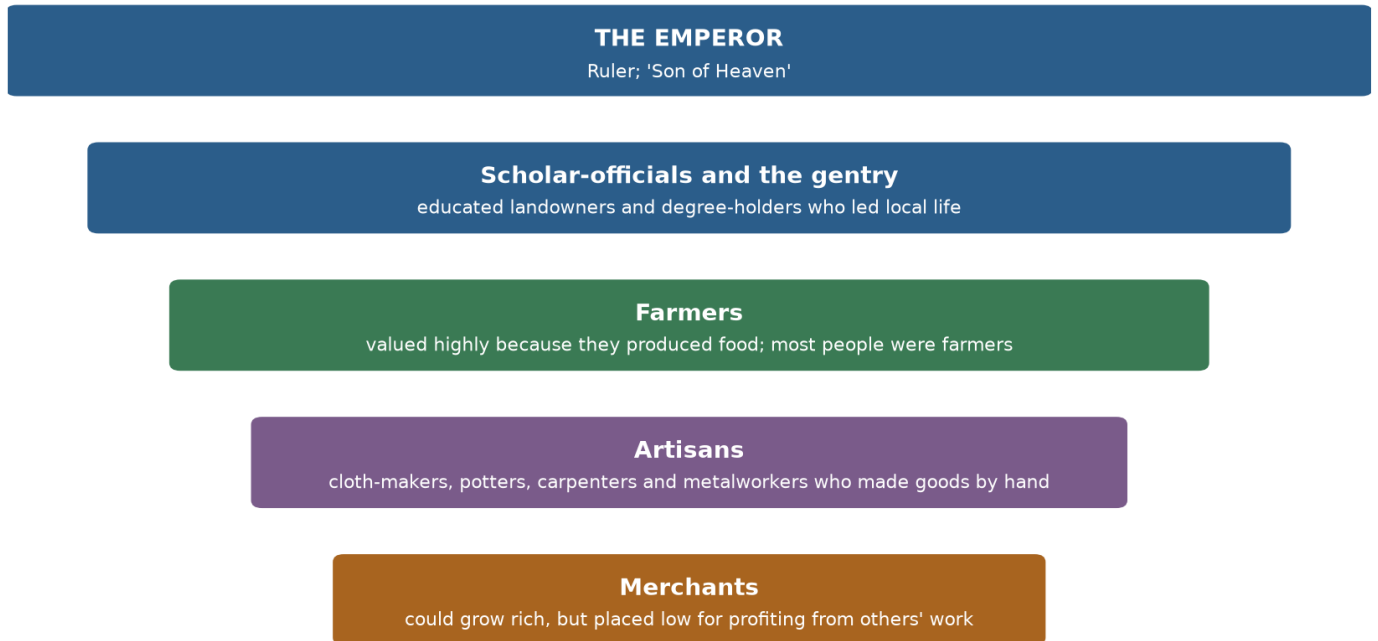
*Diagram of the Canton System, showing European ships arriving at the port of Guangzhou and trading only through the licensed cohong merchants under Qing rules*

### Part 4 — Social features: order, family and status

Qing society was strongly ordered. The picture below shows the broad ranks as Confucian ideas described them, with the emperor above all.

# The Qing social order

The broad ranks as Confucian ideas described them, with the emperor above all



*Confucian teaching ranked people by the value of their work to society, not by how much money they had.*

*Diagram of the Qing social order, with the emperor at the top and, below him, scholar-officials and gentry, then farmers, then artisans, then merchants*

- **Scholar-officials and the gentry** stood at the top of ordinary society. The **gentry** were educated landowners, often men who had passed examinations or held degrees. They led local life, settled disputes and paid for temples, schools and public works.
- **Farmers** were valued highly in theory because they produced food. Most ordinary people were farmers, and many were poor and worked small plots or rented land.
- **Artisans** made goods by hand — cloth-makers, potters, carpenters and metalworkers.
- **Merchants** traded goods and could grow rich, but Confucian teaching placed them low because they were seen as profiting from other people's work rather than making things.

**The family and respect for parents.** The family was the basic unit of society. A core Confucian value was **respect for one's parents and elders**: caring for them in old age and honouring ancestors. Families often lived together across generations, and elders held strong authority.

**Women.** Women's lives were centred on the home. Among Han families it was common to **bind the feet** of young girls so that the feet stayed very small. The practice was painful and made walking difficult, and it was valued as a mark of status and beauty. It was later criticised and eventually died out.

## Part 5 — Qing culture: art, books and buildings (VC2HH10K24.E01)

The Qing period produced some of China's most famous cultural achievements.

### Cultural features of Qing China

Achievements in art, literature and architecture

| Art                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Literature                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Architecture                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Landscape and court painting; court painters record emperors and events.</p> <p>Giuseppe Castiglione, an Italian Jesuit at the court from 1715, joins European and Chinese styles.</p> <p>Porcelain in huge amounts - blue-and-white and 'famille rose' ware - exported worldwide.</p> | <p>Dream of the Red Chamber by Cao Xueqin, a great family's rise and fall.</p> <p>The Scholars by Wu Jingzi; Strange Tales by Pu Songling.</p> <p>Book projects: the Kangxi Dictionary (1716) and the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries.</p> | <p>The Forbidden City, the imperial palace in Beijing.</p> <p>The Old Summer Palace (Yuanmingyuan), gardens and lakes, enlarged by 18th-century emperors.</p> <p>Temples, pagodas and city walls; Buddhist temples in Tibet and Mongolia.</p> |

*Named examples commonly recorded for Qing culture (retrieved 26 August 2026).*

*Table of Qing cultural features across three columns for art, literature and architecture, each with named examples*

**Art.** Qing painters kept alive the great tradition of landscape painting, and the court employed painters to record emperors, battles and ceremonies. A striking example of cultural mixing was **Giuseppe Castiglione**, an Italian Jesuit priest who worked at the Qing court from 1715 and painted in a style that joined European and Chinese ways of seeing. Qing **porcelain** — above all the blue-and-white ware and colourful “famille rose” ware — was made in huge quantities and exported across the world.

**Literature.** This era saw some of China's greatest novels. **Dream of the Red Chamber** by **Cao Xueqin** (mid-18th century) is a long novel about the rise and fall of a great family and is counted one of China's masterpieces. Other well-known works include **The Scholars** by Wu Jingzi and **Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio** by Pu Songling. The emperors also backed huge book projects: the **Kangxi Dictionary** (1716) gathered the written language, and under Qianlong officials gathered thousands of works into a vast library called the **Complete Library of the Four Treasuries**.

**Architecture.** The emperors built and kept up grand buildings. The **Forbidden City** in Beijing was the imperial palace; the **Old Summer Palace** (Yuanmingyuan), with its gardens and lakes, was greatly enlarged by the 18th-century emperors. Temples, pagodas and city walls dotted the empire, and the Qing also supported great buildings in the regions they ruled, such as Buddhist temples in Tibet and Mongolia.

## Part 6 — Ethnic and linguistic diversity (VC2HH10K24.E02)

The Qing was not a single-people state. It was a large **multi-ethnic** empire, and this diversity is a key feature of the society.

- **The Manchus** were the ruling people but a small minority.
- **The Han Chinese** were by far the largest group and the heart of the farming and city economy.
- **The Mongols** lived to the north and north-west; many were herders and skilled horsemen.
- **Tibetans** lived on the high lands of the south-west, and the Qing emperors acted as patrons of Tibetan Buddhism.
- **Uyghurs** and other Muslim peoples lived in the far north-west, in the region the Qing called **Xinjiang** (“new frontier”), which Qianlong brought under firm control in the 1750s.
- Peoples of the south-west, such as the **Miao**, and the peoples of Manchuria in the north-east, added to the mix.

**Many languages.** These groups spoke different languages: **Manchu**, **Chinese**, **Mongolian**, **Tibetan**, and the Turkic languages of Xinjiang. Manchu had its own written form, adapted from Mongolian writing, and the court kept records in both Manchu and Chinese, and sometimes in the other languages too.

**How one emperor ruled many peoples.** A clever feature of Qing rule was that the emperors presented themselves in different ways to different subjects. To the Han Chinese they acted as a traditional Confucian **emperor**; to the Mongols they acted as a **khan** (a steppe ruler); and to Tibetans and Mongols they presented themselves as supporters of **Buddhism**. The Eight Banners themselves were split into Manchu, Mongol and Han units. In this way a small ruling people held together a very large and varied empire.

## The Qing empire's ethnic and linguistic diversity

One state ruled over many peoples, each with its own region and language

| People                              | Main region             | Main language       |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Manchus</b>                      | North-east              | Manchu (own script) |
| <b>Han Chinese</b>                  | China proper            | Chinese             |
| <b>Mongols</b>                      | North & north-west      | Mongolian           |
| <b>Tibetans</b>                     | South-west highlands    | Tibetan             |
| <b>Uyghurs &amp; Muslim peoples</b> | Xinjiang (north-west)   | Turkic languages    |
| <b>Miao &amp; others</b>            | South-west & north-east | Various             |

*The Manchus ruled as a small minority over a far larger Han population, alongside Mongols, Tibetans, Uyghurs and others (retrieved 26 August 2026).*

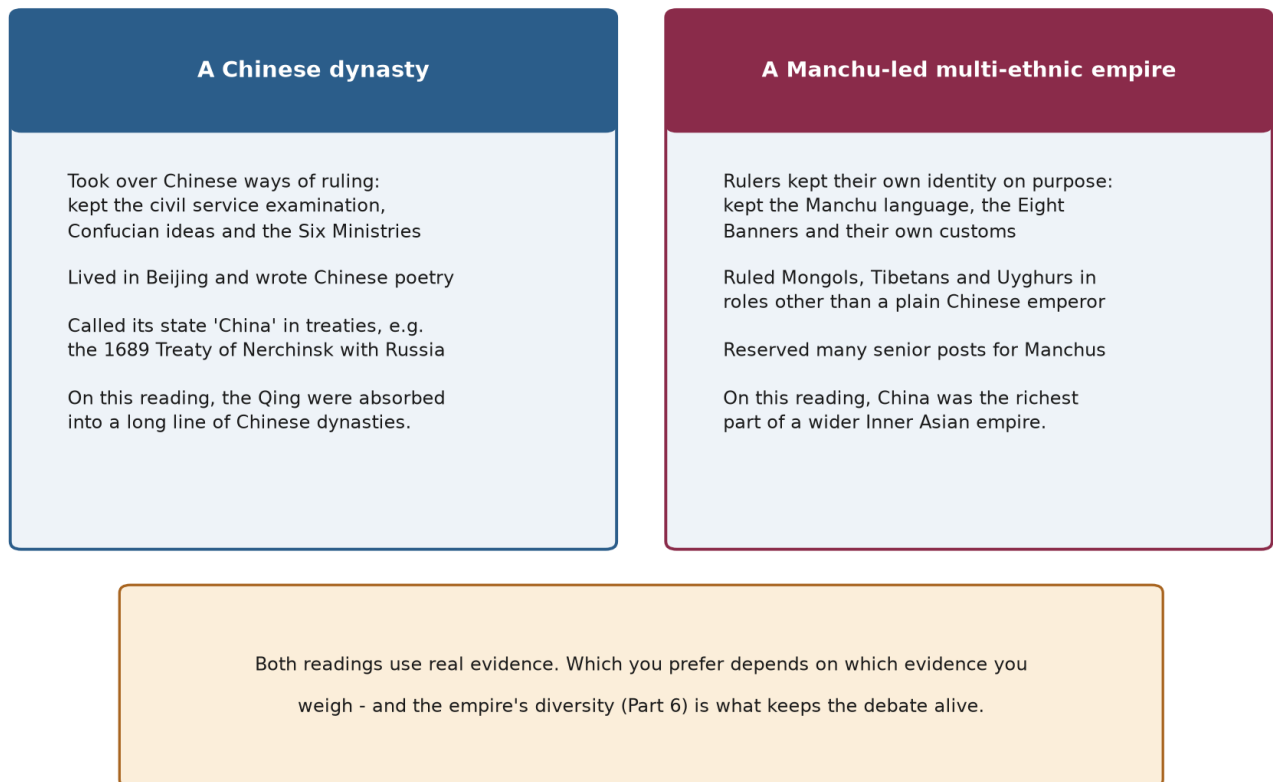
*Diagram of the Qing empire's ethnic and linguistic diversity, listing the Manchu, Han, Mongol, Tibetan, Uyghur and Miao peoples with their main regions and languages*

### Part 7 — A matter of interpretation: a Chinese dynasty, or a multi-ethnic empire?

Historians disagree about how best to understand the Qing, and each side has a fair case. This is not just a quibble about words: how you describe the Qing changes what you think mattered most about it.

## How should we understand the Qing?

Two readings, each with real evidence behind it



*A simplified version of a real debate among historians of the Qing.*

*Diagram presenting the strongest version of two positions on the Qing, one stressing its rule as a Chinese dynasty and the other stressing its character as a Manchu-led multi-ethnic empire*

**Position 1 — the Qing as a Chinese dynasty.** This view stresses how much the Qing took over Chinese ways of ruling. They kept the civil service examination, used Confucian ideas, lived in Beijing, wrote Chinese poetry and ran the Six Ministries. The state called itself **China** in treaties with other powers (for example, the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia). On this reading, the Qing were absorbed into a long line of Chinese dynasties.

**Position 2 — the Qing as a Manchu-led multi-ethnic empire.** This view stresses that the rulers kept their own identity on purpose. Manchus kept the Manchu language, the Eight Banners and their own customs; the emperors ruled Mongols, Tibetans and Uyghurs as something other than a plain Chinese emperor; and many senior posts were reserved for Manchus. On this reading, China was one part — the richest and most populated part — of a wider Inner Asian empire.

Both positions use real evidence, and the answer depends on which evidence you weigh. The ethnic and linguistic diversity in Part 6 is exactly what keeps this debate alive.

## Worked source analyses

### Analysis 1 — Source A: the Qianlong Emperor's reply to Britain (scaffolded)

#### SOURCE A

*The Qianlong Emperor's reply to Britain*

'Ours is a Celestial Empire. It has all things in rich abundance and needs no product from outside its borders. There is therefore no need to bring in the goods of foreign countries in exchange for our own ... As for your request for a representative to live in Beijing, this cannot be granted ... The trade of your country has long been carried on at Canton and will continue to be so.'

Edict of the Qianlong Emperor to King George III of Britain, 1793, in reply to the Macartney Embassy's request for wider trade. Abridged and lightly modernised.

*Source A, an abridged 1793 edict of the Qianlong Emperor to King George III of Britain explaining that China has no need of foreign goods and that trade will continue at Canton*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** It is a **primary source**: an edict (a formal order or statement) issued in **1793** by the **Qianlong Emperor**, the ruler of Qing China, in reply to a British embassy that had asked for wider trade.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to refuse the British request and to explain why. It is meant to state the emperor's authority and his view that China does not need foreign goods, so we should expect it to present China as strong and self-sufficient.

**Step 3 — What does it say (content)?** It says that China "has all things in rich abundance" and needs nothing from outside its borders, so there is no need to import foreign goods. It refuses to let a British representative live in Beijing and confirms that trade will keep being carried on at Canton.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of the Qing court at the height of its confidence. The emperor calls China a "Celestial Empire" and refers to outsiders as foreigners with nothing to offer. A British merchant, eager to sell goods and open markets, would have given a very different account.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is very useful evidence of the Qing political and economic worldview and of the **Canton System** (Part 3): it shows that the Qing wanted to control outside contact and saw themselves as needing little from the world. Because it is written to project strength, a historian would **check it against** other evidence — such as records of the actual trade at Canton — rather than take every claim at face value.

## SOURCE B

*The Kangxi Emperor's Sacred Edict: rules for a well-ordered society*

Esteem most highly filial piety and brotherly duty, so that family ties are strong.

Be generous to your relatives, so that families live in harmony.

Value farming and the growing of mulberry for silk, so that there is enough food and clothing.

Practise thrift and saving, so that money is not wasted.

Train your sons and younger brothers, so that they do no wrong.

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The Kangxi Emperor's Sacred Edict (Shengyu), sixteen maxims issued in 1670; a selection shown here.  
Abridged and lightly modernised from the Qing court records.

*Source B, an abridged selection from the Kangxi Emperor's Sacred Edict of 1670, sixteen maxims setting out Confucian values for a well-ordered society*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** A **primary source**: a set of sixteen short maxims (rules for living) issued by the **Kangxi Emperor in 1670** to guide his people. Abridged here.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to teach moral and social order across the empire. It is an official instruction, meant to shape how people behave, so we should expect it to present the values the rulers wanted people to follow.

**Step 3 — What does it say (content)?** It tells people to honour their parents and elders, to live in harmony with their relatives and neighbours, to value farming so there is enough food, to save rather than waste, and to train their children to do no wrong.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of the emperor and the Confucian learning he promoted. It places the family, farming and good behaviour at the centre of a well-run society — the same values that underlie the social order in Part 4.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is strong evidence of the **social and cultural** features of Qing China: the importance of **respect for parents**, of farming, and of Confucian moral teaching. It tells us what rulers wanted society to be like; to learn how ordinary people actually lived, a historian would look for other evidence as well, such as records of villages, taxes and family life.

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## Practice questions

### Scaffolded

**Q1.** Look at the timeline. (a) In what year did the Manchus enter Beijing and begin Qing rule? (b) Name the three emperors who ruled during the “High Qing” of the 18th century. (*Hint: the timeline marks their reigns.*)

**Q2.** Using the government diagram, name (a) the emperor's main group of advisers for urgent matters and (b) the written tests used to choose officials. (*Hint: find the boxes linked to the emperor.*)

**Q3.** The population chart shows estimated numbers. (a) About how many people lived in Qing China in 1700? (b) About how many in 1850? (c) Give one reason the population grew. (*Hint: the text names new crops from the Americas.*)

**Q4.** From the Canton System diagram, state (a) the one port where European trade was allowed after 1757 and (b) the name of the licensed Chinese merchants who dealt with foreign traders. (*Hint: both are labelled on the diagram.*)

**Q5.** Look at the social-order diagram. Place these groups in order from highest to lowest in Confucian teaching: farmers, merchants, scholar-officials, artisans. (*Hint: read the diagram top to bottom.*)

**Q6.** From the diversity diagram, name (a) the ruling people of the Qing and (b) the region in the far north-west that Qianlong brought under firm control in the 1750s. (*Hint: the ruling group is a small minority.*)

**Without a scaffold**

**Q7.** Describe two political features of Qing China and explain how each helped the emperors govern a large empire.

**Q8.** Explain one economic feature of Qing China and one social feature, and how they were connected.

**Q9.** Using Source A, explain what it reveals about the Qing view of trade with foreign powers, and why a historian would check it against other evidence.

**Q10.** Look at the interpretation diagram. Explain one reason a historian might call the Qing a “Chinese dynasty” and one reason they might call it a “Manchu-led multi-ethnic empire”. Say which reading you find more convincing and why.

---

## Answers

**Q1.** (a) 1644. (b) Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong.

**Q2.** (a) The Grand Council. (b) The civil service examination.

**Q3.** (a) About 150 million. (b) About 430 million. (c) One reason: new crops from the Americas (such as maize and the sweet potato) grew on poor soils and added food; long peace and careful farming also helped.

**Q4.** (a) Guangzhou (Canton). (b) The cohong.

**Q5.** Scholar-officials, farmers, artisans, merchants.

**Q6.** (a) The Manchus. (b) Xinjiang.

**Q7.** Model points: the emperor held final authority, backed by the idea of the Mandate of Heaven, which gave his rule a religious basis; the civil service examination chose officials by learning rather than birth, giving the government educated men across the empire; the Grand Council handled urgent matters such as war; the Six Ministries ran day-to-day government; and shared Manchu-Han posts helped the minority rulers keep control. Any two, each with a clear link to how it helped govern.

**Q8.** Model points: farming was the base of the economy and most people worked the land (economic); the family and respect for parents were the core of society (social). A connection: because farming needed steady family labour, Confucian teaching honoured farming and placed farmers above merchants; and the Sacred Edict (Source B) urged people to value farming so there was enough food. Any one economic and one social feature with a stated link.

**Q9.** Model points: Source A shows the Qing saw China as self-sufficient (“has all things in rich abundance”) and unwilling to widen trade, keeping it at Canton through the cohong; it reflects the Canton System and a wish to control outside contact. A historian would check it against other evidence because it was written to project strength and refuse a request, so it may not show the full picture of how much trade actually happened.

**Q10.** Model points: for “Chinese dynasty” — the Qing kept the examinations, Confucian ways and the Six Ministries, lived in Beijing, and called their state China in treaties. For “Manchu-led multi-ethnic empire” — Manchus kept their own language and the Eight Banners, reserved many senior posts, and the emperors ruled Mongols, Tibetans and Uyghurs in roles other than a plain Chinese emperor. A good answer gives one reason for each reading and states which it prefers with a piece of evidence from the section.

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# China and the foreign powers, 1700s to today

**Curriculum:** VC2HH10K25

**Taught society:** China — from the Qing dynasty to the People's Republic of China. Chapter 5 of this book teaches the Asia investigation through China (the book's recorded choice; see TOC decision D9).

**Linked elaborations (taught, China block):** VC2HH10K25.E01 VC2HH10K25.E02 VC2HH10K25.E03 VC2HH10K25.E04 VC2HH10K25.E05

Note: the remaining blocks of this content description (VC2HH10K25.E06–E24) cover the other society choices — India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam. They remain valid link keys for other builds and other choices, but they are not this book's taught case.

## Theory

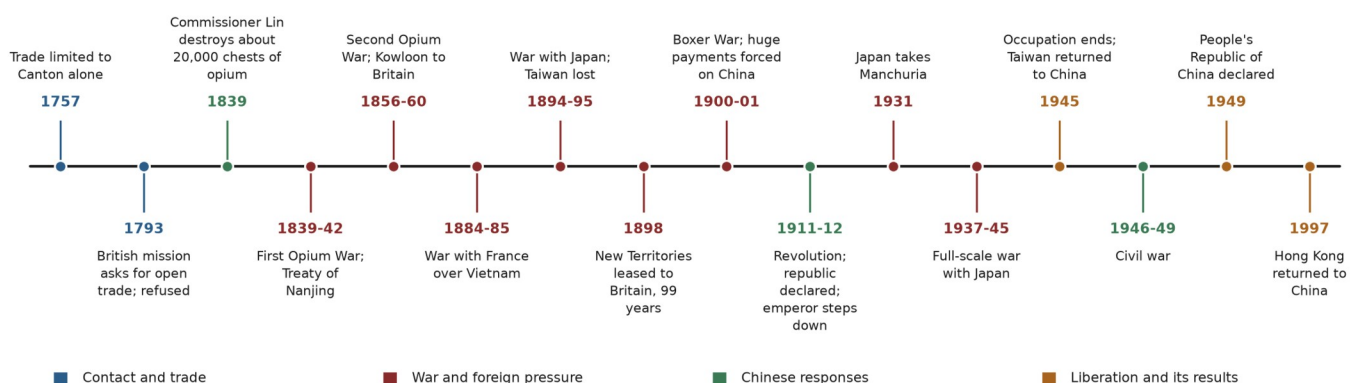
Section 5A met the Qing dynasty from the inside: its government, its farming, its trade rules and its confidence. This section follows the same society from the outside in. Between the mid-1700s and the mid-1900s, China went from limiting its contact with the outside world, to being worn down by foreign powers, to ending foreign control altogether. The story runs through contact, war, colonising pressure, revolution and, finally, liberation. It is also a study in **causes** and **consequences**: every war, treaty and revolution in this section had reasons behind it, and every one changed what came next.

**Two words to pin down first.** The curriculum uses two key words for this section — *colonisation* and *liberation* — but does not define them, so this section states how they are used here, and every question here can be answered on these meanings alone.

- **Colonisation** is used here in the sense of foreign powers gaining control of parts of China's land, trade and decision-making — by war, by agreements forced on China after military defeat, and by leases — rather than by settling the land in large numbers. Some writers use the word in a wider or a narrower sense than this; other meanings exist and are not interchangeable with this one.
- **Liberation** is used here in the sense of ending foreign occupation and control over China. Be aware that the word also carries a strong political meaning: the Communist Party of China calls its 1949 victory "liberation", while its opponents remember 1949 very differently. Where that difference matters, this section says so.

## China and the outside world, 1757-1997

Key events of contact, war, colonisation and liberation (events spaced for readability, not proportional)



*Colour-coded timeline of China and the outside world from 1757 to 1997, marking events of contact and trade, war and foreign pressure, Chinese responses, and liberation and its results*

## Part 1 — Contact at Canton: a trade that ran one way (context)

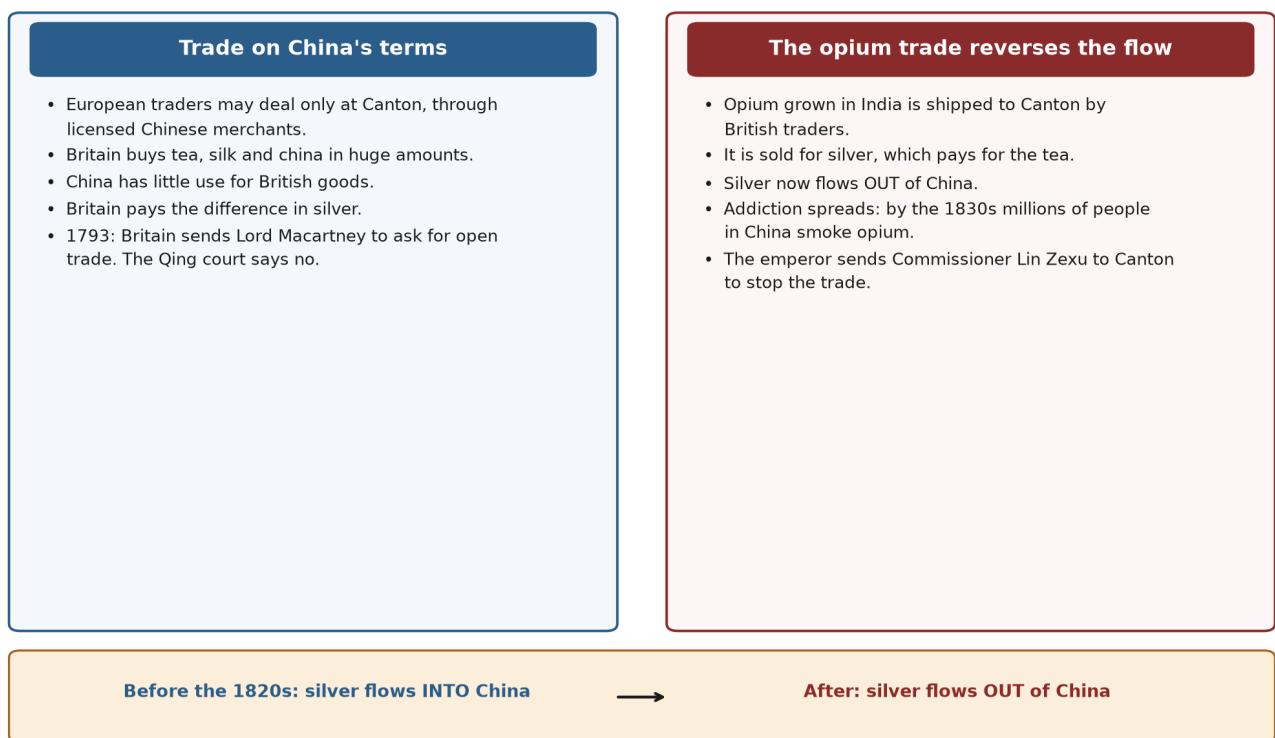
You met the setting in Section 5A. In **1757** the Qianlong Emperor limited European sea trade to a single port, **Guangzhou** (known in English as **Canton**). There, foreign traders could deal only through a group of licensed Chinese merchants called the **cohong**. This **Canton System** let the Qing court keep close watch on outside contact.

The trade itself ran strongly in China's favour. Britain bought **tea**, **silk** and porcelain in huge amounts and had little that Chinese buyers wanted in return, so British ships carried **silver** to pay the difference. In **1793** the British government sent **Lord Macartney** to ask for wider trade; the Qianlong Emperor refused (you met his reply as Source A in Section 5A).

British traders then found one product that China would buy in quantity: **opium**, a drug grown in India and shipped to Canton by British firms. It was sold for silver, and the silver was used to buy the tea. The result was a complete reversal of the trade: instead of silver flowing into China, it now flowed out. Smoking opium became widespread — by the 1830s historians estimate that millions of people in China were addicted.

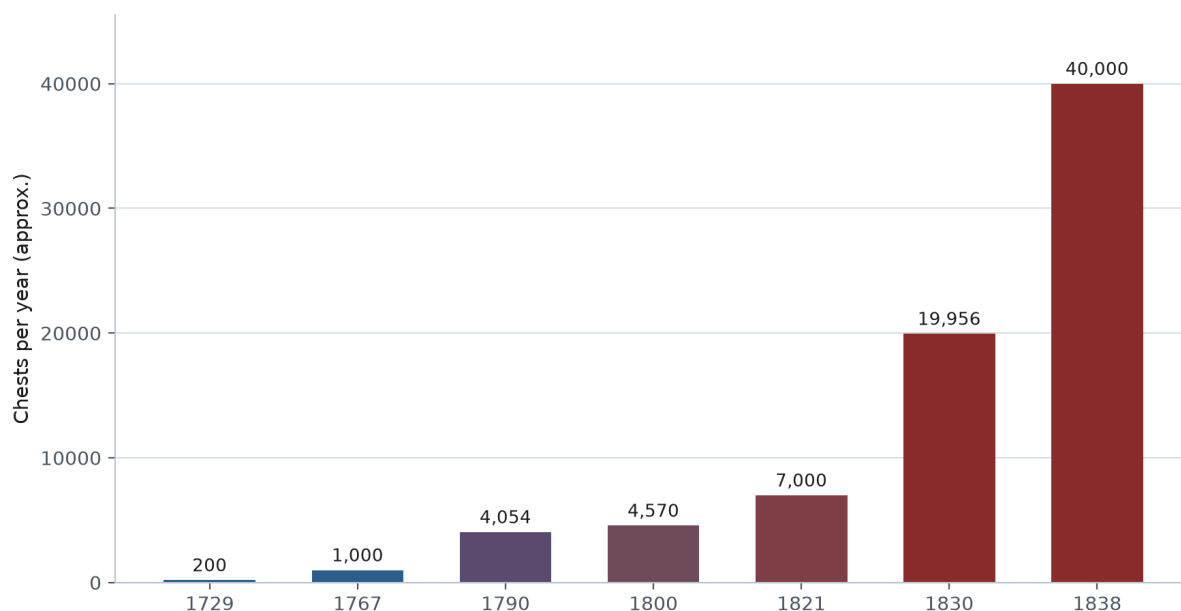
### Contact at Canton: how the trade worked, and how it broke

The Canton System, 1757-1839



*Two-panel diagram of the Canton trade: the left panel lists how trade on China's terms worked before the 1820s, and the right panel shows how the opium trade reversed the flow of silver*

**Estimated opium imported into China each year, 1729-1838**



One chest held about 60 kg. Series commonly reprinted from H.B. Morse, *Trade and Administration of the Chinese Empire* (1908); compiled for this workbook 26 August 2026.

*Bar chart of estimated opium imported into China each year from 1729 to 1838, rising from about 200 chests to about 40,000 chests*

*Opium figures are estimates commonly reprinted from H.B. Morse, *Trade and Administration of the Chinese Empire* (1908); retrieved 26 August 2026.*

## **Part 2 — The Opium Wars: causes and consequences (VC2HH10K25.E01)**

The curriculum asks you to explain why war broke out between China and at least one European power, and what followed from it. This part gives the **First Opium War (1839–1842)** the full treatment, then the **Second Opium War (1856–1860)**, and then notes the other wars named in the elaboration — the Sino-French War and the Russian occupations.

**Causes of the First Opium War.** The causes came from both sides.

- **From the Chinese side:** the silver drain and the spread of addiction convinced the **Daoguang Emperor** to act. In late 1838 he appointed **Lin Zexu** as imperial commissioner at Canton with orders to stop the trade. Lin seized and destroyed about **20,000 chests** of opium in June 1839, and he wrote to Queen Victoria asking why Britain banned opium at home but allowed it to be sold in China (Source A below).
- **From the British side:** British merchants demanded payment for the destroyed opium and an end to the Canton restrictions. The British government decided to send warships to force trade open and to protect what it called British property and honour.

**Course and consequences.** The war ran from 1839 to 1842. British steam warships moved up the coast and the rivers, and Chinese defences could not match them. China was forced to ask for peace, and the **Treaty of Nanjing (August 1842)** made China:

- open **five ports** (Canton, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai) to British trade and residence;
- hand **Hong Kong Island** to Britain;
- pay **21 million silver dollars**;
- fix taxes on British imports at a low rate, so China could no longer decide its own trade taxes.

Follow-up agreements in 1843 added that British subjects in China would be tried by British officials, not Chinese courts. Chinese historians count Nanjing as the first of the “**unequal treaties**” — a term defined in Part 3.

The **Second Opium War (1856–1860)**, fought by Britain and France, pushed further. The **Convention of Beijing (1860)** opened more ports, handed the **Kowloon** peninsula to Britain, and made the opium trade legal. In 1860 British

and French troops also burned the **Old Summer Palace**, the emperors' great garden complex outside Beijing — an act still remembered with anger in China.

### The other wars named in the elaboration.

- **The Sino-French War (1884–1885)** was fought over control of Vietnam, a long-standing neighbour state of China. France won control of Vietnam, and China lost influence on its southern border.
- **Russian occupations:** in treaties of 1858–1860 Russia took about **1,000,000 square kilometres** of China's north-eastern territory. Russian power also pressed into Manchuria and into the far west, where Russia occupied the Ili region of Xinjiang for ten years (1871–1881).

### Part 3 — The unequal treaties and the map they drew (VC2HH10K25.E01)

Historians of China describe the agreements of 1842–1901 as **unequal treaties**. In this section, *unequal* is used in this sense: a treaty whose terms one side imposed on the other by force or threat, rather than one agreed between equals. Historians debate how far the label should reach — some prefer to describe the same agreements simply as a treaty system imposed by war — but on either wording the point is the same: China's side accepted under military pressure.

#### The unequal treaties: terms forced on China, 1842-1901

A treaty is unequal when one side imposes the terms by force or threat

| Treaty and war                                                            | Terms forced on China                                                                                                                                      | Consequences                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Treaty of Nanjing, 1842 (First Opium War; Britain)</b>                 | Five ports opened to British trade; Hong Kong Island handed to Britain; China pays 21 million silver dollars; taxes on British imports fixed at a low rate | First of the 'unequal treaties'; China loses control of its own trade taxes; British rule in Hong Kong begins |
| <b>Convention of Beijing, 1860 (Second Opium War; Britain and France)</b> | More ports opened; Kowloon handed to Britain; the opium trade made legal                                                                                   | Foreign control spreads; traders and preachers move deeper into China                                         |
| <b>Treaty of Shimonoseki, 1895 (war with Japan)</b>                       | Korea leaves China's sphere; Taiwan and its islands handed to Japan; payment of 200 million taels of silver                                                | First defeat by an Asian rival; foreign powers race to grab bases in China                                    |
| <b>Boxer Protocol, 1901 (Boxer War; eight powers)</b>                     | Huge payment of 450 million taels of silver; foreign guards posted in Beijing; forts pulled down                                                           | The Qing court can no longer rule without foreign approval                                                    |

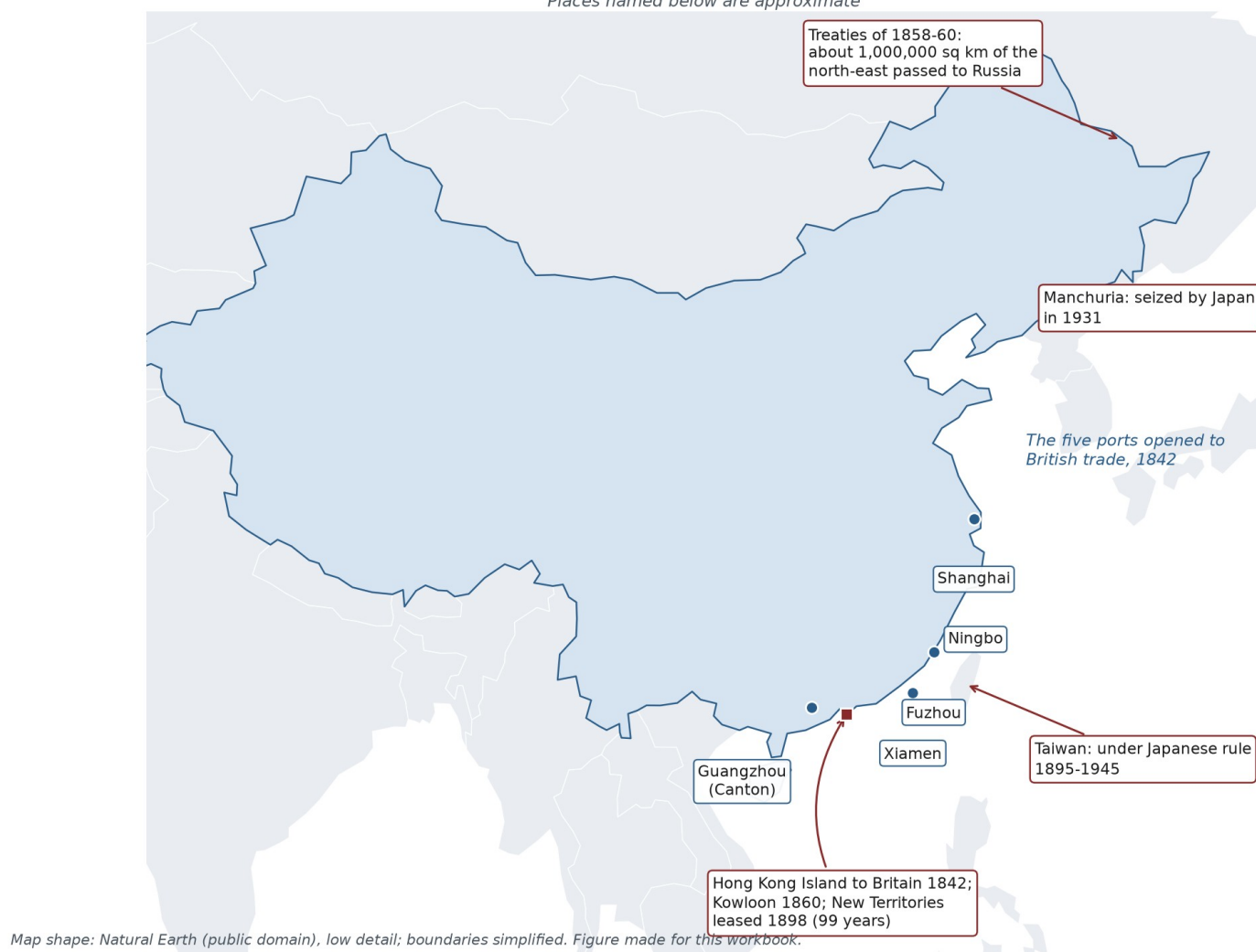
*Table of the unequal treaties from 1842 to 1901, listing each treaty and war, the terms forced on China, and the consequences*

The consequences added up across the century:

- **Wealth drained out.** Payments after each defeat ran into hundreds of millions of silver units, on top of the continuing opium trade.
- **Control slipped.** With taxes on imports fixed by treaty, and with foreign officials, soldiers and traders posted in Chinese cities, the Qing court lost power over its own affairs.
- **Foreign zones spread.** After China's defeat by Japan in 1895, foreign powers raced to secure ports, railway rights and trading zones of their own, and in **1898** Britain, France, Russia and Germany each leased territory.
- **The Boxer War (1900–1901)** sealed the pattern. After Chinese fighters besieged the area of Beijing where the foreign embassies stood, an alliance of eight foreign powers marched in to relieve them. The **Boxer Protocol (1901)** imposed a payment of 450 million units of silver and posted foreign guards in Beijing. After this, the Qing court could no longer govern without foreign approval.

## China after a century of contact and colonising pressure (by 1901)

Places named below are approximate



Map of China and its neighbours showing the five treaty ports of 1842, the three parts of Hong Kong, the territory passed to Russia by the treaties of 1858 to 1860, Manchuria seized by Japan in 1931, and Taiwan under Japanese rule from 1895 to 1945

### Part 4 — Hong Kong: from occupation to return, and to the present (VC2HH10K25.E02)

Hong Kong is the clearest single example of colonisation and then liberation in China's story, and the curriculum asks you to follow its story right up to today. It grew in three stages, and all three are needed to understand why it returned in 1997.

1. **Hong Kong Island** was occupied by British forces in January 1841 during the Opium War and was handed to Britain by the Treaty of Nanjing in **1842**.
2. **Kowloon**, the tip of the mainland opposite the island, was handed to Britain by the Convention of Beijing in **1860**.
3. **The New Territories** — the mainland area north of Kowloon plus some 235 islands — were **leased** to Britain in **1898** for **99 years**, to 30 June 1997. A lease, unlike a handover, has an end date written into it.

Japan occupied Hong Kong from 1941 to 1945; British rule returned after the war. By the 1980s the 99-year lease was running out, and in **1984** the Chinese and British governments agreed that **all** of Hong Kong would return to China on **1 July 1997**, under the formula "**one country, two systems**": Hong Kong would be part of China but would keep its own legal and economic systems under a mini-constitution, the **Basic Law**, which promised a "high degree of autonomy" for 50 years.

**To the present.** How those promises should be read is itself a live disagreement. Beijing's position is that the arrangement keeps Hong Kong part of China while letting it run many of its own affairs, and that stability comes first. Critics argue that the promised autonomy and gradual move toward greater say in government have been worn down,

pointing to the large protests of **2014** and **2019** and to later security laws. This section records the disagreement as a contested question rather than settling it; historians are still writing it.

## Hong Kong: from occupation to return

How Britain got Hong Kong, and how it came back to China

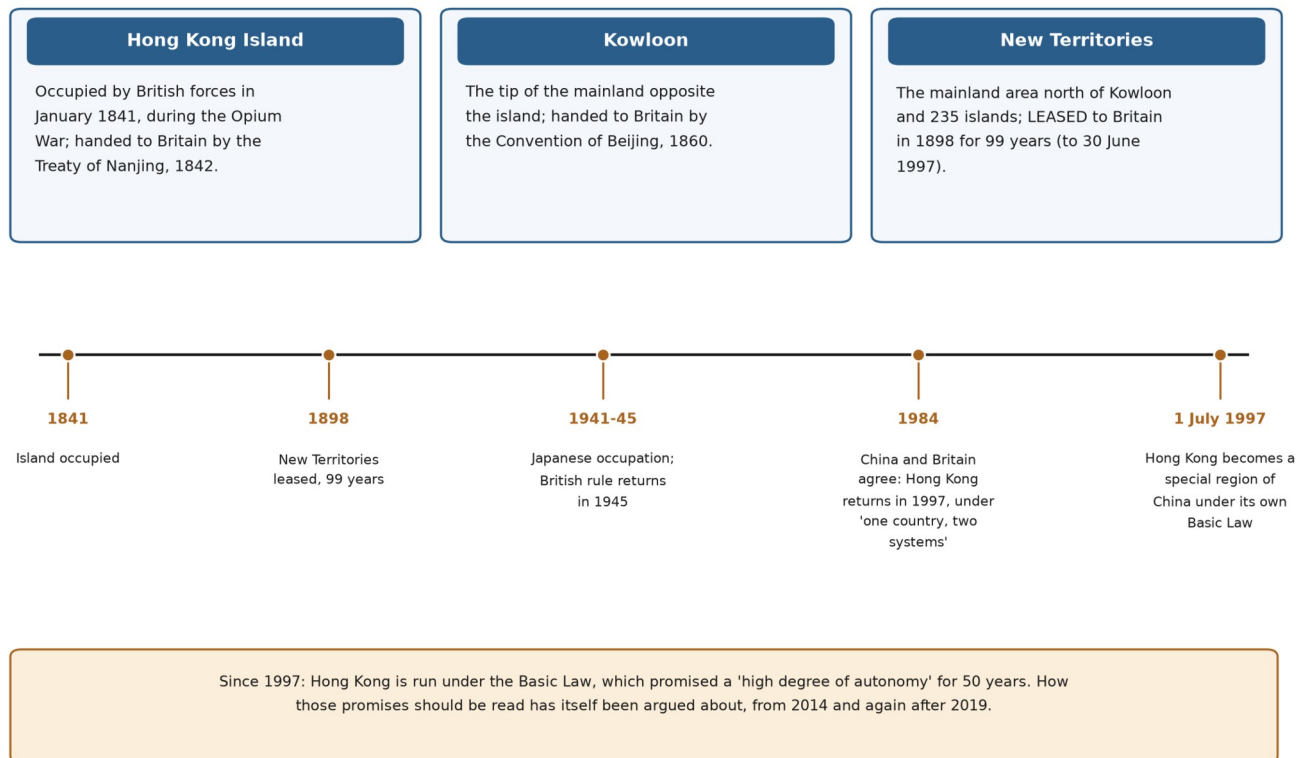


*Diagram of Hong Kong's three parts and a timeline from 1841 to 1997, showing British occupation, the 99-year lease, Japanese occupation, the 1984 agreement and the return to China*

### Part 5 — Japan's colonisation of China, 1894–1945 (VC2HH10K25.E03)

European pressure came first, but the sharpest colonising blows came from Japan — an Asian neighbour that had modernised fast after 1868 and built a strong army and navy.

- **1894–1895: the First Sino-Japanese War**, fought over influence in Korea. Japan won easily. The **Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895)** forced China to hand over **Taiwan** and its islands and to accept Korea leaving China's orbit. It was China's first defeat by an Asian rival, and it shocked Chinese reformers into urgent action.
- **1895–1945: Taiwan under Japanese rule**, administered as a colony until the end of World War II.
- **1915: the Twenty-One Demands**. During World War I, when the European powers were distracted, Japan demanded control of Manchuria and far more. China accepted most of the demands under protest.
- **1931: Manchuria seized**. After a staged explosion on a Japanese-owned railway (the **Mukden Incident**), Japanese forces took the whole of China's industrial north-east and set up the puppet state of **Manchukuo** in 1932 — a state whose ruler was controlled by Japan.
- **1937: full-scale war**. Fighting broke out near Beijing and spread. Japanese armies took the north, the coast and the great river cities. When Japanese troops took **Nanjing** in December 1937, mass killings of captured soldiers and civilians followed. The killings are established history; the number killed is still debated between historians and governments, and China's official figure is 300,000.
- **1941–1945: the war merged into World War II**, with China fighting on the Allied side. Japan surrendered in August **1945**: occupation ended, and Taiwan was returned to China.

## Japan's expansion into China, 1894-1945

From the first war to the end of occupation

| Date                | Event                                                                         | Effect                                                                                 |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1894-95</b>      | First Chinese-Japanese War, fought over Korea; Japan wins                     | Treaty of Shimonoseki: Taiwan and its islands go to Japan; Korea leaves China's sphere |
| <b>1915</b>         | Japan sends the 'Twenty-One Demands' during World War I                       | Japan demands control of Manchuria and more; China agrees under protest                |
| <b>1931</b>         | Japan seizes Manchuria after the Mukden Incident (a staged railway explosion) | Japan takes China's industrial north-east                                              |
| <b>1932</b>         | Japan sets up the puppet state of Manchukuo                                   | Manchuria is run by a ruler controlled by Japan                                        |
| <b>1937</b>         | Full-scale war breaks out near Beijing                                        | Japanese armies take the north, the coast and the big river cities                     |
| <b>1937-38</b>      | Japanese troops take Nanjing                                                  | Mass killings of soldiers and civilians; the number killed is still debated            |
| <b>1941-45</b>      | The war merges into World War II                                              | China fights on with the Allied countries                                              |
| <b>Aug-Sep 1945</b> | Japan surrenders                                                              | Occupation ends; Taiwan is returned to China                                           |

*Table of Japan's expansion into China from 1894 to 1945, listing the date, the event and its effect*

### Part 6 — The 1911 revolution: how far did European pressure cause it? (VC2HH10K25.E04)

The revolution of 1911 ended over two thousand years of imperial rule in China. The short story: after the failed reforms of **1898** (crushed by the court itself), revolutionary groups led by **Sun Yat-sen** organised from exile. In **1905** Sun helped found the **Chinese Revolutionary Alliance** in Tokyo (Source B below). In **1911**, protests in **Sichuan** over foreign control of railways drew troops away from central China; on **10 October 1911** soldiers in **Wuchang** rose, province after province declared itself independent of the court, a republic was declared on 1 January 1912, and the boy emperor **Puyi** stepped down in February 1912.

The curriculum asks you to *judge how far* European countries caused this revolution. That means weighing evidence on both sides before reaching a judgement.

## Did European countries cause the 1911 revolution?

Two strongest cases, then a balance

### Case 1: Foreign pressure pushed the dynasty down

- A century of unequal treaties drained China's wealth and cut down the authority of the Qing court.
- After the Boxer War (1901), the court had to bow to foreign demands on many matters.
- Railways built with foreign loans became danger points: the 1911 protests in Sichuan over foreign control moved troops away and opened the way for the Wuchang rising.
- National shame turned many students and soldiers towards revolution.

### Case 2: The causes lay inside China

- Long-term decline: population growth, weak rule and huge revolts like the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64) had shaken the dynasty for decades.
- Reform failed: the 1898 reforms were crushed; later reforms came too late, and the 1911 royal cabinet turned the gentry against the court.
- Revolutionaries organised: Sun Yat-sen's groups from 1894 spread republican ideas and planned risings.
- New army units and provincial leaders wanted change for their own reasons.

### A balanced judgement

Foreign pressure was a major, mostly indirect, cause: it weakened the dynasty, drained its wealth and shaped the moment of 1911. But the revolution was planned, declared and carried out by Chinese people, for reasons of their own. Most historians today weigh both forces together rather than naming one alone.

*Diagram presenting the strongest case that foreign pressure caused the 1911 revolution, the strongest case that the causes lay inside China, and a balanced judgement*

**Case 1 — foreign pressure pushed the dynasty down.** A century of unequal treaties drained China's wealth and cut down the authority of the Qing court. After the Boxer War of 1901, the court had to bow to foreign demands on many matters. The railway protests of 1911 were themselves about foreign control, and the shame of defeat turned many students and soldiers toward revolution.

**Case 2 — the causes lay inside China.** The dynasty had been weakened for decades by population growth, weak rule and huge internal revolts such as the **Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864)**. Reform failed from within: the 1898 reforms were crushed by the court, later reforms came too late, and the royal cabinet of 1911 turned the gentry against the court. Revolutionaries like Sun Yat-sen organised, planned and acted for reasons of their own.

**A balanced judgement.** Foreign pressure was a major, mostly indirect, cause: it weakened the dynasty, drained its wealth and shaped the moment of 1911. But the revolution was planned, declared and carried out by Chinese people, for reasons of their own. Most historians today weigh both forces together rather than naming one alone. Notice the structure of the argument: long-term cause (a century of pressure) versus short-term trigger (the railway protests and the Wuchang rising), and outside force versus inside agency. If you answer the practice question on this debate, you are marked on the quality of your reasoning — defined terms, evidence cited, both sides presented in full — not on which side you land on.

## Part 7 — Foreign influence on the Chinese Civil War (VC2HH10K25.E05)

The republic that replaced the Qing was weak, and China broke into years of rule by regional warlords. Two new forces then rose to contest the country: the **Nationalists** (the Kuomintang, led from 1925 by **Chiang Kai-shek**) and the **Communist Party of China** (founded in 1921; **Mao Zedong** rose to lead it). They fought a civil war from **1927**, paused it between **1937 and 1945** to face Japan together, and resumed it in **1945**. The war ended in **1949** with a

Communist victory: the **People's Republic of China** was declared on 1 October 1949, and the Nationalist government withdrew to Taiwan.

The curriculum asks you to analyse how *other countries* influenced this war. The table below tracks the three most important influences.

### Foreign influence on the Chinese Civil War

The civil war ran from 1927 to 1949, with a pause during the war against Japan (1937-45)

| Country                   | What it did                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | How it affected the civil war                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Russia</b>             | 1920s: helped build the Nationalist army with money and advisers, but also backed the young Communist Party. August 1945: invaded Manchuria and let Communist forces take over Japanese weapons there. 1949: first to accept the new People's Republic. | Kept both sides supplied and in the fight. In 1945 the takeover of Manchuria handed the Communists a huge prize: arms, factories and a base |
| <b>United States</b>      | 1945-49: sent the Nationalist government about 2,000 million US dollars in military and economic aid; flew Nationalist troops to key cities; sent General George Marshall to broker peace (1945-47), which failed.                                      | Prolonged the war but could not stop the Nationalists' defeat. The failed peace effort fed distrust on both sides                           |
| <b>Japan (indirectly)</b> | The invasions of 1931 and 1937 paused the civil war. The Nationalists bore the heaviest fighting and losses; the Communists grew in strength behind Japanese lines.                                                                                     | Shifted the balance: by 1945 the Communists were far stronger than in 1937                                                                  |

*Table of foreign influence on the Chinese Civil War, showing what Russia, the United States and Japan each did and how it affected the war*

- **Russia (the Soviet Union)** played both sides early on, helping build the Nationalist army in the 1920s while also backing the young Communist Party. Its biggest moment came in August 1945, when Soviet forces entered Manchuria; the takeover there handed Communist forces Japanese weapons, factories and a base. The Soviet Union was the first country to accept the new People's Republic in 1949.
- **The United States** backed the Nationalist government with money, weapons and transport, and sent **General George Marshall** to broker peace between 1945 and 1947. The peace effort failed, the aid prolonged the war, and it could not stop the Nationalists' defeat.
- **Japan** influenced the war in an indirect way: the invasions of 1931 and 1937 paused the civil war, the Nationalists bore the heaviest fighting and losses, and by 1945 the Communists had grown far stronger than in 1937.

**How this connects to liberation.** On the definition given at the start of this section, 1949 marks liberation: the end of the century of foreign control begun in Part 2. Remember, though, that the memory is contested — 1949 is celebrated as liberation in the People's Republic, while those who withdrew to Taiwan and their supporters remember it as defeat and the start of a long separation.

### Part 8 — Putting the causes and consequences together

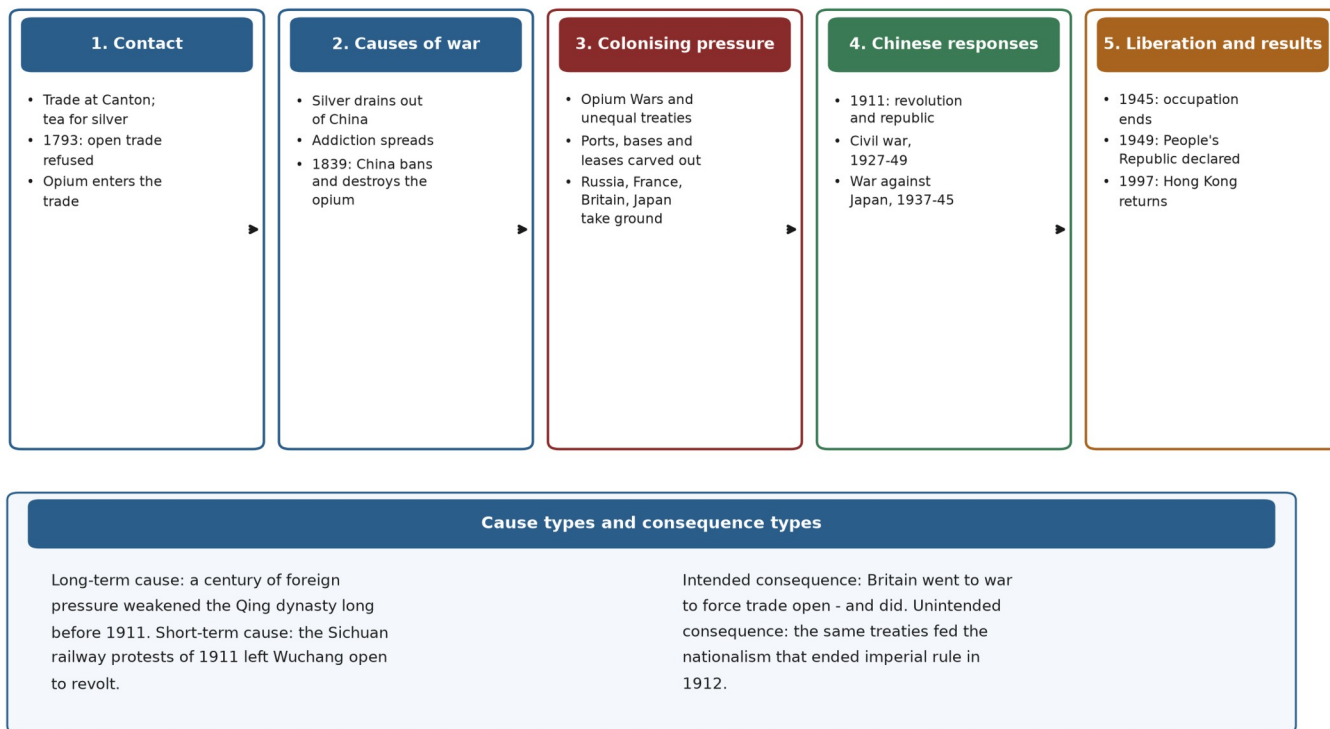
This section's content description is built around causes and consequences, so it is worth sorting the types before you practise.

- **Long-term versus short-term causes.** A century of foreign pressure weakened the Qing long before 1911 (long-term); the Sichuan railway protests left Wuchang open to revolt (short-term trigger).
- **Intended versus unintended consequences.** Britain went to war in 1839 to force trade open — and did (intended). But the same treaties fed the national feeling that ended imperial rule in 1912 (unintended).

- **Consequences that become causes.** Every consequence in this section became a cause of the next event: the Treaty of Nanjing's loss of control fed later demands; Japan's 1895 victory fed the scramble for foreign zones; the Boxer payments weakened the court that fell in 1911.

### Model: causes and consequences of contact, colonisation and liberation

One way to connect the events of this section (historians would draw other links too)



*Model diagram connecting the five stages of this section — contact, causes of war, colonising pressure, Chinese responses, and liberation and its results — with examples of long-term and short-term causes and of intended and unintended consequences*

And alongside change, note **continuity**: through wars and revolutions, most people still lived in villages, worked the land and kept family customs much as they had. Sections 5C to 5E follow what changed — and what did not — in Chinese life through the twentieth century.

## Worked source analyses

### Analysis 1 — Source A: Lin Zexu's letter to Queen Victoria, 1839 (scaffolded)

#### Source A - Lin Zexu's letter to Queen Victoria (1839)

*Lin Zexu, imperial commissioner at Canton, wrote this letter in August-September 1839. Abridged translation.*

Of all the goods that China produces, there is nothing that your country cannot buy. Your country takes our tea and our silk, and pays us silver. This is fair trade.

But now your ships bring us opium, and the poison spreads among our people. In your own country, the smoking of opium is strictly forbidden. You know that it harms those who smoke it. Why then do you allow it to be sold in China?

Suppose a man from another country came to your country to trade, and tried to set aside your people's own laws - would that be tolerated?

The Way of Heaven is fairness itself: do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.

Commissioner Lin banned the opium trade and destroyed about 20,000 chests of it in June 1839. Britain went to war within months. The letter was never delivered to the Queen.

*Translation abridged from S.-Y. Teng and J.K. Fairbank (eds), China's Response to the West (Harvard University Press, 1954). Retrieved 26 August 2026.*

*Source A, an abridged extract from Commissioner Lin Zexu's 1839 letter to Queen Victoria arguing that the trade was fair until Britain sent opium in return, and asking why a drug banned in Britain is sold in China*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** A **primary source**: a letter written in 1839 by **Lin Zexu**, the Qing official sent to Canton to stop the opium trade, addressed to Queen Victoria of Britain. Shown here in abridged translation.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to persuade. Lin wants the British government to stop the opium trade, and he argues his case on moral grounds: fairness, and not doing to others what you would not accept yourself. We should expect it to present China's case as strongly as possible.

**Step 3 — What does it say (content)?** It says that trade between the two countries has been fair — China sells tea and silk and receives silver — but that British ships now bring opium, which harms Chinese people. It points out that opium smoking is forbidden in Britain itself, and it asks why Britain allows the drug to be sold in China.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of a senior Chinese official at the moment of strongest Qing action against the trade. Lin assumes that the Queen controls her merchants and that she will respond to a moral argument. A British merchant, whose profits depended on the trade, would have given a very different account.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is very strong evidence of the Chinese moral and political case against the opium trade, and of one direct **cause** of the First Opium War (Part 2): China's decision to act. It has limits too — the letter was never delivered to the Queen, and it was written to persuade, so a historian would check it against British records of why the trade continued and why war followed.

## Analysis 2 — Source B: the oath of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, 1905 (scaffolded)

### Source B - The oath of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance (1905)

In August 1905 Sun Yat-sen helped to found the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui) in Tokyo. New members took this oath. Translation as commonly recorded.

**"Expel the barbarians, restore China,  
establish a republic, equalise land rights."**

Sun Yat-sen later explained the oath as his 'three principles':  
nationalism - China free from foreign control and from Manchu rule;  
democracy - a republic with a constitution;  
and people's livelihood - a fairer share of wealth, above all land.

*'Barbarians' here means the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty; that was the revolutionaries' own word for them.*

*Oath of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui), Tokyo, August 1905, drafted under Sun Yat-sen's leadership.*

*Translation as commonly recorded in standard collections; see W.T. de Bary (ed.), Sources of Chinese Tradition (Columbia University Press). Retrieved 26 August 2026.*

*Source B, the oath of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance of 1905, with its four aims — expel the barbarians, restore China, establish a republic, equalise land rights — and Sun Yat-sen's later explanation of the oath as his three principles*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** A **primary source**: the oath taken by new members of the **Chinese Revolutionary Alliance** (Tongmenghui), the group Sun Yat-sen helped found in Tokyo in August 1905. Shown as commonly recorded in translation.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to commit members to the revolution in four short aims. As an oath, it tells us what the organisation stood for and what it asked its members to swear to.

**Step 3 — What does it say (content)?** It sets four aims: drive out the “barbarians” (the revolutionaries’ own word for the Manchu rulers of the Qing), restore China, establish a republic, and make land rights fairer. Sun later explained these as his **three principles**: nationalism (China free from foreign control and from Manchu rule), democracy (a republic under a constitution), and people’s livelihood (a fairer share of wealth, above all land).

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of Chinese revolutionaries working from exile. Notice how much the wording packs in: the first aim targets the Qing dynasty itself, while “restore China” echoes anger at foreign control (Part 3). A Qing official reading the same words would see treason, not patriotism — the same source, opposite readings, which is exactly what perspective analysis is for.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is strong evidence that organised revolutionary groups existed **before** 1911, with clear aims — which matters for the Part 6 debate, because it supports Case 2 (causes inside China). To weigh it fully, a historian would ask how widely the oath was known in China itself, and check it against the events of 1911.

## Practice questions

### Scaffolded

**Q1.** Look at the timeline. (a) In what year was trade limited to Canton alone? (b) Name one war shown on the timeline and its years. (c) In what year did Hong Kong return to China? (*Hint: the legend sorts events into four colour-coded groups.*)

**Q2.** Look at the opium chart. (a) About how many chests were imported in 1790? (b) About how many in 1838? (c) What does this change suggest about why the Daoguang Emperor decided to act? (*Hint: the bar labels give the figures; Part 2 names the reasons.*)

**Q3.** Read Source A. (a) According to Lin, what does Britain buy from China, and what does it pay with? (b) State one question Lin puts to the British. (*Hint: look at the first two paragraphs of the source text.*)

**Q4.** Look at the unequal-treaties table. (a) Name the territory handed to Britain in 1842 and the one handed in 1860. (b) State one term forced on China by the Boxer Protocol of 1901. (*Hint: read across the second column.*)

**Q5.** Look at the Hong Kong diagram. (a) Which part of Hong Kong was leased for 99 years, and in what year? (b) In what year did the two governments agree on the return? (*Hint: the timeline runs along the bottom of the figure.*)

**Q6.** Look at the Japan table. (a) What did Japan seize in 1931, and what staged event did it use as a reason? (b) What happened to Taiwan in 1895, and what happened to it in 1945? (*Hint: find the rows for those dates.*)

### Without a scaffold

**Q7.** Explain two causes of the First Opium War — one from the Chinese side and one from the British side — and describe two consequences of the Treaty of Nanjing for China.

**Q8.** Explain why the New Territories were leased, rather than handed over, in 1898, and why that lease mattered for the return of the whole of Hong Kong in 1997.

**Q9.** “European powers caused China’s 1911 revolution.” Evaluate this claim. Present the strongest version of each side of the debate, cite evidence from this section, and state your own reasoned judgement.

**Q10.** Choose one foreign country from Part 7 and analyse how its actions influenced the Chinese Civil War and its outcome. Say whether you judge the influence to have been decisive, and why.

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## Answers

**Q1.** (a) 1757. (b) Any one, for example the First Opium War, 1839–1842; the Second Opium War, 1856–1860; the war with France, 1884–1885; the war with Japan, 1894–1895; the Boxer War, 1900–1901; or the full-scale war with Japan, 1937–1945. (c) 1997.

**Q2.** (a) About 4,000 chests (the chart gives 4,054). (b) About 40,000 chests. (c) The trade had grown enormously, so silver was draining out of China and addiction was spreading — the reasons Part 2 gives for the emperor’s decision to ban the trade.

**Q3.** (a) Britain buys tea and silk, and pays silver. (b) Any one, for example: why does Britain allow opium to be sold in China when smoking it is forbidden in Britain itself? — or: would Britain tolerate a foreign trader setting aside its own laws?

**Q4.** (a) Hong Kong Island in 1842; Kowloon in 1860. (b) Any one: a payment of 450 million units of silver; foreign guards posted in Beijing; forts pulled down.

**Q5.** (a) The New Territories, leased in 1898. (b) 1984.

**Q6.** (a) Manchuria, after the staged railway explosion called the Mukden Incident. (b) In 1895 Taiwan and its islands were handed to Japan by the Treaty of Shimonoseki; in 1945, after Japan’s surrender, Taiwan was returned to China.

**Q7.** Model points: Chinese-side cause — the silver drain and spreading addiction led the Daoguang Emperor to send Lin Zexu, who destroyed about 20,000 chests of opium in 1839. British-side cause — merchants demanded payment for the destroyed opium and open trade, and the government sent warships to force it. Consequences of Nanjing — five ports opened; Hong Kong Island handed to Britain; a payment of 21 million silver dollars; China lost control of its own import taxes. Any one cause per side and any two consequences, each clearly explained.

**Q8.** Model points: by 1898 the pattern was leases and zones rather than outright takeovers, and a lease let Britain add land for defence of the colony while setting a time limit — 99 years, to 30 June 1997. The lease mattered in 1997 because China insisted that the New Territories could not stay British once the lease ended, and without the New Territories the colony could not stand; so the 1984 agreement returned all three parts together on 1 July 1997. A good answer links the lease’s end date to the date of the return.

**Q9.** Model points: for the claim — a century of unequal treaties drained China’s wealth and cut down the Qing’s authority; after the Boxer War the court had to bow to foreign demands; the 1911 railway protests were about foreign control, and they moved troops away from Wuchang; national shame pushed students and soldiers toward revolution. Against the claim — long-term internal decline (the Taiping Rebellion, weak rule, population pressure); failed reforms from within (1898 crushed; the 1911 royal cabinet alienated the gentry); revolutionaries organised and acted for their own reasons (Sun Yat-sen’s groups from 1894; Source B). Judgement — most historians weigh both: foreign pressure was a major, mostly indirect cause, but the revolution was planned and carried out by Chinese people. Marks go to reasoning — terms defined, both sides stated in full, evidence cited, judgement given — not to which side is chosen.

**Q10.** Model points: Russia — helped build the Nationalist army in the 1920s while also backing the Communists; in August 1945 its entry into Manchuria let Communist forces take over Japanese weapons, factories and a base there; it was first to accept the People’s Republic in 1949. Its influence can be judged near-decisive in 1945–46 because Manchuria was the war’s biggest prize. United States — about 2,000 million US dollars in aid, troop transport, and the failed Marshall peace effort; this prolonged the war but could not prevent Nationalist defeat, so its influence was real but not decisive. Japan — in an indirect way: the invasions paused the civil war, wore down the Nationalists most, and left the Communists far stronger by 1945. A good answer picks one country, gives its actions and effects from Part 7, and defends a stated judgement.

# Events and ideas that shaped modern China

**Curriculum:** VC2HH10K26

**Taught society:** China. Chapter 5 of this book teaches the Asia investigation through China (the book's recorded choice; see TOC decision D9).

**Linked elaborations (taught, China block):** VC2HH10K26.E01 VC2HH10K26.E02 VC2HH10K26.E03 VC2HH10K26.E04 VC2HH10K26.E05

Note: the remaining blocks of this content description (VC2HH10K26.E06–E25) cover the other society choices — India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam. They remain valid link keys for other builds and other choices, but they are not this book's taught case.

## Theory

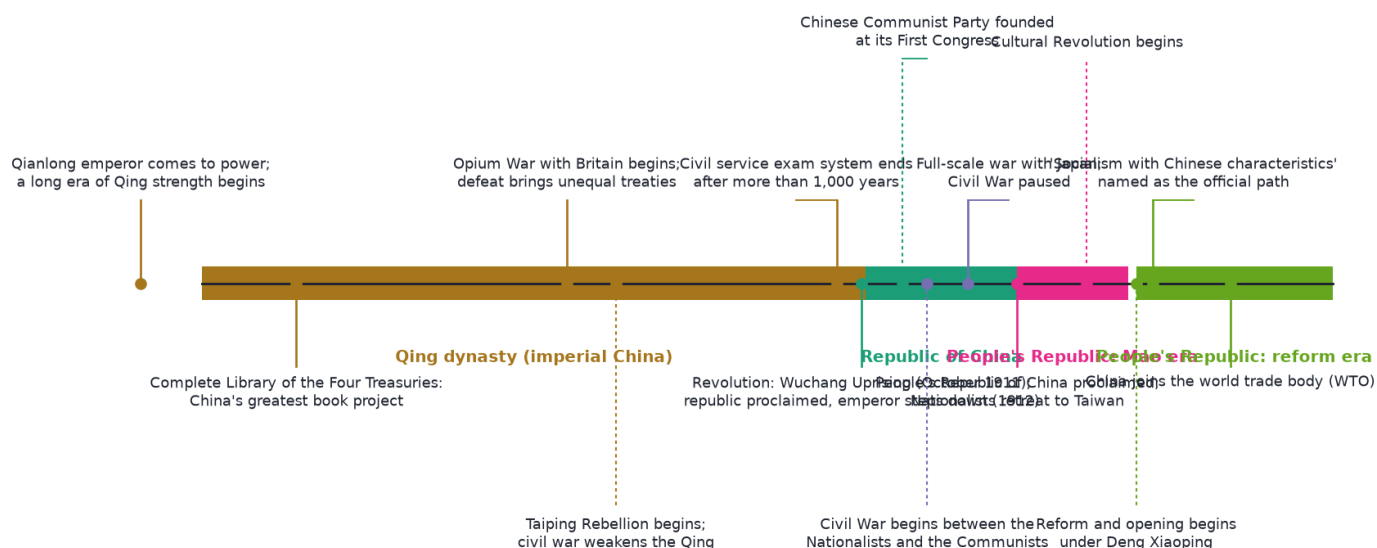
Events are what happened; ideas are what people believed should happen. This section holds the two together. It follows the biggest events in China's modern story — revolution, civil war and remaking of the state — and asks, for each one, which **ideas** drove it, what it **changed**, and what it left standing. Those are the two tools named in the content description: **continuity** (what stayed the same, or changed only slowly, across a period) and **change** (what was transformed, replaced or broken). Section 8A teaches the skill of continuity-and-change analysis in full; this section keeps practising it on real ground.

One habit matters throughout. Historians do not treat ideas as decoration. An idea — a belief about how society should be ordered — can move millions of people, decide a war, and outlive the event that carried it. Keep asking, of every event in this section: *which idea did it serve, what did the idea change, and what continued in spite of it?*

### Significant events in China, 1750 to the present

Events studied in this section. Colours show the era each event belongs to.

Dots mark the true year of each event.



*Timeline of significant events in China from 1750 to the present, colour-coded into four eras: the Qing dynasty, the Republic of China, the People's Republic under Mao Zedong, and the reform era, marking events from the Qianlong era to China joining the World Trade Organization in 2001*

## Part 1 — The big picture: four eras of modern China

The timeline above sorts modern China into four eras. Learn them, because everything else in the section hangs on them:

- **The Qing dynasty, 1644–1912** — imperial China, ruled by the Manchu emperors studied in section 5A. Its last strong era was the 18th century; its 19th century was worn down by rebellion and foreign pressure (section 5B).
- **The Republic of China, 1912–1949** — born in revolution, weakly governed, torn by warlords, then by civil war, then by war with Japan.
- **The People’s Republic under Mao Zedong, 1949–1976** — the communist state proclaimed on 1 October 1949, remade from top to bottom and shaken by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.
- **The reform era, 1978–present** — the same communist state, running a market economy and rising to world power.

Notice the join between the third era and the fourth: the party in charge did not change. That is the section’s sharpest example of change and continuity arriving together.

## Part 2 — The Confucian revival under the Qing (VC2HH10K26.E01)

Section 5A met the teaching of **Confucius** (Kong Qiu, 551–479 BCE): duty, respect for parents and elders, and rule by good example, gathered in the sayings called the *Analects*. By the time the Manchu **Qing dynasty** took Beijing in 1644, that teaching had guided Chinese government for two thousand years. The Qing were not Han Chinese, and that created a problem: why should China’s scholars accept Manchu rulers?

Their answer was a deliberate **revival** — a bringing back to life — of Confucian teaching. A revival is a kind of continuity: it says *the old way is the right way*. But it is also an act of policy, chosen by someone, for a reason. The Qing used the revival to strengthen their rule, and the table below sets out how.

## The Confucian revival under the Qing dynasty

How Manchu emperors used China's oldest teaching to strengthen their rule (17th-18th centuries).

| Feature                                                        | What it was                                                                                                                                                              | Why it mattered                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Civil service exams kept and filled</b>                     | Government jobs were still won by exams set on the Confucian classics. The exam system had chosen officials for over 1,000 years.                                        | By keeping the exams, the Qing won the support of China's scholars and kept the old way of choosing rulers going (continuity). |
| <b>The Sacred Edict (1670)</b>                                 | The Kangxi Emperor issued sixteen moral rules - such as respect for parents, harmony in the village and hard work - to be read aloud in towns and villages across China. | Confucian values were spread as official teaching for ordinary people, not just scholars.                                      |
| <b>The Kangxi Dictionary (1716)</b>                            | A great dictionary that gathered about 47,000 Chinese characters into one work, worked on by the emperor's own scholars.                                                 | It showed that the Qing saw themselves as guardians of Chinese learning, not outsiders to it.                                  |
| <b>The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries (from 1773)</b> | The Qianlong Emperor had about 3,400 of China's books copied into one vast library - the largest book project in Chinese history to that time.                           | The same project banned and destroyed works judged hostile to Qing rule. Revival and censorship went together.                 |

Confucius (Kong Qiu, 551-479 BCE) taught that a stable society rests on people doing their duties, on respect within the family, and on rule by good example. His sayings were gathered in the Analects. The Qing revival kept these teachings at the heart of Chinese government.

*Table of the features of the Confucian revival under the Qing dynasty: the civil service exams, the Sacred Edict of 1670, the Kangxi Dictionary of 1716 and the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries from 1773, each with what it was and why it mattered*

Read the table for the section's two tools. The revival kept old things going: the **civil service examination** that chose officials by learning, the social order built on family duty, and the place of scholarship at the heart of government. That is continuity, and it worked — the Qing held China for nearly three centuries.

But two changes sit inside the revival. First, the Qing spread the teaching further than before: the **Sacred Edict** of the Kangxi Emperor (1670) took Confucian rules out of the scholar's study and into every town and village, read aloud to ordinary people. Second, revival came with **censorship** — the official banning of books and ideas the state rejects. The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries, begun in 1773, gathered about 3,400 of China's books into one great work — and the same project hunted down and destroyed the books the Qianlong Emperor judged hostile to Qing rule. Protecting the past and policing it happened at the same desk.

The era of the revival ended with a jolt. In **1905**, after a century of defeats by foreign powers (section 5B), the Qing abolished the examination system itself. An institution more than a thousand years old stopped almost at once — a giant change. Yet the values the exams had carried — respect for education, family duty, rule by example — did not stop. As you will see in section 5E, they kept running through Chinese life long after the system that trained them was gone. That is continuity surviving the change that seemed to kill it.

### Part 3 — 1911: the last emperor falls (VC2HH10K26.E02)

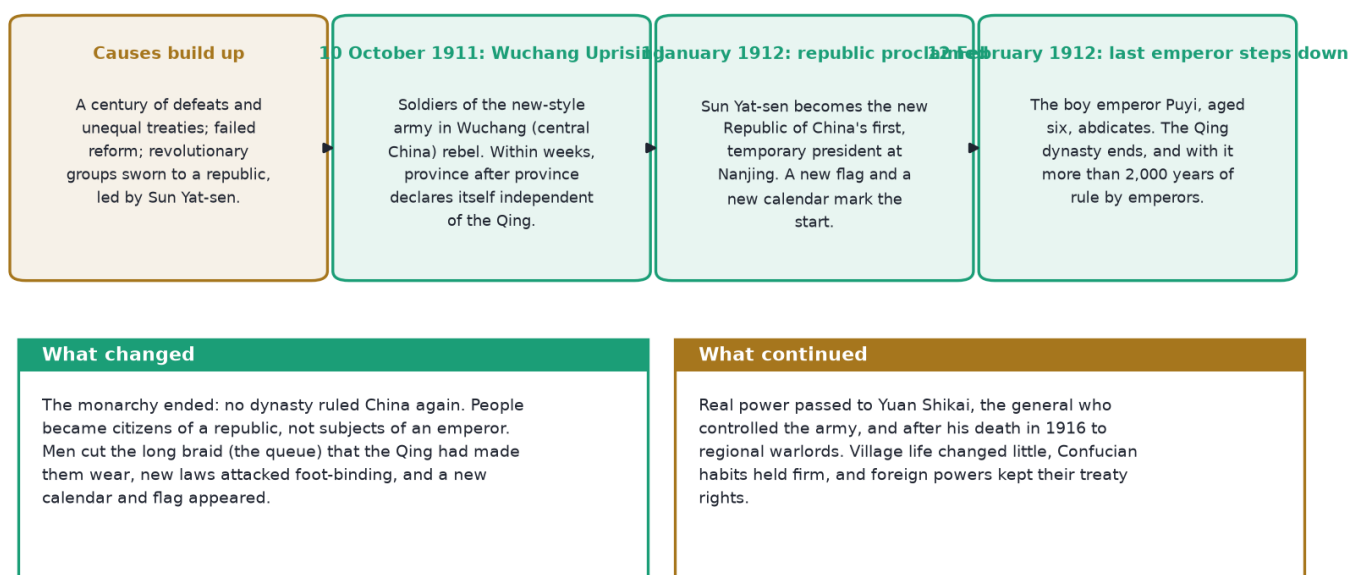
The biggest single event in modern Chinese history was not a war but a collapse: in little more than four months, in late 1911 and early 1912, the revolution of 1911 ended more than 2,000 years of rule by emperors.

The ideas behind it had been building for a generation. China's defeats by foreign powers — the Opium Wars, the war with Japan of 1894–95, the carve-up of rights and territory that followed — convinced a growing number of Chinese that the Qing could no longer defend the country. Section 5B covers those causes in detail. Here, the event itself.

The best-known carrier of the revolutionary idea was **Sun Yat-sen** (1866–1925), a doctor from southern China who gave his life to building revolutionary groups. Section 5D follows his life as experience and perspective; here, his ideas. Sun’s programme was the **Three Principles of the People**: **nationalism** — China free of foreign control and united; **democracy** — a republic with a constitution in place of an emperor; and **the people’s livelihood** — a fairer share of wealth, above all of land. *Nationalism* is used here for the idea that a nation’s people should govern themselves, free of outside control; other definitions exist.

### The 1911 revolution: four steps from empire to republic

What happened, in order. Section 5B covers the causes in detail; this section follows the event and its ideas.



*Sequence diagram of the 1911 revolution in four steps: the causes building up, the Wuchang Uprising of 10 October 1911, the proclamation of the republic on 1 January 1912, and the last emperor stepping down on 12 February 1912, with panels for what changed and what continued*

The event ran ahead of everyone’s plans. On **10 October 1911**, soldiers of the new-style army at **Wuchang** (central China) rose in revolt. The Qing could not put the fire out: one province after another declared itself independent of the dynasty. On **1 January 1912** the **Republic of China** was proclaimed at Nanjing, with Sun Yat-sen as its first, temporary president. The end came on **12 February 1912**, when the boy emperor **Puyi**, aged six, gave up the throne — the formal word is **abdication**. The Qing were finished, and with them the imperial system begun by the first emperor in 221 BCE.

The diagram’s two bottom panels do the section’s work. The changes were real and symbolic at once: subjects became citizens, the long braid (the **queue**) that the Qing had forced men to wear was cut, laws attacked foot-binding, and a new flag and calendar appeared. The continuities were just as real: military men held the true power, village life changed little, and foreign powers kept their treaty rights. Sun Yat-sen saw it coming. When he died in March 1925, his recorded last words were “*The revolution is not yet finished; all my comrades must still strive on.*” You will meet that source again as Source A below.

### Part 4 — Ideas at war: ideologies of the Civil War era (VC2HH10K26.E03)

The republic did not settle China. After the strongman **Yuan Shikai** died in 1916, the country broke into regions ruled by rival generals — the **warlord** era (1916–1928). Out of that disorder came a contest of ideas, and the contest decided China’s future.

An **ideology** is a system of ideas about how society should be organised and governed — who should hold power, who should own what, and what the state is for. In the Civil War era, China’s educated people debated several. Four mattered most (and they are summarised in the table below): the revived Confucian teaching, now on the defensive; Sun’s nationalism; the “new culture” ideas of the students and writers; and **communism**, which arrived last and won.

### The influencing ideas of this section

Four bodies of ideas shaped China’s century of change. Each is explained in the part of the section named below.

| Idea                                                               | Main carriers                                                  | What it taught                                                                                                              | The change it sought                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Confucian teaching</b> , revived by the Qing (Part 2)           | Qing emperors; scholars; officials                             | Order through duty: rulers rule by good example, families honour parents and elders, officials are chosen by learning.      | To hold society steady. Revival was a tool of continuity - but the Qing also spread the teaching wider, and censored books against it (a change in reach). |
| <b>Nationalism and the Three Principles of the People</b> (Part 3) | Sun Yat-sen; the Guomindang (Nationalists)                     | China should be free of foreign control, united, and governed as a republic with a share of wealth and land for its people. | To end imperial rule and build a modern nation-state. Achieved the first half in 1911-12.                                                                  |
| <b>New Culture and May Fourth ideas</b> (Part 4)                   | Students and writers such as Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun (1895-1936) | Question the old teaching; learn from science and democracy; write in plain language so all can read.                       | To change minds first: a modern culture before, or instead of, another change of rulers.                                                                   |
| <b>Communism, adapted to China</b> (Parts 4-6)                     | Chinese Communist Party (founded 1921); Mao Zedong (1893-1976) | History is a struggle between classes; workers and peasants should rule; the party leads the remaking of the economy.       | To overthrow landlord power, remake farming and industry, and build a strong socialist state.                                                              |

The same ideas kept reappearing in new forms - for example, respect for education outlived the exam system that carried it. Tracing an idea across eras is one way historians find continuity.

*Table of the four influencing ideas of this section — Confucian teaching revived by the Qing, nationalism and the Three Principles, the new ideas of the May Fourth Movement, and communism adapted to China — with what each taught, who carried it, and the change it sought*

The turning of minds came in **1919**. The peace settlement that ended World War I handed the rights Germany had held in China’s Shandong province to Japan instead of returning them. Students marched in Beijing on 4 May, and protests spread across the country: this was the **May Fourth Movement**. Behind it ran the **New Culture Movement**, whose writers — among them **Chen Duxiu** and **Lu Xun** — attacked the old teaching, demanded plain written language instead of the classical style, and called for “Mr Science and Mr Democracy”. Section 5D covers these as movements of people; their point here is as an idea-shift. May Fourth told a generation that China’s problem was not just its government but its culture — and it opened the door to foreign ideas of every kind, including the ideas of **Karl Marx**.

## Two sides, two ideas of China: the Civil War era

The Chinese Civil War (fought mainly 1927-37 and 1946-49) was a contest of ideologies as much as of armies.

|                                | The Nationalists (Guomindang)                                                                                                                                     | The Communists (CCP)                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Leader</b>                  | Sun Yat-sen until his death in 1925; then Chiang Kai-shek, a general trained in Japan and the Soviet Union.                                                       | Mao Zedong, a founder member of the party in 1921, whose leadership was made firm on the Long March (1935).                                                 |
| <b>Guiding idea</b>            | The Three Principles of the People: a strong united nation, guided step by step towards constitutional government, with people's welfare looked after from above. | Marxism adapted to China: the countryside, not the cities, as the engine of revolution; land to the tillers; power held through a strongly organised party. |
| <b>Main support</b>            | City business, officers, many landowners, and foreign backing at different times (Soviet Union, then United States).                                              | Poor farmers in the countryside - the huge majority of China - won over by land reform and by the army's discipline.                                        |
| <b>Programme in war</b>        | National unity under one government; land reform put off until later; regular armies.                                                                             | Land reform at once; guerrilla war behind the Japanese lines in 1937-45 won recruits and land.                                                              |
| <b>What each side promised</b> | Order first, change second.                                                                                                                                       | A new society now: land, literacy and a new status for the poor.                                                                                            |

What they shared matters too: both sides wanted a China that was strong, united and free of foreign control. They split over who should hold power, and how wealth - above all land - should be shared.

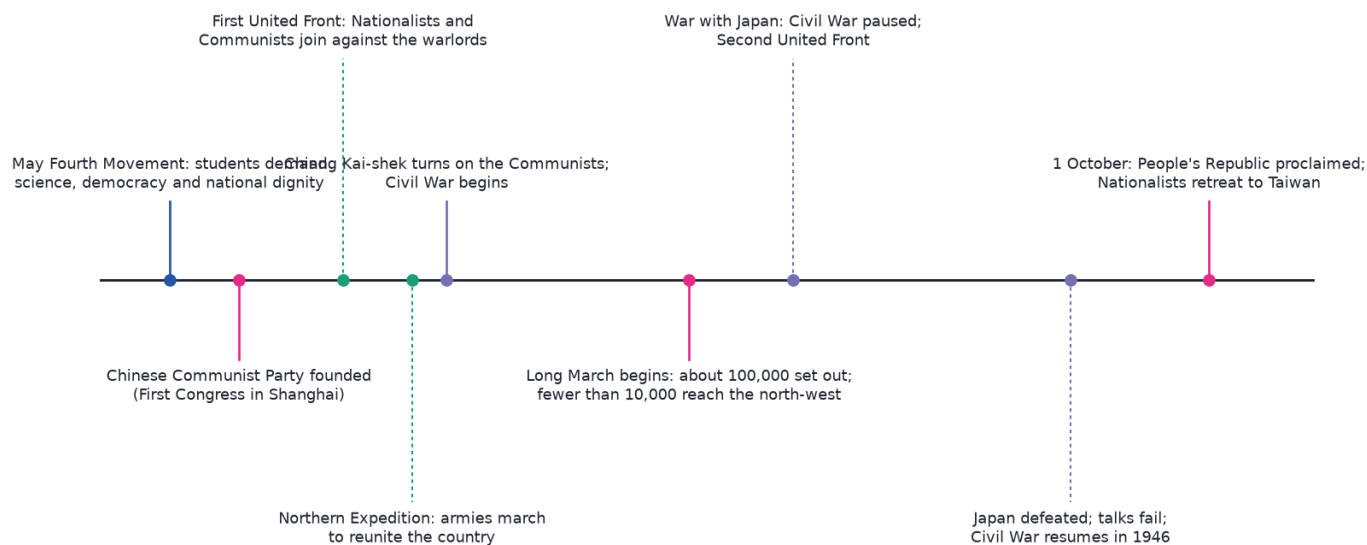
*Table comparing the Nationalists (Guomindang) and the Communists (CCP) during the Chinese Civil War era: their leaders, guiding ideas, main support, wartime programmes and promises*

Out of this ferment two parties grew strong enough to fight for China. The **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** was founded at its First Congress in Shanghai in **July 1921** — Mao Zedong, a young organiser from Hunan, was among the delegates. The CCP's ideology was communism: the idea that history is a struggle between classes, that the workers and peasants should rule, and that a strongly organised party should lead the remaking of the economy. Under **Mao Zedong**, the party bent that idea to Chinese ground: in a country of farmers, the countryside — not the city — would be the engine of revolution, and **land to the tillers** was the promise that carried it.

The other side was the **Guomindang** (the Nationalist Party), Sun Yat-sen's party, led after 1925 by the general **Chiang Kai-shek**. Its ideology was the Three Principles: a strong, united nation, guided step by step towards constitutional government, with the people's welfare managed from above.

## From new ideas to a new state, 1919-1949

The road from the May Fourth Movement to the People's Republic. Dots mark the true year of each event.



The Communists' idea - land for the tillers, carried by a disciplined party and army - proved the most powerful in the contest. The Nationalists' weaknesses in the 1946-49 war (money out of control, harsh recruitment of soldiers, loss of country support) handed them the victory.

*Timeline of China from 1919 to 1949 marking the May Fourth Movement, the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, the First United Front, the Northern Expedition, the start of the Civil War, the Long March, the war with Japan, and the proclamation of the People's Republic*

The two sides allied first — the **First United Front** of 1924 — and marched north in 1926–28 to break the warlords. Then the alliance shattered: in April 1927 Chiang Kai-shek turned on his communist allies, and thousands of party members and workers were killed in Shanghai. The **Chinese Civil War** had begun.

The Civil War ran in two stretches. In the first (1927–1937) Chiang's armies pushed the CCP out of its southern bases; in the **Long March** of 1934–35, about 100,000 communists broke out and marched to the remote north-west, and fewer than 10,000 arrived. The march became the party's founding legend, and on the way, at Zunyi in January 1935, Mao Zedong's leadership was made firm. Then Japan's full-scale invasion of 1937 paused the war: the two sides formed a **Second United Front** against the invader (the war itself is covered in section 5B and in Chapter 3). When Japan was defeated in 1945 the talks between the sides failed, and the Civil War resumed in 1946.

Why did the communist idea win? Ideas matter here, not just weapons. The CCP's programme — land reform carried out at once, an army under strict discipline, a party that organised down to the village — spoke to the huge peasant majority. The Nationalists' weaknesses — money out of control, harsh recruitment of soldiers, and the loss of support in the countryside — handed the CCP the advantage. On **1 October 1949** Mao Zedong proclaimed the **People's Republic of China** in Beijing; the Nationalist government withdrew to the island of **Taiwan**. The ideology question of the era had its answer — and the new state set out to remake everything.

### Part 5 — Ideas in command: the Cultural Revolution, 1966–1976 (VC2HH10K26.E04)

The People's Republic's first seventeen years were a rush of change: land taken from landlords and given to farmers, farms joined into big shared farms called **communes**, industry owned by the state, and schooling and family life remade by campaign. Then, in 1958–62, the **Great Leap Forward** — a push to industrialise within a few years — failed, and famine followed in which many millions died. Mao Zedong stepped back from day-to-day rule while others repaired the damage. By the mid-1960s Mao feared the revolution could be lost from within: that officials were leading China away from communism. His answer, launched in May 1966, was the **Cultural Revolution** — and it is the clearest case in this section of ideas driving events.

The curriculum asks you to explain the importance of ideas to this period, so the table below sorts it idea by idea.

### Ideas at work: the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976

Launched by Mao Zedong in May 1966. This table asks what IDEAS drove it, and what followed from them. For the experiences of the groups involved, see section 5D.

| The idea                                        | What it looked like                                                                                                                                                                               | What followed                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The revolution could be lost from within</b> | Mao said officials were leading China away from communism and called on the young to defend the revolution. In May 1966 he launched the movement, going around normal party channels.             | Students formed Red Guard groups. Teachers, officials and anyone labelled an enemy of the movement were publicly attacked; many were punished, some killed. Schools and universities closed for years.                     |
| <b>The Little Red Book</b>                      | Quotations from Chairman Mao, gathered under Lin Biao, were printed in their hundreds of millions - one of the most printed books in history. Carrying and reciting it became a test of loyalty.  | Mao's words stood above all other argument. The extreme praise of one leader shut down open debate inside the party and the country.                                                                                       |
| <b>Destroy the Four Olds</b>                    | Old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits were declared enemies. From August 1966 Red Guards smashed temples, books, art and family records, and attacked 'old' names and foreign links. | Centuries of heritage were lost in months. When rival groups began fighting each other, the army restored order, and from 1968 city students were sent to work in the countryside.                                         |
| <b>The aftermath</b>                            | Mao died in September 1976. Within a month the Gang of Four - four radical leaders, including Mao's wife - were arrested.                                                                         | In 1981 the party's own resolution judged the period a disaster that caused the most serious losses since 1949. Survivors, including Deng Xiaoping, concluded the system itself had to change - the door to reform opened. |

*Table of the ideas at work in the Cultural Revolution — the belief that the revolution could be lost from within, the Little Red Book, the campaign against the Four Olds, and the aftermath — with what each looked like and what followed*

Three ideas did the most work:

- **The Little Red Book.** *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, gathered under the general **Lin Biao**, was printed in its hundreds of millions — one of the most printed books in history. Carrying it, reading it and reciting it became a public test of loyalty. When one leader's words stand above all argument, debate stops; that is exactly what happened.
- **The Four Olds.** The movement declared war on **old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits**. From August 1966, student groups called **Red Guards** attacked what carried them: temples, books, works of art, family records, and people whose names, habits or foreign links looked “old”. The destruction of the Four Olds is one of the fastest losses of heritage ever recorded.
- **The cult around one leader.** The extreme praise of Mao — huge parades, badges, portraits everywhere — gave the movement its energy and made it hard to question. Section 5D covers which groups took part and which were targeted; the experiences of teachers, officials and families are told there. Here, hold the idea-side: what the movement believed, and what followed from believing it.

The consequences shaped the next era. Schools and universities closed for years; a generation's schooling was broken. Rival groups fell to fighting each other, and from 1968 the army restored order while city students were sent to work in the countryside. When Mao died in **September 1976**, the **Gang of Four** — four radical leaders including Mao's wife — were arrested within a month. In **1981** the party's own resolution judged the period a disaster: it had caused, it said, the most serious losses to the party, the state and the people since 1949.

Now apply the section's tools. The Cultural Revolution changed much — heritage destroyed, schooling broken, the old party habits smashed. But it also produced a fierce continuity: the Communist Party survived its own upheaval, and when the upheaval ended, one-party rule stood where it had stood in 1949. And one more consequence matters for

what follows: survivors of the period — among them **Deng Xiaoping** — concluded that a system which could do this to itself had to change how it ran the country.

## Part 6 — China’s own path since 1949 (VC2HH10K26.E05)

The final thread is the idea that still names China’s official path. Since **1982**, when Deng Xiaoping gave it to the party congress as the country’s guiding phrase, its official name in China has been **socialism with Chinese characteristics** (*socialism* is used here in the communist movement’s own sense: a society moving towards common ownership, directed by the party); the curriculum treats it as China’s own form of communism. Either way, the question is the same: what does communism mean in China, and how has the answer changed since 1949?

The answer comes in two halves — the Mao era and the reform era — and the table below lines them up.

### One party, two ways of running an economy

How socialism with Chinese characteristics, China's own form of communism, changed after 1978.

|                          | Mao era, 1949-1976                                                                | Reform era, from 1978                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Who decides what is made | State planners set targets for factories and communes; prices fixed by the state. | Markets: firms and families choose, guided - not replaced - by state plans. Private business allowed from the 1980s.          |
| The countryside          | Communes: villagers worked big collective farms and shared what the state paid.   | Household responsibility: families farm the land and keep what they grow above their quota. Output rose fast from 1978.       |
| The outside world        | Mostly closed; trade limited and state-run.                                       | Open: foreign firms invited into Special Economic Zones (Shenzhen, 1980); China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001.  |
| The measure that matters | Class struggle: politics decided who rose and who fell.                           | Results: Deng's test - does life get better? 'It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice.' |
| Who rules                | The Chinese Communist Party, with Mao at the top.                                 | The Chinese Communist Party. One-party rule continued; reform was economic, not political.                                    |

The blue final row is the point: the great economic change happened WHILE the political order continued. That pairing - change in one part of society, continuity in another - is the pattern this section keeps finding.

*Comparison table of the Mao era 1949 to 1976 and the reform era from 1978 across who decides what is made, the countryside, the outside world, the measure that matters, and who rules, showing economic change alongside continuing one-party rule*

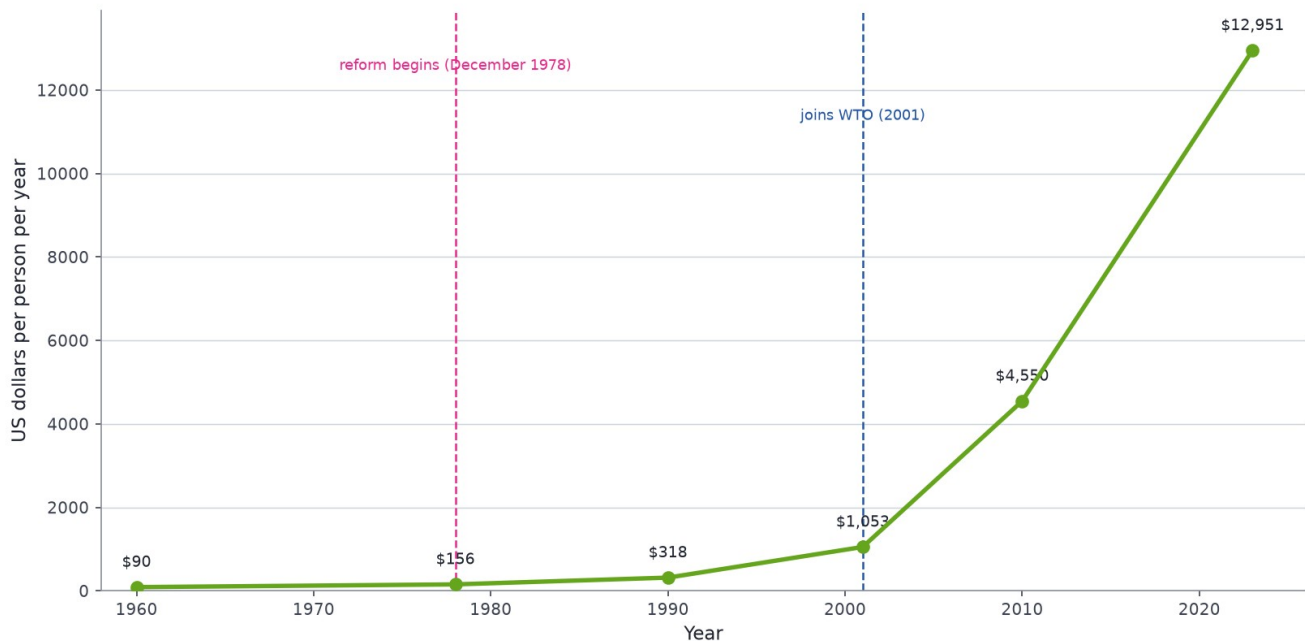
From **1949 to 1976** the system ran on the Soviet pattern: the state owned industry, planners set the targets, and the countryside worked in communes. Politics decided everything — the era of “class struggle” studied in Part 5.

From **December 1978**, under **Deng Xiaoping**, the party chose reform. The change started in the countryside: under the **household responsibility** system, families farmed the land and kept what they grew above the state’s share, and output rose fast. Then came the towns and the coast: private business was allowed, foreign firms were invited into **Special Economic Zones** — **Shenzhen**, a small border town in 1980, grew into a city of millions — and China re-joined the world’s trading system, joining the **World Trade Organization** in **2001**. Markets came into a system that had banned them.

The results are the fastest rise in living standards ever measured. The chart below tracks GDP per person — the value of the economy divided among all people, a rough measure of average income — from 1960 to 2023.

## What reform did to living standards

GDP per person in China (current US dollars), 1960-2023.



Data: World Bank (api.worldbank.org), GDP per capita (current US\$), retrieved 26 August 2026; same series as section 5E. Note: the 1960 figure falls in the famine years of the Great Leap Forward.

Line chart of GDP per person in China in current US dollars from 1960 to 2023, rising from about 90 dollars in 1960 to about 156 in 1978 when reform began, then sharply to about 12,951 dollars in 2023, with markers for the start of reform and for joining the World Trade Organization

Data: World Bank (api.worldbank.org), GDP per capita (current US\$), retrieved 26 August 2026; the same series is used in section 5E.

Deng's own words explain the idea behind the turn — you will meet them as Source B below. The test of a policy became its results: does life get better? “Poverty is not socialism,” he said.

And what continued? The table's last row is the point the curriculum wants you to analyse: the Chinese Communist Party kept its rule through all of it. Reform was economic, not political. The state that opened markets also kept censorship and one-party control; the party that condemned the Cultural Revolution kept the power structure that produced it. Change in the economy, continuity in power — that pairing is what the phrase “with Chinese characteristics” was built to describe.

### Part 7 — The pattern of continuity and change

Every thread of this section can be sorted into the same two columns. The table below does it; use it to check your own reading of the section.

## Sorting the section: continuity and change in one table

The five threads of this section, each sorted into what it changed and what it kept going. This is the skill section 8A teaches in full.

| Thread                                                     | Era                | What it changed                                                                                                         | What it kept going                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Confucian revival under the Qing</b>                    | <b>1600s-1700s</b> | Spread old teaching wider (Sacred Edict for ordinary people); paired revival with censorship of books against the Qing. | The exam system, village order, family duty - the old ways of choosing rulers and running society.                   |
| <b>The 1911 revolution</b>                                 | <b>1911-12</b>     | Ended more than 2,000 years of rule by emperors; proclaimed a republic; citizenship replaced subject-hood.              | Rule by the strong: warlords, then one-party states. Village life and foreign treaty rights changed little at first. |
| <b>Ideologies of the Civil War era</b>                     | <b>1919-49</b>     | Replaced the republic's weak centre with a party-state built on one idea: communism adapted to China's countryside.     | The goal every side shared: a strong, united China free of foreign control.                                          |
| <b>The Cultural Revolution</b>                             | <b>1966-76</b>     | Smashed heritage, schooling and party habits; then ended faith in extreme politics - creating the demand for reform.    | One-party rule survived the upheaval, and was stronger than ever when it ended.                                      |
| <b>Reform and 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'</b> | <b>1978-now</b>    | Markets, private business, cities, world trade; living standards rose faster than almost anywhere in history.           | Chinese Communist Party rule; the strong central state; and - in time - a new official respect for Confucius.        |

Read down the last column: in every era, something old was carried forward. Read across any row: no event changed everything at once. That is the pattern of continuity and change.

*Summary table sorting the five threads of this section — the Confucian revival, the 1911 revolution, the ideologies of the Civil War era, the Cultural Revolution, and the reform era — into the era each belongs to, what each changed, and what each kept going*

Two readings of the table matter most. Read down the last column: in every era, something old was carried forward — the values under the revival, the goal of a strong united China through the Civil War, one-party rule through reform. Read across any row: no event, not even the revolution of 1911 or the Cultural Revolution, changed everything at once. That is the pattern historians mean by continuity and change: they are not opposites but partners, always running together.

### Part 8 — A matter of interpretation: did the 1911 revolution succeed?

Historians argue about the 1911 revolution, and the argument matters because the verdict changes what the revolution was *for*. As always in this book, both sides are set out in their strongest form before you are asked to judge.

## A matter of interpretation: did the 1911 revolution succeed?

Two historians could use the same facts and reach different verdicts. Each side is set out below in its strongest form.

| YES - it was a real revolution                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | NO - the change was shallow                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An empire that had lasted more than 2,000 years fell within four months, and no dynasty ever ruled China again.</li><li>• The idea of a republic took root. When Yuan Shikai tried to make himself emperor in 1915-16 he was forced to give up within months; a 1917 attempt to restore the last emperor collapsed in twelve days.</li><li>• New ideas of citizenship, new schools, new writing and new laws followed - the revolution opened the door to everything that came after.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Power passed straight to generals. The warlord era (1916-28) brought fighting, not the peace a republic was meant to bring.</li><li>• For most farmers - the huge majority - daily life was almost unchanged: the same rents, the same taxes, the same gentry.</li><li>• Foreign powers kept their treaty rights and special districts for decades more.</li><li>• Sun Yat-sen's own dying words admitted it: 'The revolution is not yet finished; all my comrades must still strive on.'</li></ul> |

*The verdict depends on what a revolution is FOR: taking power, or changing how people live. Historians weigh both - and many say the 1911 revolution did the first job but left the second unfinished.*

*Diagram setting out the strongest form of two interpretations of the 1911 revolution — that it was a real revolution because the monarchy fell and republican ideas took root, and that the change was shallow because warlords, village life and foreign treaty rights were unchanged — with a note that the verdict depends on what a revolution is for*

Notice the structure of the disagreement. Both sides use the same agreed facts — the dynasty fell, warlords followed, Sun's last words asked for more. They differ over the **criterion**: what counts as a revolution's success? If the test is "the old system fell and the new idea survived," 1911 passes. If the test is "ordinary life was transformed," 1911 fails — and those who judge it this way usually add that the real transformation came in 1949. You do not have to settle the debate to do well here; you have to name the criterion each side is using and hold both sides to the same standard.

## Worked source analyses

### Analysis 1 — Source A: Sun Yat-sen's last words (scaffolded)

#### Source A - Sun Yat-sen's last words (March 1925)

A primary source: the recorded last political words of the revolution's best-known leader.

*Sun Yat-sen died on 12 March 1925, before the republic he had worked for was truly secure. His last political words have been recorded as follows.*

**"The revolution is not yet finished;  
all my comrades must still strive on."**

In lectures of 1924 Sun set out the idea behind his life's work, the Three Principles of the People: nationalism - a China free of foreign control and united; democracy - a republic under a constitution; and the people's livelihood - a fairer share of wealth, above all of land.

*Sun Yat-sen, last political words, 12 March 1925. Translation as commonly recorded in standard collections.*

*See W.T. de Bary (ed.), Sources of Chinese Tradition (Columbia University Press). Retrieved 26 August 2026.*

*Source A, the recorded last political words of Sun Yat-sen of March 1925 — 'The revolution is not yet finished; all my comrades must still strive on' — with a panel setting out his Three Principles of the People*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** It is a **primary source**: the recorded last political words of **Sun Yat-sen**, the revolution's best-known leader, written as he was dying in March 1925. The wording is a translation, as commonly recorded in standard collections.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to urge the movement on. Sun knew he was dying and knew the republic he had helped to build was not secure, so the words are a command to continue, not a celebration. We should expect them to present the revolution as unfinished.

**Step 3 — What does it say (content)?** It says two things: the revolution has not reached its goal ("is not yet finished"), and the work now belongs to those who come after ("all my comrades must still strive on"). The panel sets out the goal he meant: the **Three Principles of the People** — nationalism, democracy and the people's livelihood.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of a revolutionary nationalist at the end of his life: the change of 1911–12 was real but not enough. A warlord general in 1925, or a foreign power comfortable with the treaty system, would have described the same years very differently — as disorder, or as a republic that had already gone too far.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is strong evidence for two things: the state of the republic by 1925 (weak, divided, unfinished) and the standard by which its founders judged it. A historian would check it against the record of the 1916–28 warlord era — and would also remember that last words are shaped for effect: they tell us what Sun wanted the movement to believe as much as what had actually been achieved.

## Analysis 2 — Source B: Deng Xiaoping's sayings on reform (scaffolded)

### Source B - Deng Xiaoping on what should count

A primary source: two sayings of the leader who opened the reform era, widely recorded.

---

**"It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white,  
so long as it catches mice."**

**"Poverty is not socialism."**

Meaning: judge a policy by its RESULTS - does it make life better? - not by whether it repeats accepted words. This thinking let markets and private business into a system that had banned them, while one-party rule continued.

*Deng Xiaoping: the first saying from a talk on farming policy in 1962; the second from remarks widely recorded in the 1980s. Translations as commonly recorded.*

*See W.T. de Bary (ed.), Sources of Chinese Tradition (Columbia University Press). Retrieved 26 August 2026.*

*Source B, two recorded sayings of Deng Xiaoping — 'It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice' and 'Poverty is not socialism' — with a panel explaining that policy came to be judged by its results*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** A **primary source**: two sayings of **Deng Xiaoping**, the leader who opened the reform era. The first is from a talk on farming policy in 1962; both became widely recorded as the reform era's motto-words.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to change how policy is judged. Deng is telling officials to stop asking "is this idea correct by the book?" and start asking "does this idea work?" We should expect the sayings to justify trying new things — markets, private business, foreign firms — inside a communist system.

**Step 3 — What does it say (content)?** The cat saying means the colour of the cat (the label of the policy) matters less than catching mice (the result). "Poverty is not socialism" means a system that keeps people poor cannot be the one the revolution promised. Together: results decide, and getting richer is not a betrayal of the revolution but its point.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of a practical leader who had watched the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution damage the country. Someone who believed politics must always come first — the radicals removed in 1976 — would have rejected both sayings as giving up the revolution's ideas.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** The sayings are excellent evidence of the *turn* of 1978 and after: the same party, a new test for policy. A historian would check them against what actually changed — the household responsibility system, the Special Economic Zones, the growth figures in the chart above — and would note a limit: the sayings justify economic change only, not political change. The party's continued rule, set out in Part 6, sits comfortably with both sentences.

## Practice questions

### Scaffolded

- Q1.** Look at the timeline of significant events. (a) In what year did the Wuchang Uprising begin the 1911 revolution? (b) What colour-coded era covers 1949 to 1976? (*Hint: the era bands are labelled under the line.*)
- Q2.** From the Confucian revival table, name (a) the sixteen rules issued in 1670 to teach Confucian values to ordinary people and (b) the book project begun in 1773 that both gathered China's books and destroyed some of them. (*Hint: both are rows in the table's first column.*)
- Q3.** Using the 1911 revolution diagram, state (a) the date the Republic of China was proclaimed and (b) one symbol of change named in the "What changed" panel. (*Hint: the panels sit beneath the four steps.*)
- Q4.** From the two-sides table, name (a) the guiding idea of each side in the Civil War era and (b) the main support of the Communists. (*Hint: the second and third rows of the table.*)
- Q5.** Look at the Cultural Revolution table. (a) List the Four Olds. (b) What was the Little Red Book, and what did carrying it become? (*Hint: the second and third rows.*)
- Q6.** Using the reform comparison table, (a) explain in your own words what Deng's cat saying meant for policy and (b) name the one row of the table that shows continuity between the two eras. (*Hint: the last row is shaded differently.*)

### Without a scaffold

- Q7.** Explain how the Confucian revival under the Qing was at the same time an act of continuity and an act of change. Use two features from the table as your evidence.
- Q8.** Outline the 1911 revolution: what happened between October 1911 and February 1912, and what did it end? Then give two changes it brought and two things that continued in spite of it.
- Q9.** "The Chinese Civil War was won by an idea as much as by an army." Explain this statement using the ideologies and events of the 1919–1949 period.
- Q10.** Using Source B and Part 6, explain how socialism with Chinese characteristics changed the way China ran its economy after 1978 — and identify what did not change. Say why the pairing of that change and that continuity matters for understanding China today.
-

## Answers

**Q1.** (a) 1911 (October). (b) The People's Republic: Mao era.

**Q2.** (a) The Sacred Edict of the Kangxi Emperor. (b) The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries.

**Q3.** (a) 1 January 1912. (b) Any one of: citizenship in place of subject-hood; the cutting of the queue; laws against foot-binding; a new flag and calendar.

**Q4.** (a) The Nationalists: the Three Principles of the People. The Communists: Marxism adapted to China — class struggle, rule by workers and peasants, the party leading the remaking of the economy, with the countryside as the engine of revolution. (b) Poor farmers in the countryside.

**Q5.** (a) Old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits. (b) Quotations from Chairman Mao, gathered under Lin Biao and printed in their hundreds of millions; carrying and reciting it became a test of loyalty.

**Q6.** (a) A policy should be judged by its results — whether it makes life better — not by whether it fits accepted labels or repeated words. (b) The last row: the Chinese Communist Party ruled in both eras (one-party rule continued).

**Q7.** Model points: continuity — the revival kept the civil service examinations, the village social order and family duty at the heart of government for nearly three centuries. Change — the Qing spread the teaching to ordinary people through the Sacred Edict, and paired the revival with censorship, destroying books judged hostile to their rule. A good answer names both sides and ties each to a feature in the table.

**Q8.** Model points: outline — the Wuchang Uprising of 10 October 1911; province after province declared independence of the Qing; the Republic of China was proclaimed at Nanjing on 1 January 1912; the boy emperor Puyi abdicated on 12 February 1912, ending more than 2,000 years of imperial rule. Changes: subjects became citizens; the queue was cut; laws attacked foot-binding; new flag and calendar. Continuities: real power lay with military men (Yuan Shikai, then warlords); village life changed little; foreign powers kept their treaty rights. Any two of each, correctly placed.

**Q9.** Model points: the CCP's idea — land to the tillers, carried by a disciplined party and army organised down to the village — spoke to the peasant majority; land reform carried out at once won the countryside, and the guerrilla war behind Japanese lines in 1937–45 won recruits and land. The Nationalists' idea — order first under a strong state — lost support through money out of control, harsh recruitment of soldiers and failure in the countryside. The May Fourth era mattered because it opened minds to new ideologies, of which communism was one. A good answer links at least one idea to one event and to the outcome.

**Q10.** Model points: change — markets and private business replaced state targets; families farmed under the household responsibility system; foreign firms entered the Special Economic Zones; China joined the WTO in 2001; GDP per person rose from about 156 US dollars in 1978 to nearly 13,000 in 2023. Continuity — Chinese Communist Party one-party rule, and censorship and central control alongside the markets. The pairing matters because it explains modern China: world-beating economic growth under a system that kept its political shape — the meaning of “with Chinese characteristics”. Any answer that pairs the economic change with the political continuity and says why the pairing matters.

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# Lives in a changing China: reformers, rebels and rulers

**Curriculum:** VC2HH10K27

**Taught society:** China. Chapter 5 of this book teaches the Asia investigation through China (the book's recorded choice; see TOC decision D9).

**Linked elaborations (taught, China block):** VC2HH10K27.E01 VC2HH10K27.E02 VC2HH10K27.E03 VC2HH10K27.E04 VC2HH10K27.E05 VC2HH10K27.E06

Note: the remaining blocks of this content description (VC2HH10K27.E07–E22) cover the other society choices — India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam. They remain valid link keys for other builds and other choices, but they are not this book's taught case.

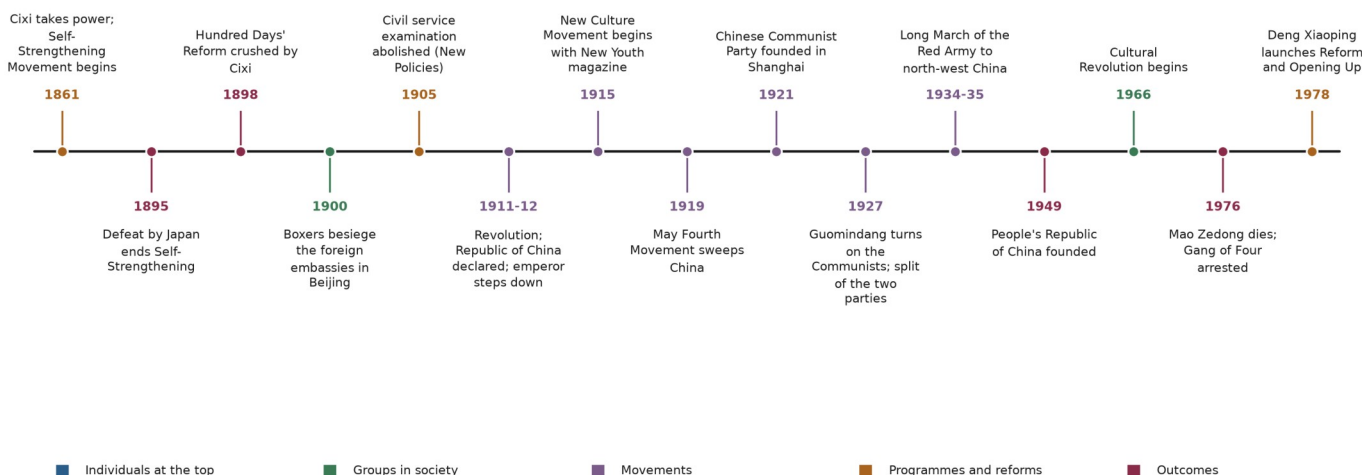
## Theory

This section puts people at the centre of China's century of change. Sections 5A to 5C looked at Qing society, at contact with foreign powers, and at the big events. Here we ask the question set by this section's curriculum: what were these changes like for the **individuals**, **groups** and **movements** who lived through them — and how did their experiences and choices shape Chinese society over time?

A **perspective** is the way a person or group sees events, shaped by who they are, what they believe and what they have lived through. An official, a farmer, a student and a foreign missionary standing in the same Beijing street in 1900 would each give a different account of what was happening and why. Historians read several perspectives together to build a fuller picture, and this section asks you to do the same.

### Individuals, groups and movements in modern China, 1861-1978

Key moments of the century this section covers (events spaced for readability, not proportional)



Dates follow the standard account of these events (retrieved 26 August 2026).

*Timeline of key moments in the experiences of individuals, groups and movements in China from 1861 to 1978, including the Self-Strengthening Movement, the Boxer Rebellion, the revolution of 1911, the May Fourth Movement, the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, the Long March, the founding of the People's Republic, the Cultural Revolution and Reform and Opening Up*

## Part 1 — Setting the scene: a proud society under strain

By the mid-1800s, Qing China faced problems from two directions at once. From outside, foreign powers had defeated China in war and forced one-sided treaties on it (section 5B covers these wars and treaties). From inside, the empire was stretched by a huge and growing population, and by large rebellions. Section 5C traced the main events of this period. Here, instead of listing events, we follow the people and movements caught up in them: the reformers who tried to save the dynasty, the rulers who decided how far change could go, the revolutionaries who decided the dynasty had to go, and the mass movements that remade China in the 1900s.

## Part 2 — Missionaries, reformers and the Boxers (VC2HH10K27.E01)

**Christian missionaries.** After the treaties of the 1840s and 1850s, Christian missionaries gained the right to travel, preach and own property deep inside China. By 1900 thousands of foreign missionaries were working there. They built churches and preached, opened schools — including some of the first schools for girls — set up hospitals and clinics, and printed books and Bibles in Chinese. A well-known example is **Hudson Taylor**, a British missionary who founded the **China Inland Mission** in **1865** and insisted on working far from the safe treaty ports, dressing in Chinese clothes to reach inland communities.

Chinese responses were mixed, and this is where perspective matters. Some Chinese converted and found meaning in the new faith; many others valued the schooling and medical care the missions brought. But many more were hostile. Preaching was backed by foreign power: the treaty rights that protected missionaries had been won in wars, and when a dispute broke out between a mission and a village, foreign force often stood behind the mission. Attacks on local temples and customs angered communities. In some places, anger turned violent and churches were attacked. Foreigners spoke of these incidents as proof that China needed “opening”; many Chinese saw them as proof that foreign religion came with foreign power behind it.

### Christian missionaries in late Qing China

What missions set up, and how Chinese people responded

| What missionaries set up                                            | How Chinese people responded                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Churches and preaching</b>                                       | Some Chinese converted and found meaning in the faith; most kept their own beliefs and resented preaching backed by foreign power. |
| <b>Schools, including some of the first schools for girls</b>       | Valued by many families for the new learning; others feared it would pull children away from Chinese customs.                      |
| <b>Hospitals and clinics</b>                                        | Medical care was widely welcomed, and trained the first modern Chinese doctors and nurses.                                         |
| <b>Printed books and Bibles in Chinese</b>                          | Spread new ideas, including about women's status; critics saw them as foreign words forced in after the wars.                      |
| <b>Travel into inland provinces after the treaties of the 1850s</b> | Contact spread far beyond the treaty ports; disputes between missions and villages sometimes turned violent.                       |

#### A named example: Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission (1865)

Hudson Taylor, a British missionary, founded the China Inland Mission in 1865 and insisted on working far from the treaty ports, wearing Chinese dress to reach inland communities. His mission became one of the largest in China, and his letters home shaped how Britain saw the Chinese interior.

*Missionary activity grew under the treaty rights won by foreign powers in the wars of 1839-1842 and 1856-1860 (see section 5B).*

*Table of what Christian missionaries did in late Qing China, with the mixed Chinese responses to each activity*

**The Self-Strengthening Movement.** After the disasters of the 1850s and 1860s, some Qing officials reached a blunt conclusion: China must learn the West's military methods to defend itself. Their programme is known as the **Self-Strengthening Movement** (about **1861–1895**). At the court, **Prince Gong** backed it; in the provinces, officials such as **Zeng Guofan**, **Li Hongzhang** and **Zuo Zongtang** carried it out. They built arsenals and shipyards (such as the **Jiangnan Arsenal** at Shanghai and the **Fuzhou Shipyard**), laid telegraph lines and railways, raised a modern navy (the **Beiyang Fleet**), and sent groups of Chinese boys to study in the United States from **1872**. The guiding idea was summed up in a slogan of the time: Western skills for defence, Chinese learning as the foundation.

The movement ended in failure. In the war with **Japan of 1894–1895**, China was badly beaten, and the navy the reformers had built was destroyed. To a generation of Chinese observers, the lesson was clear: borrowing foreign tools

was not enough. The system itself would have to change. That lesson pushed the next generation towards sharper reform — and then towards revolution.

**The Boxer Rebellion.** While officials debated reform, anger spread among ordinary people in northern China. Drought and floods ruined harvests; foreign railways and missions spread across the countryside. Out of this came the **Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists** — called the **Boxers** by Westerners because its members practised fighting exercises. The Boxers were a loose, local movement with no single leader. Their slogan was “**Support the Qing, destroy the foreign**”, and they attacked railways, telegraph lines, churches and Chinese Christians.

In **June 1900**, with the support of some imperial troops, Boxers surrounded the foreign **embassies** in Beijing — the walled compounds where foreign governments kept their representatives — and kept them under siege for 55 days. An alliance of eight foreign powers sent armies to the rescue; Beijing fell to them in August. The **Boxer Protocol**, signed in **September 1901**, punished China harshly: a huge war payment of 450 million taels of silver (to be paid over 39 years), foreign guards stationed in Beijing, and the punishment of officials who had backed the Boxers.

What did ordinary Chinese take from this experience? Two lessons stand out. The Qing court had failed to protect its own people from foreign punishment. And the foreign powers would use overwhelming force to keep their position in China. Both lessons fed the revolutionary movements that followed.

### The Boxer Rebellion, 1899-1901

The Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists against the foreign powers



The Boxers were a loose, local movement with no single leader; Westerners called them Boxers because members practised fighting exercises.

*Diagram of the Boxer Rebellion of 1899 to 1901, with its causes, its main events including the siege of the foreign embassies in Beijing, and its results in the Boxer Protocol of 1901*

### Part 3 — Empress Dowager Cixi: the woman at the top (VC2HH10K27.E02)

**Cixi** (1835–1908) entered the imperial palace as one of the emperor’s junior wives. When her son became emperor in 1861, she helped lead a palace takeover and took power as **regent** — that is, she ruled on behalf of a child emperor. She ruled first for her son, then, from 1875, for her nephew, the **Guangxu Emperor**, with breaks in between. With interruptions, she held the highest power in China for about 47 years, until her death in November 1908.

Her record on modernisation is the heart of this part. She backed the Self-Strengthening Movement while it lasted. In **1898**, the young Guangxu Emperor launched the **Hundred Days’ Reform**: in about three months he issued more than a hundred edicts ordering new schools, modern armies, industry and faster communication. Conservative officials feared losing their positions and appealed to Cixi. She stepped in, placed the emperor under house arrest for the rest of his life, cancelled most of the reforms, and had six reformers put to death, including the thinker **Tan Sitong**. In **1900** she made her most dangerous decision: she backed the Boxers against the foreign powers. The result was the disaster of 1901.

Then came the surprise. After 1901, Cixi turned around and launched the most far-reaching reform programme the dynasty had ever tried: the **New Policies** (1901–1908).

## Cixi's New Policies, 1901-1908

The reforms launched by Empress Dowager Cixi after the Boxer disaster

| Reform                                            | What it did                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Civil service examination abolished (1905)</b> | The thousand-year-old route into official life ended; modern schools replaced it and thousands of students were sent abroad to study. |
| <b>New armies</b>                                 | Armies raised and trained on Western lines, replacing the old banner and militia forces.                                              |
| <b>Foot binding discouraged</b>                   | An edict discouraged the practice, and anti-foot-binding societies spread, changing the lives of girls and women.                     |
| <b>New laws and government</b>                    | Ministries reformed, and provincial assemblies were set up as a first step toward elected government.                                 |
| <b>Constitution promised (1908)</b>               | The Outline of the Imperial Constitution promised a full constitution within nine years.                                              |

Note the timing: Cixi crushed the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898, yet within ten years her own New Policies had gone further than the reformers of 1898 had dared. Historians still argue over whether this makes her the blocker of modernisation or, at the last, its leader (see the debate below in the section).

*Reforms as commonly recorded in standard histories of the late Qing (retrieved 26 August 2026).*

*Table of Empress Dowager Cixi's New Policies reforms between 1901 and 1908, including the end of the civil service examination, new schools, new armies, the ban on foot binding and the promise of a constitution*

- The **civil service examination**, the route into official life for over a thousand years, was **abolished in 1905** and replaced by modern schools; thousands of students were sent abroad to study.
- **New armies** were raised and trained on Western lines.
- **Foot binding** was discouraged by edict, and anti-foot-binding societies spread.
- In **1908** the court issued an **Outline of the Imperial Constitution**, promising a full constitution within nine years.

### A matter of interpretation: did Cixi block modernisation, or lead it?

Historians disagree about Cixi, and both sides have real evidence. Following the house rule of presenting each position in its strongest form:

## A matter of interpretation: did Cixi block or lead modernisation?

Each position below is presented in its strongest form

### Position 1: Cixi blocked modernisation

- She cared about power first and China second.
- She crushed the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898 the moment it threatened her control, and had six reformers put to death.
- She gambled with the Boxers in 1900 and made China pay for it with the Boxer Protocol.
- Real reform came only when the dynasty had no choice - and too late to save it.

### Position 2: Cixi was a practical moderniser

- She governed a vast empire from a weak position, with rivals at court and foreign powers at the coast.
- She backed technological reform (Self-Strengthening) for decades and kept the empire running.
- Her New Policies went further than 1898: ending the examination system was a greater break with the past than any single reform of the Hundred Days.
- A ruler should be judged against what was possible, not against what a reform pamphlet wished for.

### What the debate is really about

Both positions use the same facts; they differ over which facts matter most, and over whether a ruler should be judged by intentions or by results. Notice that a position can be clearly stated and still be argued against - that is what makes it a genuine historical debate.

*House rule: each position is given in the strongest form its own supporters would accept before either is evaluated.*

*Diagram presenting the strongest version of two positions on Empress Dowager Cixi, one that she blocked modernisation and one that she was a practical moderniser*

**Position 1 — Cixi blocked modernisation.** This view holds that Cixi cared about power first and China second. She crushed the Hundred Days' Reform the moment it threatened her control. She gambled with the Boxers and made China pay for it. Real reform came only when the dynasty had no choice — and then it came too late to save it. On this reading, the reforms of her last years were an attempt to rescue the throne, not the country.

**Position 2 — Cixi was a practical moderniser.** This view holds that Cixi governed a vast empire from a weak position, facing rivals at court and foreign pressure at the coast. She backed technological reform for decades, kept the empire running, and in her last years carried through changes bigger than anything proposed in 1898 — ending the examination system was a greater break with the past than any single reform of the Hundred Days. A ruler must be judged against what was possible, this view argues, not against what a reform pamphlet wished for.

Each position uses real evidence, and the answer you reach depends on whether you judge a ruler by intentions or by results. Notice what the debate is about: not the facts, but which facts matter most. That is what makes it a genuine historical debate.

## Part 4 — Sun Yat-sen: the man who ended the dynasty (VC2HH10K27.E03)

**Sun Yat-sen** (1866–1925) was born in Guangdong province. He was educated for a time in Hawaii and trained as a doctor in Hong Kong. By the 1890s he had reached the conclusion that separated him from the reformers of Part 3: the Qing could not be repaired; it had to be replaced by a republic.

His life shows what a determined individual could do. In **1894** he founded the **Revive China Society**, one of the first revolutionary groups. An uprising in 1895 failed, and Sun spent most of the next sixteen years in exile — in Japan, South-East Asia, Europe and the United States — raising money, winning support and organising. In **1905** he helped found the **Tongmenghui** (United League) in Tokyo, which brought the scattered revolutionary groups together around his programme, the **Three Principles of the People**:

- **Nationalism** — China should be united and free of foreign control;
- **Democracy** — China should be a **republic**, a state with no emperor, governed with the consent of the people;

- **Livelihood** — land and wealth should be shared more equally, so that modern growth did not simply create new forms of poverty.

## Sun Yat-sen: the Three Principles and a life of revolution

The programme and career of the man who ended the Qing dynasty



*Diagram of Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People and the main steps of his revolutionary career from 1866 to his death in 1925*

On **10 October 1911**, troops at **Wuchang** rebelled against the Qing (section 5C covers this event and its causes). Sun was abroad at the time and learned of the uprising from a newspaper. Province after province declared itself independent of the Qing. Sun returned and was chosen as **provisional president of the Republic of China**, declared on **1 January 1912**. To make sure the last emperor actually stepped down, he agreed to stand aside in favour of **Yuan Shikai**, the general who controlled the northern armies; the boy emperor Puyi gave up the throne in February 1912, ending over two thousand years of imperial rule.

Sun spent his remaining years trying to rebuild a united China out of the fragments the revolution left behind. He died in March 1925. His will ended with words the movement kept alive: *"The revolution is not yet complete. All comrades must continue to strive."* Later generations on different sides of Chinese politics have all claimed Sun as their own — which tells you how central his perspective remains to China's story.

**A revolutionary woman's voice: Qiu Jin.** The revolution was not only men's work. **Qiu Jin** (1875–1907), from Zhejiang province, left an arranged marriage, studied in Japan, and wrote boldly for women's rights and against foot binding. She joined the revolutionary movement and helped plan an uprising, which was betrayed. She was executed in **July 1907**. For Qiu Jin, freeing the nation and freeing women were one cause. Her writings give historians a perspective the official record rarely preserved: how a woman revolutionary experienced the same age of change.

### Part 5 — Movements in the age of the republic, 1912–1949 (VC2HH10K27.E04)

The republic did not bring the order Sun hoped for. Yuan Shikai soon ruled as a dictator, and after his death in 1916 China broke apart under rival warlords. Out of this disorder came a wave of new movements. The curriculum asks you to trace the development of at least one of them; here are the five it names.

## Five movements in China, 1912-1949

Use this table as the starting point for the infographic task (Q12)

| Movement                                    | When it began         | Key people                                              | Main goals                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>New Culture Movement</b>                 | 1915                  | Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Lu Xun                              | Renew China through new ideas: democracy, science, plain writing (baihua), and criticism of old customs.                     |
| <b>May Fourth Movement</b>                  | 1919                  | Beijing students, then workers and merchants nationwide | Protest the peace treaty's handing of Shandong to Japan; defend China's rights; awaken the nation.                           |
| <b>Guomindang (Kuomintang)</b>              | 1912; rebuilt 1919-24 | Sun Yat-sen, then Chiang Kai-shek                       | Unify China under one strong national government; after 1927, wipe out the Communists.                                       |
| <b>Chinese Communist Party and Red Army</b> | 1921                  | Chen Duxiu, then Mao Zedong                             | Revolution of workers and peasants; land shared equally; power away from landlords and foreign powers.                       |
| <b>New Life Movement</b>                    | 1934                  | Chiang Kai-shek                                         | Renew public morals and discipline - Confucian values, hygiene and order - against the Communists and the threat from Japan. |

These movements overlap and collide: New Culture students marched on May Fourth; some became Communists, others joined the Guomindang; and after 1927 the Guomindang and the CCP fought a civil war, paused only for the war with Japan (1937-1945).

Dates and people as commonly recorded in standard histories of the period (retrieved 26 August 2026).

*Table of five movements in China between 1912 and 1949 — the New Culture Movement, the May Fourth Movement, the Guomindang, the Chinese Communist Party and the Red Army, and the New Life Movement — with their starting points, key people and main goals*

**The New Culture Movement (from 1915).** In 1915 the thinker **Chen Duxiu** founded the magazine **New Youth**, which called on China to think anew. Its watchwords were “**Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science**”. Its writers attacked old habits they blamed for China’s weakness and called for everyday, plain writing (**baihua**) instead of the classical style only scholars could master. The writer **Lu Xun** published “**A Madman’s Diary**” in 1918, the first short story in plain written Chinese; it attacked the cruelty of old family customs. The movement was centred on **Peking University**. For the young people who read these magazines, the experience was like waking up: the private became political, and the old became something to be questioned.

**The May Fourth Movement (1919).** When World War I ended, the peace conference decided to hand Germany’s rights in China’s **Shandong** province to Japan instead of returning them to China. On **4 May 1919**, about 3,000 students gathered in Beijing in protest. The movement spread nationwide: students struck, workers walked off their jobs, and merchants refused to sell Japanese goods. In the end, China’s representatives refused to sign the treaty. May Fourth matters because nationalism became a mass movement: students discovered they could shake a government, and many who marched went on to help found the movements below.

**The Guomindang.** Sun Yat-sen reorganised his party, the **Guomindang** (also called the Kuomintang), in the early 1920s, with a military academy at **Whampoa** opened in 1924. After Sun’s death, **Chiang Kai-shek** led the **Northern Expedition (1926–1928)**, which defeated the warlords and set up a national government at Nanjing. In **April 1927** Chiang turned on his previous Communist allies, and thousands of workers and Communists were killed in Shanghai and other cities. In 1934 Chiang launched the **New Life Movement**, promoting public discipline, hygiene and Confucian values to strengthen society against the Communists and the growing threat from Japan.

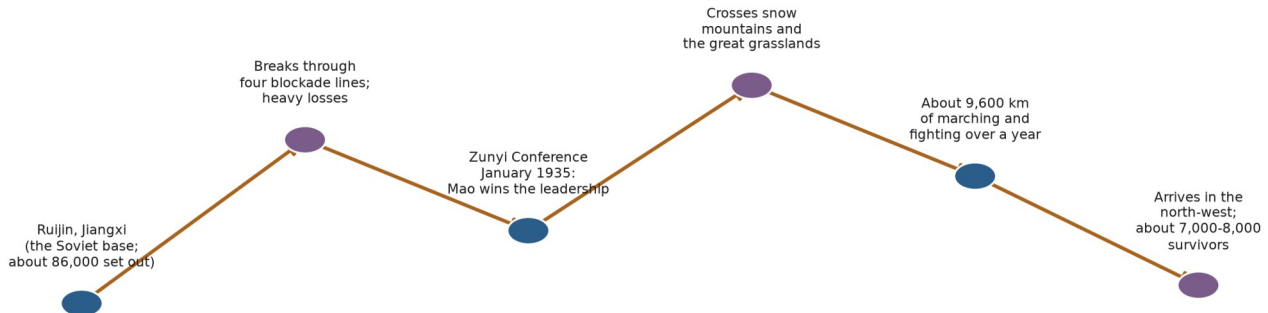
**The Chinese Communist Party and the Red Army.** The **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** was founded at a secret meeting in Shanghai in **July 1921** — thirteen delegates representing about fifty members, finishing their meeting on a boat at Jiaying after police closed in. **Chen Duxiu** was its first leader; **Mao Zedong** attended and later argued that China’s revolution must rest on its peasants, who made up the vast majority of the population. After 1927 the CCP built rural bases, above all in **Jiangxi**. Surrounded and attacked by Chiang’s armies, the Red Army broke out in **October 1934**: the **Long March**.

## The Long March, October 1934 - October 1935

The Red Army's retreat from Jiangxi to north-west China (schematic route, not drawn to map scale)

### Why the Long March mattered

|                    |                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Military:</b>   | it saved the core of the Red Army from destruction in Jiangxi and carried the party to a new base at Yan'an.            |
| <b>Leadership:</b> | at Zunyi, Mao Zedong won control of the party - the beginning of his rise to lead China.                                |
| <b>Story:</b>      | the movement turned terrible losses into a founding legend of endurance and belief, which drew new members to its side. |



Numbers as commonly recorded by historians; the route is drawn as a simple chain of stops, not a map (retrieved 26 August 2026).

*Labelled diagram of the Long March of 1934 to 1935, showing the route from Jiangxi to north-west China with key stopping points and the main figures for distance, time and numbers*

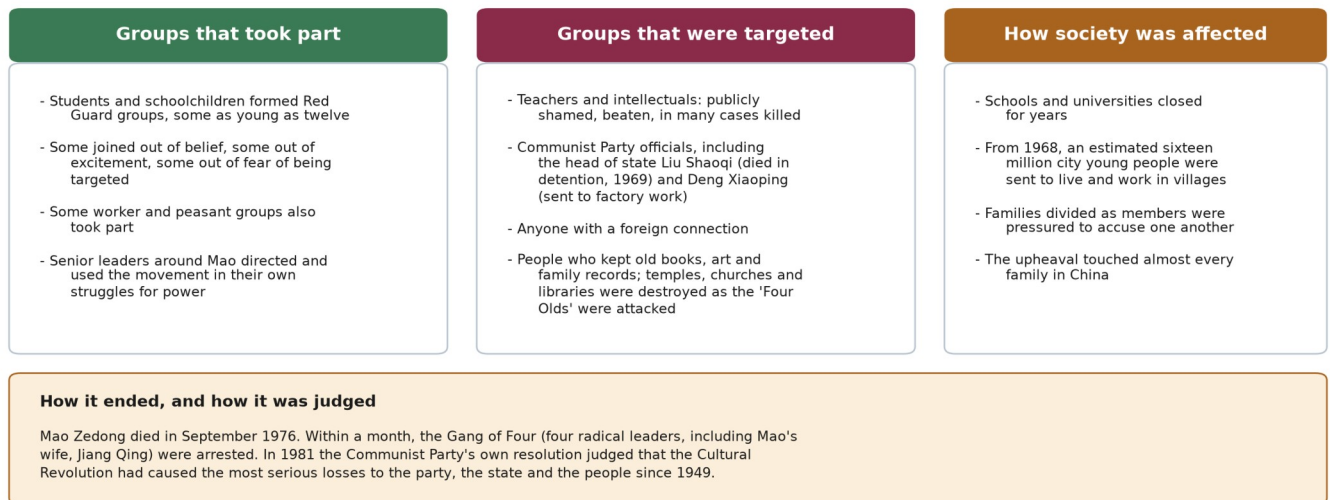
The Long March covered about **9,600 kilometres** over a year of marching and fighting, from the rice fields of Jiangxi to the dry hills of north-west China. Of roughly **86,000** who set out, only about **7,000 to 8,000** arrived. At the **Zunyi Conference (January 1935)**, Mao Zedong won the leadership of the party. From its base at **Yan'an**, the movement rebuilt itself, gained support in the countryside, survived the war with Japan (1937–1945), and fought the civil war that followed. On **1 October 1949**, Mao Zedong announced the founding of the **People's Republic of China**. For the individuals involved — the marchers, the peasants who fed them, the students who later joined — the experience created a loyalty and a story that shaped Chinese politics for the rest of the century.

### Part 6 — The Cultural Revolution, 1966–1976 (VC2HH10K27.E05)

In **May 1966**, Mao Zedong launched the **Cultural Revolution**. He called on the nation's young people to attack the **"Four Olds"** — old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits — and the people he said were leading China away from revolution. The result was ten years of upheaval that touched every family in China. This part looks, as the curriculum asks, at which groups took part, which groups were targeted, and what the experience did to society.

## The Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976: who took part, who was targeted

As asked in VC2HH10K27.E05: how different groups participated in or were targeted by the movement



*The events are stated as commonly recorded in standard histories, including the Communist Party's own 1981 resolution (retrieved 26 August 2026).*

*Diagram showing how different groups participated in, were targeted by and were affected by the Cultural Revolution in China between 1966 and 1976*

**Who took part.** Students and schoolchildren formed paramilitary groups called **Red Guards**, some as young as twelve. Many joined out of real belief, some out of excitement, some out of fear of being targeted themselves. Some worker and peasant groups also took part, and senior leaders around Mao directed and used the movement for their own struggles for power.

**Who was targeted.** Teachers and intellectuals were among the first targets: publicly shamed, beaten, and in many cases killed. Officials inside the Communist Party itself were purged — including the head of state, **Liu Shaoqi**, who was stripped of his posts and died in detention in 1969, and **Deng Xiaoping**, who was sent to work in a tractor factory in Jiangxi. Anyone with a foreign connection, or who kept old books, art or family records, was at risk. Temples, churches, genealogies and libraries were destroyed as the Four Olds were attacked.

**How society was affected.** Schools and universities closed for years. In 1968 Mao called on educated urban youth to learn from the countryside, and by the late 1970s an estimated sixteen million city young people had been sent to live and work in villages. Families were divided, as members were pressured to accuse one another at public meetings.

**How it ended.** Mao died in **September 1976**. Within a month, four radical leaders — the **Gang of Four**, including Mao's wife, **Jiang Qing** — were arrested, and the upheaval slowly wound down. In **1981**, the Communist Party's own resolution on its history judged that the Cultural Revolution had caused the most serious losses to the party, the state and the people since 1949.

Historians still debate the causes — how much responsibility lies with individuals, and how much with the political system that gave one person unchecked power. Either way, for the groups who lived through it, the experience left a lasting mark on how Chinese society thinks about order, education and authority.

### Part 7 — China since 1976: what leaders have aimed for (VC2HH10K27.E06)

The curriculum asks you to compare what each leader of the People's Republic after Mao put first. One term needs care here: China's top leader has usually held the head position of the Communist Party (called Chairman under Mao, later General Secretary) rather than the state position of president; since the 1990s the same person has usually held both. So this part compares the focuses of the top leaders since Mao, which is what the curriculum means by "presidents".

## The focuses of China's top leaders since Mao Zedong

VC2HH10K27.E06 asks you to compare these focuses and their impact

| Leader               | Years at or near the top            | Main focus                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Hua Guofeng</b>   | 1976-81                             | Keeps stability after Mao's death; orders the arrest of the Gang of Four; soon pushed aside by the reformers.                                                                                   |
| <b>Deng Xiaoping</b> | 1978-89 (leading figure; died 1997) | Reform and Opening Up: family farming, special economic zones (Shenzhen), foreign trade and investment. Growth and results come before slogans.                                                 |
| <b>Jiang Zemin</b>   | 1989-2002 (president 1993-2003)     | Market reforms continue; China joins the World Trade Organization in December 2001, binding its economy into world trade.                                                                       |
| <b>Hu Jintao</b>     | 2002-12                             | Growth with more attention to fairness; calls for a 'harmonious society' as the gaps between rich and poor widen.                                                                               |
| <b>Xi Jinping</b>    | 2012-                               | The 'Chinese Dream' of national renewal; a wide campaign against corruption in the party; the Belt and Road Initiative (2013) funding roads, ports and railways across Asia, Africa and Europe. |

A term to handle with care: China's top leader usually holds the head position of the Communist Party (Chairman under Mao, later General Secretary) rather than the state position of president; since the 1990s one person has usually held both. This table therefore compares the top leaders, which is what the curriculum means by 'presidents'.

Dates and programmes as commonly recorded (retrieved 26 August 2026).

*Table comparing the focuses of the top leaders of the People's Republic of China since Mao Zedong, from Hua Guofeng to Xi Jinping*

- **Hua Guofeng** (top leader 1976–1981) kept stability after Mao's death and ordered the arrest of the Gang of Four, but was soon pushed aside by stronger reformers.
- **Deng Xiaoping** (the leading figure from **December 1978** to 1989) launched **Reform and Opening Up**. Farming was returned to family hands, **special economic zones** were set up (Shenzhen grew from a small town into a huge city), and foreign trade and investment were welcomed. Deng's focus was growth: his saying that it did not matter whether a cat was black or white, so long as it caught mice, put results ahead of slogans.
- **Jiang Zemin** (top leader 1989–2002; president 1993–2003) continued market reforms, and in **December 2001** China joined the **World Trade Organization**, binding its economy into world trade.
- **Hu Jintao** (top leader 2002–2012) kept growth going while calling for a more balanced, "harmonious society", as the gaps between rich and poor widened.
- **Xi Jinping** (top leader from 2012) has focused on the "Chinese Dream" of national renewal, a wide campaign against corruption within the party, and the **Belt and Road Initiative** (announced 2013), which funds roads, ports and railways across Asia, Africa and Europe.

**The impact over time.** Comparing these focuses shows how China's direction changed across two generations: from class struggle under Mao, to growth and openness under Deng and Jiang, to a focus on fairness under Hu, and to national strength under Xi. For ordinary people, each change altered the texture of daily life — what work was available, where people could move, what they could buy, and how China stood in the world. The perspectives you met earlier in this section — the reformer, the revolutionary, the marching student — all fed into the society these leaders then directed.

## Worked source analyses

### Analysis 1 — Source A: Sun Yat-sen on nationalism (from the Three Principles lectures) (scaffolded)

#### SOURCE A

*Sun Yat-sen, from the first lecture on Nationalism (Three Principles of the People), Guangzhou, January 1924*

'We are the poorest and weakest state in the world, occupying the lowest position in international affairs. The rest of mankind is the carving knife and the serving dish, while we are the fish and meat ...'

'Among the Chinese people the family and kinship ties are very strong ... On the other hand, our people hesitate to sacrifice themselves for a national cause. The spirit of unity has not extended beyond the family and clan relationships.'

'If we do not earnestly promote nationalism and weld together our four hundred millions into a strong nation, we face a tragedy - the loss of our country and the destruction of our race.'

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Sun Yat-sen, first lecture on Nationalism, San Min Chu-i: The Three Principles of the People (Guangzhou, January 1924). Abridged excerpt. Retrieved 26 August 2026.

*Source A, an abridged extract from Sun Yat-sen's first lecture on Nationalism, delivered in Guangzhou in January 1924, arguing that China is weak and divided and calling on the nation to unite*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** It is a **primary source**: the text of a lecture delivered by **Sun Yat-sen** in **Guangzhou in January 1924**, the first of his series of lectures on the **Three Principles of the People**, here the principle of nationalism. It is abridged.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to persuade. Sun is setting out the beliefs that his revolutionary movement stands for, at a moment when he is rebuilding his party. We should expect it to present China's position in the worst light and the movement's program in the best.

**Step 3 — What is its content?** Sun argues that China is the poorest and weakest state in the world, at the mercy of foreign powers — he pictures the foreign powers as the carving knife and China as the fish and meat on the dish. He says Chinese loyalty stops at family and clan, so there is no unity binding the whole nation together. His remedy is nationalism: binding four hundred million people into one strong nation.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of a revolutionary nationalist who has spent thirty years working to end imperial rule. Notice what the perspective reveals and what it hides: it reveals how the humiliation by foreign powers (5B) was experienced by a generation of Chinese activists; it hides, of course, the doubts and failures that Sun's own career also contained. A Qing official, or a foreign diplomat, would have described China's condition in very different terms.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is valuable evidence of the beliefs and aims of the revolutionary movement that ended the Qing (Part 4), and of how nationalism was argued in the 1920s. Because it is a persuasive speech, a historian would not take its claims about China's condition as plain fact, but would check them against other evidence — such as the treaties and trade records in section 5B — before accepting them.

## Analysis 2 — Source B: Edgar Snow on the Long March (scaffolded)

### SOURCE B

Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), chapter on the Long March

'While the Red Army's March to the North-west was unquestionably a strategic retreat, it can hardly be called a major disaster, for the Reds finally reached their objective with their nucleus still intact, and their morale and political will evidently as strong as ever ...'

'It helped them turn what might have been a demoralized retreat into a spirited march of victory. In one sense this mass migration was the biggest armed propaganda tour in history. ... Thousands of others - farmers, apprentices, ... workers, all the discontents - joined in and filled the ranks.'

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Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937). Snow, an American journalist, visited the Communist base at Yan'an in 1936 and interviewed Mao Zedong. Abridged excerpt. Retrieved 26 August 2026.

*Source B, an abridged extract from Edgar Snow's Red Star Over China of 1937, assessing the Long March of the Red Army as a strategic retreat rather than a disaster and describing how the Communists turned it into a march of victory*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** It is a passage from **Red Star Over China**, the book published in **1937** by **Edgar Snow**, an American journalist who spent months in the Communist base at Yan'an in **1936** and interviewed Mao Zedong and other leaders. It is a **secondary source** built from first-hand interviews, and it is abridged here.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Snow's purpose was to tell the outside world who the Chinese Communists actually were, after years in which outsiders had been told almost nothing. We should expect a vivid, readable account — and one shaped by the access Snow was granted, which was a privilege no ordinary observer had.

**Step 3 — What is its content?** The passage assesses the Long March of 1934–1935 (Part 5). It argues that the march was certainly a retreat, but by no means a disaster: the Red Army reached its destination with its core of people still together, and its spirit and its beliefs as strong as ever. Snow adds that the Communists turned the retreat into a march of victory and a way of spreading their message to millions, drawing new members to their side.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of a sympathetic Western reporter seeing the movement from inside its own base. Snow admired the people he met, and the Communists had every reason to present their best story to him. A Nationalist (Guomindang) source of the 1930s would have called the Long March a desperate flight of bandits. Recognising these two competing perspectives is exactly the skill this section trains.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is highly valuable: it is one of the first inside accounts of the Communist movement, written while the Long March was still fresh, and it shaped how the world understood modern China. Its limits are equally clear — it relies heavily on what Communist leaders chose to tell a welcome guest. A historian would use it for what it can prove best: the movement's own sense of itself, and how it turned the Long March into a story of victory and a recruiting tool on purpose.

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## Practice questions

### Scaffolded

**Q1.** Look at the timeline. (a) In what year did the Boxers besiege the foreign embassies in Beijing? (b) Which movement was founded in 1921? (*Hint: both answers are labelled on the timeline.*)

**Q2.** Using the missionaries table, name (a) two things missionaries set up in China and (b) one reason some Chinese were hostile to them. (*Hint: read down the two columns.*)

**Q3.** From the New Policies table, state (a) what happened to the civil service examination in 1905 and (b) what the court promised in 1908. (*Hint: look for the reform rows with those dates.*)

**Q4.** Using the Sun Yat-sen diagram, (a) name the Three Principles of the People and (b) state what position Sun took on in January 1912. (*Hint: the principles are the three boxes; the career strip gives the 1912 event.*)

**Q5.** From the movements table, identify (a) the movement that began with a magazine in 1915 and (b) the movement whose members marched about 9,600 kilometres in 1934–1935. (*Hint: one is an ideas movement, the other a military one.*)

**Q6.** Look at the Cultural Revolution diagram. (a) Name two groups that were targeted. (b) What happened within a month of Mao Zedong's death in 1976? (*Hint: targeted groups are in the middle column; the end of the period is described beneath.*)

### **Without a scaffold**

**Q7.** Explain the goal of the Self-Strengthening Movement and why its failure by 1895 changed how reformers thought about China's problems. Use the idea of perspective: how would a Boxer farmer's view of foreign influence have differed from Li Hongzhang's?

**Q8.** "Cixi blocked China's modernisation" and "Cixi was a practical moderniser" are both argued by historians. Using evidence from Part 3, present one point for each position, then state which position you find more convincing and why. Marks are given for the quality of your reasoning, not the conclusion you reach.

**Q9.** Using Source A, explain what the source reveals about Sun Yat-sen's perspective on China's problems, and give two reasons why a historian would check its claims against other evidence.

**Q10.** Using Source B and Part 5, explain why the Long March mattered to the Chinese Communist Party — both as a military event and as a story the movement told about itself.

**Q11.** Compare the focuses of two leaders of the People's Republic since 1976, and explain how each focus changed the daily lives of ordinary Chinese people. Use Part 7 and the leaders table.

**Q12 — Creative task (keyed to VC2HH10K27.E04).** Design an **infographic** that follows one of these movements from 1912 to 1949: the Guomindang, the Chinese Communist Party, the Red Army, the New Life Movement, or the New Culture and May Fourth Movements. Include: when and where it began, its key people, its main goals, one turning point, and one source (a quotation, image or object) with a citation. Use the movements table as your starting point.

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## Answers

**Q1.** (a) 1900. (b) The Chinese Communist Party.

**Q2.** (a) Any two of: churches, schools (including schools for girls), hospitals and clinics, printed books and Bibles. (b) Accept any reason from the table, e.g. preaching was backed by foreign force won in war, or attacks on local temples and customs.

**Q3.** (a) It was abolished and replaced by modern schools. (b) A constitution, to be delivered within nine years (the Outline of the Imperial Constitution).

**Q4.** (a) Nationalism, democracy and livelihood. (b) Provisional president of the Republic of China.

**Q5.** (a) The New Culture Movement. (b) The Red Army (the Chinese Communist Party's army) on the Long March.

**Q6.** (a) Any two of: teachers and intellectuals, Communist Party officials such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, people with foreign connections, people who kept old books, art and family records. (b) The Gang of Four, including Mao's wife, were arrested.

**Q7.** Model points: the Self-Strengthening Movement aimed to defend China by adopting Western military technology while keeping Chinese learning as the foundation; its defeat by Japan in 1894–1895 showed that tools alone were not enough, pushing reformers toward changing the system itself (and then revolution). On perspective: Li Hongzhang saw foreign power as something to learn from and balance against; a Boxer farmer experienced foreign railways and missions as threats to land, livelihood and local custom, which is why the Boxers wanted them destroyed rather than copied. Any clear explanation of the goal, the effect of the 1895 defeat and a stated difference of perspective.

**Q8.** Model points: for “blocked” — she crushed the Hundred Days' Reform when it threatened her control, gambled with the Boxers and made China pay for it, and reformed only when forced. For “practical moderniser” — she backed technological reform for decades, and her New Policies went further than the reforms of 1898, ending the examination system and promising a constitution. A good answer gives one fair point per side and then judges by stated criteria (e.g. intentions vs results), with evidence from Part 3.

**Q9.** Model points: Source A reveals that Sun saw China's core problem as weakness and division — loyalty stopped at family and clan, with no national unity — which left China “the poorest and weakest state in the world” at the mercy of foreign powers, and that his remedy was nationalism, welding the nation into one strong body. A historian would check it because (1) it is a persuasive speech, written to make the movement's case as strongly as possible, and (2) Sun was a committed leader of that movement, so his account of China's condition serves his purpose; checking against treaties, trade records or other observers' accounts (e.g. 5B) would test whether the picture is exaggerated.

**Q10.** Model points: militarily, the Long March saved the core of the Red Army from destruction in Jiangxi and carried the party to a new base in the north-west, with Mao winning the leadership at Zunyi. As a story, the movement turned terrible losses into a founding legend of endurance and belief; Source B shows that the story was told on purpose (Snow's book spread it worldwide), and it later attracted new members who wanted to belong to such a movement.

**Q11.** Model points: e.g. Deng Xiaoping focused on Reform and Opening Up — family farming, special economic zones, foreign trade — which changed daily life by creating new work, allowing movement to growing cities and bringing more goods into ordinary households; Hu Jintao focused on balancing growth (“harmonious society”) as inequality widened, which directed attention to rural welfare and social services. Any two leaders with a clear focus each and at least one stated effect on ordinary life per leader.

**Q12.** Model points: marks for accuracy (correct dates, people, goals per the movements table and Part 5), for a genuine turning point (e.g. the Shanghai killings of 1927 for the CCP, or Zunyi for the Red Army), for a real cited source, and for clear visual layout. Check that the source cited is real and the citation gives author, date and place of publication or retrieval.

## Daily life, institutions and culture in China: what changed

**Curriculum:** VC2HH10K28

**Taught society:** China. Chapter 5 of this book teaches the Asia investigation through China (the book's recorded choice; see TOC decision D9).

**Linked elaborations (taught, China block):** VC2HH10K28.E01 VC2HH10K28.E02 VC2HH10K28.E03 VC2HH10K28.E04 VC2HH10K28.E05

Note: the remaining blocks of this content description (VC2HH10K28.E06–E19) cover the other society choices — India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam. They remain valid link keys for other builds and other choices, but they are not this book's taught case.

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### Theory

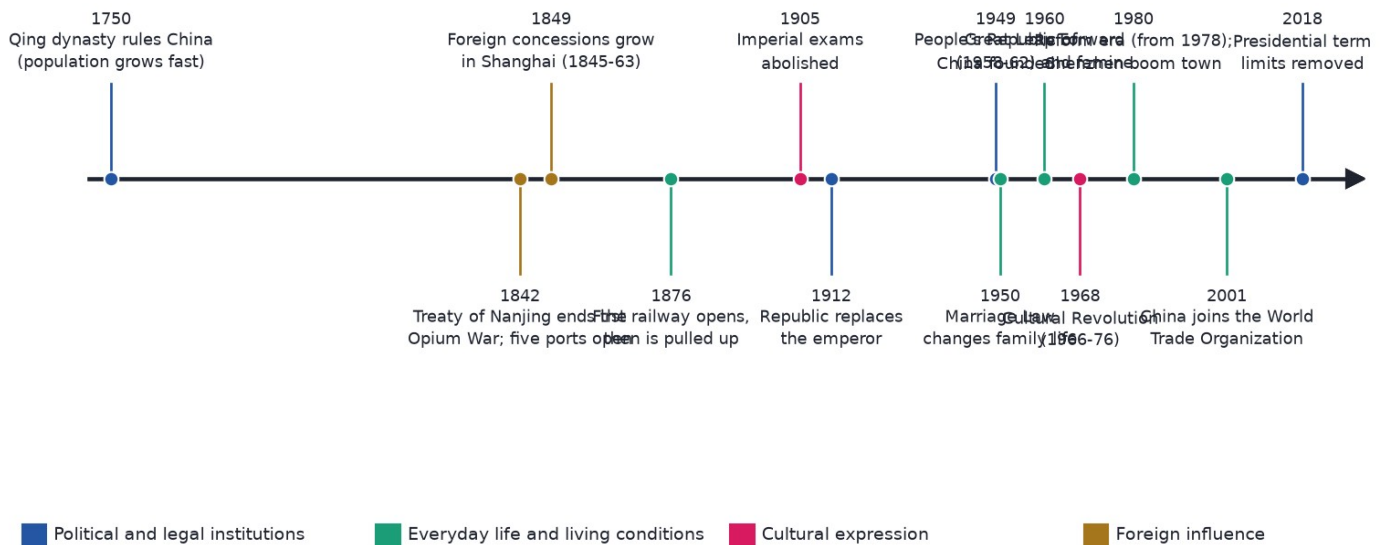
The other sections of this chapter tell China's story in detail: the features of Qing China (5A), the causes and consequences of foreign contact, colonisation and liberation (5B), the events and ideas that shaped modern China (5C), and the lives of the people, groups and movements in a changing China (5D). This section stands back from the story and asks a different question, the question of this content description: **what changed, and what stayed the same**, across three parts of Chinese life from 1750 to the present?

The three parts, named in the content description, are:

- **everyday life and living conditions** — how ordinary people lived: their health, work, food, housing, family life and status;
- **political and legal institutions** — the organised structures through which China has been governed: the emperor and his officials, the republic, and since 1949 the Chinese Communist Party and the state it runs; an **institution** is an established organisation or practice that structures how a society works;
- **cultural expression** — the ways a society shows what it thinks and values: its art, literature, theatre, music, festivals, dress and the language it writes in.

Two ideas guide the whole section. **Continuity** means what stayed the same, or changed only slowly, across a period of time. **Change** means what was transformed, replaced or broken. Historians always look for both at once: in any period, some things are changing fast while other things stay almost the same. As you read, keep asking of every fact: *did this change, continue, or both?*

## China, 1750 to the present: major turning points in three threads



*Timeline of China from 1750 to the present marking major turning points colour-coded into four threads: political and legal institutions, everyday life and living conditions, cultural expression, and foreign influence*

### Part 1 — The shape of the period: a quick run through the turning points

In 1750 China was ruled by the **Qing dynasty** (the dynasty studied in section 5A). The emperor governed through trained officials chosen by written examinations, and most people lived by farming. Over the next 270 years the country passed through a series of turning points:

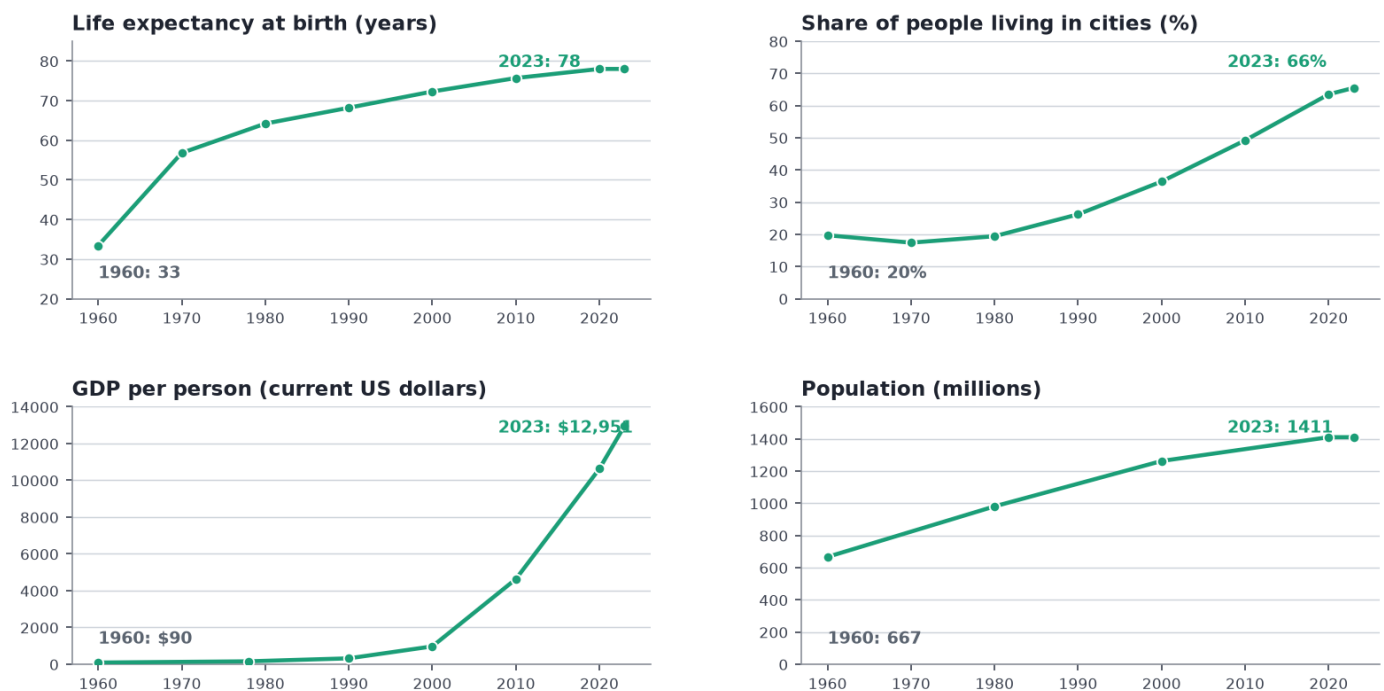
- **Foreign pressure grew, 1840s–1900.** After losing the Opium War of 1839–42 to Britain, China signed the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), which opened five ports to foreign trade. More wars and one-sided treaties followed, and foreign powers carved out special districts and spheres of influence. (Section 5B covers the causes and consequences of this in detail.)
- **Imperial rule ended, 1911–1912.** Revolution overthrew the emperor, and China became a **republic** in 1912.
- **The communist victory, 1949.** After decades of civil war and a brutal war with Japan, the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** won the civil war, and **Mao Zedong** proclaimed the **People's Republic of China** on 1 October 1949.
- **The Mao era, 1949–76.** The new state remade farming, family life, education and culture. Two great upheavals stand out: the **Great Leap Forward** (1958–62) and the **Cultural Revolution** (1966–76).
- **Reform and opening-up, from 1978.** Under **Deng Xiaoping** China kept one-party rule but allowed markets, private business and foreign investment. The economy grew faster than almost anywhere in human history.
- **China as a world power, 2012–present.** Under **Xi Jinping** power has been drawn back to the top, and China acts on the world stage as its size demands.

Each of these turning points is examined below for what it did to the three threads.

### Part 2 — Everyday life and living conditions: drawing the big picture (VC2HH10K28.E01)

The clearest single picture of changed living conditions is the set of numbers below. Four measures — how long people live, where they live, what they earn, and how many of them there are — show one of the fastest transformations ever recorded.

## Living conditions in China: four measures, 1960-2023



Note: the 1960 life-expectancy figure falls in the famine years of the Great Leap Forward.  
Data: World Bank ([api.worldbank.org](https://api.worldbank.org)), retrieved 26 August 2026.

Four charts showing living conditions in China from 1960 to 2023: life expectancy rising from 33 to 78 years, the share of people living in cities rising from 20 to 66 per cent, GDP per person rising from 90 to 12,951 US dollars, and population growing from 667 million to about 1,411 million

Data: World Bank ([api.worldbank.org](https://api.worldbank.org)), retrieved 26 August 2026. Note that the 1960 life-expectancy figure falls in the famine years of the Great Leap Forward.

Read the four charts together:

- **Life expectancy** — the average number of years a newborn could expect to live — more than doubled. The low figure for 1960 records a terrible event: during the Great Leap Forward, farming policy failed and a famine followed in which many millions of people died (estimates of the toll differ widely). By the 1970s the trend was climbing again, and it has climbed since.
- **Where people live** changed completely. In 1960 about four in five Chinese people lived in the countryside; today about two in three live in cities. Cities like **Shanghai**, **Guangzhou** and **Shenzhen** grew into giant centres of factory and office work.
- **GDP per person** — the value of the economy divided among all people, a rough measure of average income — rose from about 90 US dollars in 1960 to nearly 13,000 today. China went from one of the world's poorest countries to an upper-middle-income one.
- **The population** more than doubled, from about 667 million in 1960 to about 1.41 billion today.

Numbers like these sit behind everyday changes too. In 1949 most adults could not read; today almost all young people do. The practice of **binding girls' feet** — painful, and a mark of old status ideals (see section 5A) — was banned in the early 1900s and died out. The **Marriage Law of 1950** gave women the legal right to choose their own husband and to divorce, remaking family life; it is discussed again in Part 6.

*How to read an infographic like this one.* An **infographic** is a visual summary: it picks a few strong measures, shows each as a simple chart or picture, and labels the start and end points so the change jumps out. When you read one, ask: what is being measured, over what years, and what is left out? When you draw one, keep it honest: label the source of your numbers and the year they were measured.

**Your turn (E01):** using the four charts above as a model, draw your own infographic showing how living conditions in China changed from 1960 to 2023. Include at least three measures, a clear title, labelled start and end values, and a one-sentence source line.

**Part 3 — Foreign pressure on the old empire (VC2HH10K28.E02)**

Between the 1840s and 1911, foreign pressure changed China’s ways of life and its institutions from the outside in. **Imperialism** — here meaning foreign powers forcing weaker states into unequal deals and taking control of parts of their trade, territory and law — reached China through four main channels: trade, railways, missionaries, and foreign-run districts in Chinese cities. Section 5B covers the wars and treaties themselves; here the focus is on how these channels changed life inside China.

**Trade.** Before the Opium War, European trade was limited to the one port of Guangzhou (Canton) under the Canton System (section 5A). The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) smashed that system open.

**How the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) opened China to foreign power**

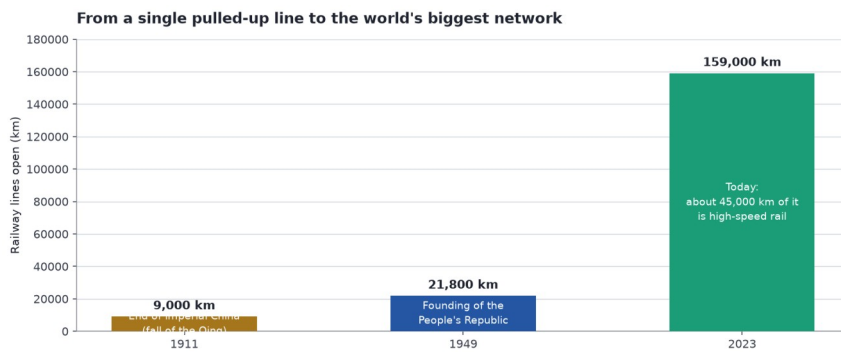
| What the treaty changed                          | Treaty of Nanjing, 1842                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Five ports opened to British trade and residence | (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo) and Shanghai |
| Hong Kong Island                                 | ceded (handed over) to Britain                                             |
| A payment of 21 million silver dollars           | paid by China to Britain                                                   |
| Added in 1843: British people in the ports       | answered to British officials, not to Chinese law                          |

China had fought the Opium War of 1839-42 against Britain and lost. This treaty's terms began the 'treaty port' system (see section 5B for the war itself).

*Table of the terms of the Treaty of Nanjing, 1842: five ports opened to British trade and residence, Hong Kong Island ceded to Britain, a payment of 21 million silver dollars, and British people in the ports answering to British officials rather than Chinese law*

The five new treaty ports — Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai — became gateways for foreign goods, firms and people. Foreign imports such as machine-made cloth undercut Chinese people who wove cloth by hand, while Chinese tea, silk and porcelain flowed out. For the first time, large parts of China’s economy answered to foreign buyers and sellers.

**Railways.** Railways were the most visible sign of foreign-driven change. China’s first railway — the Woosung Road, a 14.5-kilometre line built by British traders near Shanghai — opened in 1876, and was pulled up a year later after Qing officials bought it and dismantled it. That story captures the Qing dilemma: railways brought speed and profit, but they were built and owned by foreigners. By 1911 China had about 9,000 km of line, much of it foreign-built or foreign-funded; by 1949 about 21,800 km; and today the network is the world’s largest, at about 159,000 km, including roughly 45,000 km of high-speed line.



China's first railway - the Woosung Road, 14.5 km, built by British traders near Shanghai - opened in 1876 and was pulled up a year later after Qing officials bought it. By 1911 there were about 9,000 km of line, much of it foreign-built or foreign-funded.

Bar chart showing the growth of China's railway network from about 9,000 km at the end of imperial China in 1911, to about 21,800 km at the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, to about 159,000 km today, of which about 45,000 km is high-speed rail

**Missionaries.** Christian missionaries came with the traders and the treaties. By 1900 thousands were at work across China, preaching, building churches, and founding schools, universities and hospitals. Some, like the Welsh missionary **Timothy Richard**, promoted modern learning and helped found Shanxi University in 1902; the British missionary **Hudson Taylor** founded the China Inland Mission in 1865 to take Christianity into the interior. Missions changed lives — some Chinese became Christians, and many more used mission schools and hospitals — but they also caused anger, because the missionaries were protected by foreign power, and their teaching challenged long-held beliefs. Attacks on missions and converts were one of the sparks of the Boxer Rising of 1900 (section 5B).

**Foreign concessions.** In several treaty ports, foreign powers secured **concessions** — districts within Chinese cities that were run by foreigners, under foreign rules. Shanghai is the most famous case.

### Foreign Shanghai: a city split into foreign-run districts, 1845-1943

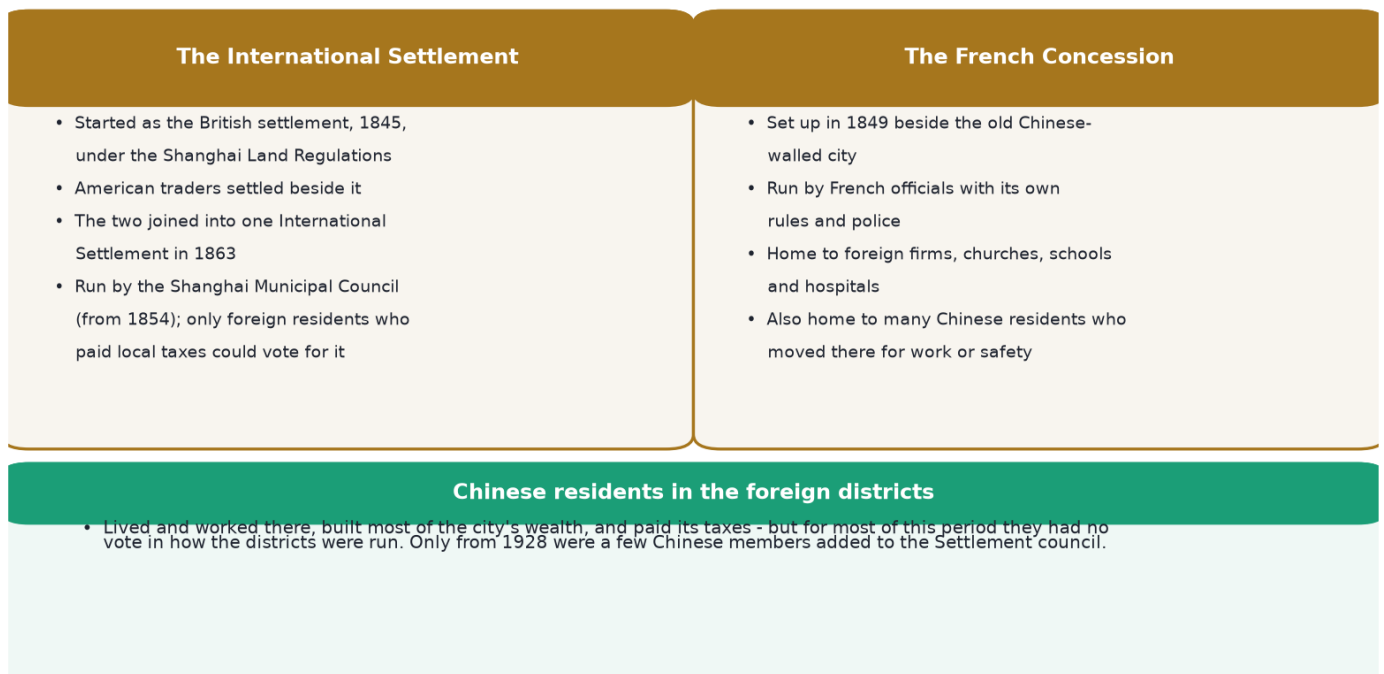


Diagram of foreign-run Shanghai from 1845 to 1943, showing the International Settlement and the French Concession as separate foreign-run districts beside the old Chinese city, with notes on how each was governed and on the position of Chinese residents

Shanghai grew from a busy port into China's biggest and most modern city, famous for its banks, department stores, newspapers, trams and electric lights. But it was a divided city. The foreign districts made their own rules, ran their own police and courts, and for most of this period their councils were elected only by foreign taxpayers, even though most of the residents — and most of the city's wealth and taxes — were Chinese. Chinese residents gained a few seats

on the Settlement council only from 1928. For many Chinese, foreign Shanghai was proof that their own government could no longer protect their rights in their own country — a powerful fuel for the nationalist and revolutionary movements studied in sections 5C and 5D.

*Continuity and change here.* Foreign pressure **changed** China's trade, transport, cities and law, and weakened the Qing. But much **continued**: the countryside, where the huge majority still farmed by hand; the family system; and Confucian teaching, which remained the state's official ideas until the exams were abolished in 1905.

---

#### Part 4 — Why Confucius still matters (VC2HH10K28.E03)

No idea has shaped China for longer than **Confucianism**: the teachings that follow the thinker **Confucius** (551–479 BCE). Its core ideas include:

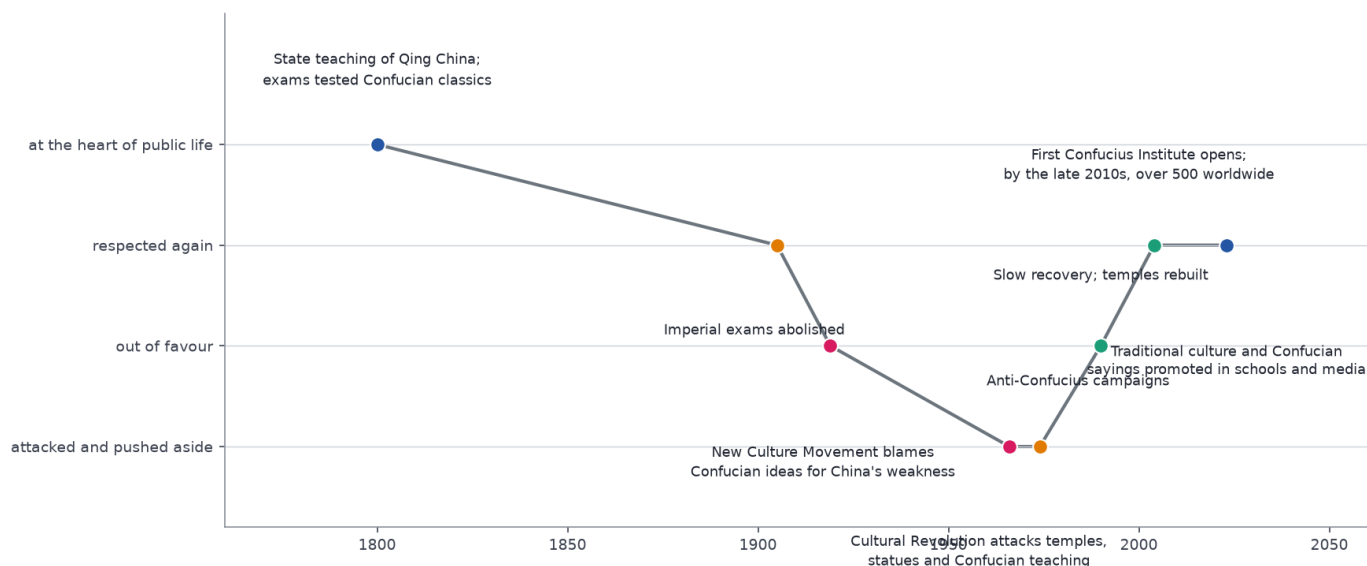
- **respect for parents and elders**, and duty to the family;
- **love of learning** and self-improvement;
- the belief that rulers should govern by **moral example**, not just by force;
- a ranked but mutual view of relationships — ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, elder and younger, friend and friend — in which each side owes duties to the other.

**Why it mattered under the Qing.** Confucianism was not just a set of beliefs; it was the operating system of the state. The civil service examinations tested knowledge of the Confucian classics, so every ambitious man had to master them; officials governed in Confucian language; and emperors presented themselves as moral teachers (see section 5A). In our terms, Confucianism sat inside both institutions and cultural expression at once.

**Why it was attacked.** As China grew weaker against foreign powers from the 1840s, critics began to blame Confucian ideas for holding the country back. When the imperial exams were abolished in **1905**, Confucianism lost its grip on education and official careers. The **New Culture Movement** of the 1910s and 1920s went further: reform-minded writers such as **Chen Duxiu** and **Lu Xun** argued that China could only modernise if it questioned old teachings — Lu Xun's 1918 story *A Madman's Diary* attacked traditional family authority in the new everyday written language. During the **Cultural Revolution** the attack turned physical: the campaign of 1966–76, and the “Criticise Lin, Criticise Confucius” campaign of 1974, denounced Confucius as a symbol of everything old; temples were damaged, statues smashed and traditional teaching pushed aside.

**Why it has returned.** Since the 1990s Confucianism has been steadily rebuilt into public life. Temples have been restored; Confucian sayings are promoted in schools and the media; and from **2004** China opened **Confucius Institutes** — language and culture centres — around the world, reaching more than 500 by the late 2010s. Today the state presents respect for elders, family duty and love of learning as national strengths.

### A model of the changing public standing of Confucianism (a historian's sketch, not a measurement)



*A modelled line chart sketching the changing public standing of Confucianism from 1800 to the present: at the heart of public life under the Qing, pushed aside after the exams ended in 1905, attacked during the New Culture Movement and the Cultural Revolution, and gradually restored from the 1990s to today*

This figure is a historian's model, not a measurement. Historians often sketch the "standing" of an idea over time to show a pattern. The vertical scale is a judgement, not data — which is exactly why the figure says so. Notice the pattern it shows: an idea this deep does not vanish even when a revolution tries to destroy it. Across every change of regime in this section — Qing to republic, republic to People's Republic, Mao era to reform era — Confucian values have **continued**, in some form, for 2,500 years. That continuity is itself part of the answer to the question of **significance** (in this section, significance means the importance of something in shaping what happened, and what still matters today).

## Part 5 — Books, art and theatre in the Cultural Revolution (VC2HH10K28.E04)

The **Cultural Revolution** (1966–76) was, as its name suggests, a revolution aimed at culture as much as at politics. Mao Zedong called on young people — the **Red Guards** — to attack the "Four Olds": old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits. The results for cultural expression were dramatic:

- schools and universities closed for years;
- libraries, temples, artworks and family heirlooms were destroyed as "feudal" or "foreign";
- writers, artists and teachers were denounced, and many were imprisoned or killed;
- almost all existing books, films and plays were banned.

What replaced them shows why cultural expression mattered so much: in a society where politics controlled everything, art became politics. The state, with Mao's wife **Jiang Qing** directing cultural policy, produced a small set of approved works — the **eight model works** — and for years these were the only stage works performed anywhere in China.

**The 'eight model works': for much of the Cultural Revolution, these were the only stage works allowed in China**

| Work                                     | Form            | Story (in short)                                                |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy</b> | Peking opera    | A soldier beats mountain bandits in the late 1940s              |
| <b>The Red Lantern</b>                   | Peking opera    | A railway worker's family hides a signal lamp from the Japanese |
| <b>Shajiabang</b>                        | Peking opera    | Villagers hide wounded soldiers during the war with Japan       |
| <b>Raid on the White Tiger Regiment</b>  | Peking opera    | A surprise attack in the Korean War                             |
| <b>On the Docks</b>                      | Peking opera    | Dock workers in Shanghai take charge of their port              |
| <b>The Red Detachment of Women</b>       | Ballet          | A servant woman joins the communist army in Hainan              |
| <b>The White-Haired Girl</b>             | Ballet          | A peasant girl escapes a cruel landlord and is freed            |
| <b>Sand Family Lane</b>                  | Symphonic music | Railway workers resist the Japanese occupation                  |

*Table of the eight model works of the Cultural Revolution — five Peking operas, two ballets and one symphonic work — with the story of each in short*

Study the table and notice the pattern. Every story is about revolution, war against Japan, or class struggle; every hero is a worker, peasant or soldier; every villain is a landlord, a Japanese invader or a party traitor. Traditional Peking opera kept its music and acrobatics, but its old stories of emperors, generals and scholars were replaced. Cultural expression was not a side-show of the Cultural Revolution — it was one of its main battlefields, because whoever controlled what people saw and heard controlled how they thought.

The best-known printed object of the era worked the same way.

## SOURCE 2

PRIMARY SOURCE - A POLITICAL BOOK, 1964

“

Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution.

Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong (the 'Little Red Book'), opening line of the 1964 edition; first written by Mao Zedong in a 1926 essay.

*Source 2, the opening line of Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong, the Little Red Book, first published in 1964: Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution*

The *Little Red Book* was printed in the billions; carrying it, reading it aloud and quoting it became tests of loyalty. A short political sentence, repeated everywhere, became the most powerful “cultural expression” in the country. After Mao’s death in 1976 and the arrest of Jiang Qing and her allies, the model-works era ended; from the late 1970s traditional arts, old films and new writing returned — though the party has kept firm control over what may be published and screened.

## Part 6 — One party in charge: China since 1949 (VC2HH10K28.E05)

The founding of the People's Republic in 1949 replaced one set of political institutions with another. The **Chinese Communist Party** sits at the centre of every institution: it leads the army (the People's Liberation Army), appoints the senior officials of the state, and controls the media. Formally, laws are made by the **National People's Congress**, and the country has a constitution; in practice the party's decisions come first. That basic structure has **continued** since 1949. What has **changed**, again and again, is *how* the party rules.

### One party in charge: China since 1949, in five phases

| Period    | Top leader                                 | How the party ruled                                                                                           | What it meant for people's lives                                                                    |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1949-57   | Mao Zedong                                 | Revolution from above: land reform (1950-52), the Marriage Law (1950), party branches in every workplace      | Landlords lost their land; women could divorce for the first time; literacy drives reached villages |
| 1958-62   | Mao Zedong                                 | Great Leap Forward: farms merged into communes; small 'backyard' steel furnaces                               | Food output collapsed; famine killed many millions (estimates differ widely)                        |
| 1966-76   | Mao Zedong                                 | Cultural Revolution: young Red Guards mobilised against officials and 'old' culture                           | Schools closed; art and books destroyed; hundreds of thousands persecuted or killed                 |
| 1978-2012 | Deng Xiaoping, then Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao | Reform and opening-up: markets and private business allowed, party keeps political control                    | Farms broke up into family plots; cities and factories boomed; China joined the WTO (2001)          |
| 2012-     | Xi Jinping                                 | Power drawn back to the top: anti-corruption campaigns, control of media and the internet, 'national revival' | More party control over business, education and daily life; China acts as a world power             |

*Table of five phases of Chinese Communist Party rule since 1949: 1949 to 1957 under Mao Zedong, the Great Leap Forward of 1958 to 1962, the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976, the reform and opening-up era from 1978 under Deng Xiaoping and his successors, and the era of Xi Jinping from 2012, each with how the party ruled and what it meant for people's lives*

**Phase 1 — Revolution from above, 1949–57.** The new state moved fast. The **Marriage Law (1950)** banned arranged marriage and gave women the right to divorce; **land reform (1950–52)** took land from landlords and gave it to farming families; literacy drives reached into villages; and party branches were set up in every workplace. Ordinary people, especially women and poor farmers, experienced these as liberation; landlords, and others who opposed the new state, experienced them as persecution.

**Phase 2 — The Great Leap Forward, 1958–62.** Farms were merged into giant **communes**, and villagers were set to making steel in small “backyard” furnaces. The plan failed: food output collapsed, and famine followed. Historians estimate that many millions of people died; the exact toll is disputed: records from the period are poor, and politics has shaped how they are read.

**Phase 3 — The Cultural Revolution, 1966–76.** Mao, fearing his rivals and wanting to rekindle revolutionary spirit, mobilised young Red Guards against the party's own officials and against the “Four Olds” (Part 5). Schools closed, careers and lives were ruined, and the country only steadied after Mao's death in 1976. The party's own verdict, issued in 1981, called the Cultural Revolution a serious mistake — unusual, because it criticised Mao himself.

**Phase 4 — Reform and opening-up, 1978–2012.** Deng Xiaoping changed the party’s method while keeping its monopoly: markets and private business were allowed, communes were broken up into family plots, and foreign investment was welcomed through zones such as **Shenzhen**, which grew from a fishing town into a city of millions. The party’s bargain with the people became: rising living standards in exchange for accepting one-party rule. Living conditions rose spectacularly (Part 2), and China joined the **World Trade Organization** in 2001. Political control stayed tight; demands for faster political change were refused.

**Phase 5 — Power recentred, 2012–present.** Under Xi Jinping the party has drawn power back to the top: anti-corruption campaigns have disciplined officials, media and the internet are more closely controlled, and in 2018 the constitution was amended to remove the limit on the president’s terms — a break with the practice of regular leadership changes that Deng had established. The party now promotes national pride, traditional culture (Part 4) and its own record as sources of loyalty, and China acts abroad as a great power.

*Continuity and change across all five phases.* The **continuities**: one-party rule; party control of the army and the media; a strong central state that prizes unity and order; and the claim that government exists to care for the people’s livelihood — an echo, in modern form, of the old Confucian duty of rulers. The **changes**: the swing from mass campaigns to market economics; the changing position of women; the rise of cities; and, most recently, the shift from shared, term-limited leadership back to concentrated personal power.

## Part 7 — What changed, and what stayed the same: bringing the three threads together

### What changed, and what stayed the same, in each thread

| Political and legal institutions    | What changed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | What stayed the same                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From emperor to republic (1912) to one-party communist state (1949)</li> <li>From a state-run economy to markets and private business (from 1978)</li> <li>From rule by officials of the emperor to rule by the party and its laws</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong central government has remained the norm</li> <li>China has stayed one united state, despite civil war and invasion</li> <li>The idea that government should keep order and care for the people</li> </ul>                     |
| Everyday life and living conditions | What changed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | What stayed the same                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Life expectancy: about 35 years in 1949, about 78 today</li> <li>Mostly poor and rural in 1949; about two-thirds city-dwellers today</li> <li>Women gained legal rights to marry and divorce as they choose (1950)</li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family remains the centre of life, care and duty</li> <li>Food culture - rice, tea, shared meals - continues</li> <li>Festivals such as the Spring Festival are still kept</li> </ul>                                                 |
| Cultural expression                 | What changed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | What stayed the same                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imperial exams abolished (1905); classical writing gave way to everyday language</li> <li>Traditional arts attacked in the Cultural Revolution, then rebuilt</li> <li>Film, pop music and the internet now shape what people see and share</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confucian values - respect for elders, love of learning - still taught</li> <li>Calligraphy, poetry and Chinese medicine still practised</li> <li>Art keeps carrying moral and political messages, as it did for the state</li> </ul> |

*Diagram bringing the section together, with the three threads of the content description — political and legal institutions, everyday life and living conditions, and cultural expression — each split into what changed and what stayed the same across the period 1750 to the present*

### A matter of interpretation: rupture, or endurance?

Historians agree on the facts above, but they disagree about the best overall reading of modern China, and each side can be put in a strong form.

**Position 1 — modern China as a story of rupture.** This view stresses how completely the old order was swept away: the emperor replaced by a republic, the republic by a party-state; the examination system abolished; the family system remade by law; old art and temples attacked; villages emptied into cities; a poor farming country made into an

industrial giant within a single lifetime. On this reading, the word that best describes China since 1750 is **revolution**, and continuity is mostly surface.

**Position 2 — modern China as a story of endurance.** This view stresses what survived every revolution: a strong, centralised state governing a huge territory; family duty and respect for elders; the prestige of learning and examinations (today's gaokao university entrance exam is a direct descendant of the old system, in spirit); art that carries moral and political messages, whether painted for an emperor, staged as a model opera, or posted online under state guidance. On this reading, revolutions changed the management of China more than its deep structure.

Both positions use real evidence from this section, and a good answer weighs the evidence rather than cheering for a side. Which thread you emphasise depends on where you look: look at living conditions and the case for change is overwhelming; look at values and the structures of power and the case for continuity is strong. That is why continuity and change are studied together — neither alone tells the truth.

## Worked source analyses

### Analysis 1 — Source 1: the Treaty of Nanjing, Article II (scaffolded)

#### SOURCE 1

PRIMARY SOURCE - A TREATY, 1842

“

... [British subjects], with their families and establishments, shall be allowed to reside, for the purpose of trade and commerce, without molestation or restraint, at the cities and towns of Canton, Amoy, Foochowfoo, Ningpo and Shanghai.

Treaty of Nanjing, Article II, signed 29 August 1842 (abridged here; the old-fashioned wording is kept). The treaty ended the Opium War of 1839-42.

*Source 1, an abridged quotation from Article II of the Treaty of Nanjing, 1842, allowing British subjects and their families to reside and trade at the five ports of Canton, Amoy, Foochowfoo, Ningpo and Shanghai*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** It is a **primary source**: an article of a treaty signed on 29 August 1842, ending the Opium War of 1839–42. It is a legal and diplomatic document, written by the negotiators at the time.

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to make the new trading rights official and binding. It records what the defeated Chinese government had to grant to Britain, so we should read it as the winner's terms, not as an account both sides chose.

**Step 3 — What does it say (content)?** It says British subjects, with their families and businesses, may live and trade “without molestation or restraint” in five ports: Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo) and Shanghai.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is written from the British position — the treaty's very existence records British victory. A Qing official would have seen the same clause as a humiliation: foreign residents inside Chinese cities, protected by their own government. A Shanghai merchant might have seen opportunity. The document itself shows only the agreed legal text; the feelings around it must come from other sources.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is strong evidence for Part 3: it is the founding document of the treaty-port system, and it shows exactly how foreign trade was forced open. Because it is the official legal text, its content can be trusted for what was agreed — but to learn what the treaty *did* to Chinese lives, a historian would corroborate it with records of trade, missionary reports, and Chinese accounts of the ports.

## SOURCE 2

PRIMARY SOURCE - A POLITICAL BOOK, 1964

“

Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution.

Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong (the 'Little Red Book'), opening line of the 1964 edition; first written by Mao Zedong in a 1926 essay.

*Source 2, the opening line of Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong of 1964: Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution*

**Step 1 — What kind of source is it?** A **primary source**: the opening line of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*, first published in 1964 (the words themselves were first written by Mao in a 1926 essay).

**Step 2 — What is its purpose?** Its purpose is to teach a way of seeing the world: dividing everyone into friends and enemies of the revolution. Published in a small book meant to be carried and memorised, it was designed to shape the thinking of soldiers and, in the Cultural Revolution, of everyone.

**Step 3 — What does it say (content)?** It says that telling friends from enemies is “a question of the first importance” for the revolution — that political loyalty is the first test of a person.

**Step 4 — What is its perspective?** It is the perspective of Mao and the party leadership at its most confident. The framing assumes that the revolution is right, that enemies exist everywhere, and that ordinary people must learn to spot them — the same thinking that powered the Red Guard movement of 1966–68 (Part 5). Someone denounced as an “enemy” under this logic would give a very different account.

**Step 5 — How valuable is it as evidence?** It is excellent evidence of how cultural expression worked in the Mao era (Part 5): a short political text, printed in billions of copies, became the country’s most important book. It tells us what the state wanted people to think; to learn what people actually thought, a historian would look for diaries, memoirs and interviews written after the period.

## Practice questions

### Scaffolded

**Q1.** Look at the timeline. (a) Name two turning points that changed China’s political institutions. (b) Which thread of the content description does the Marriage Law of 1950 belong to? (*Hint: the timeline colour-codes each event into one of four threads.*)

**Q2.** Using the four living-conditions charts: (a) what was life expectancy in China in 1960, and in 2023? (b) about what share of Chinese people lived in cities in 1960, and in 2023? (c) which years does the note under the figure warn us about, and why? (*Hint: the answer is in the figure’s note.*)

**Q3.** From the Treaty of Nanjing table: (a) name the five ports opened to British trade and residence; (b) what was added in 1843 about British people living in the ports? (*Hint: it concerns which law they answered to.*)

**Q4.** Using the Shanghai diagram: (a) in what years were the British settlement and the French Concession set up? (b) who ran the International Settlement, and who could vote for it for most of the period? (*Hint: look at the bottom panel about Chinese residents.*)

**Q5.** From the Confucianism model: (a) what happened in 1905, and in 2004? (b) why does the figure call itself “a historian’s sketch, not a measurement”? (*Hint: think about what the vertical scale measures.*)

**Q6.** From the eight model works table: (a) how many of the eight works are Peking operas? (b) what kinds of heroes appear in them? (c) what kinds of stories were pushed out? (*Hint: compare the stories listed with traditional opera stories.*)

### **Without a scaffold**

**Q7.** Explain two ways foreign influence changed China’s ways of life or institutions between 1842 and 1911. In each case, say what changed and what continued.

**Q8.** “An idea this deep does not vanish even when a revolution tries to destroy it.” Using the story of Confucianism from the Qing to today, explain what this claim means, giving at least three dated examples.

**Q9.** Using Source 2 and Part 5, explain why cultural expression was so important during the Cultural Revolution. Consider both what was destroyed and what was made.

**Q10.** Choose any two of the five phases of CCP rule. For each, explain one thing that changed in how the party ruled and one thing about China’s political institutions that stayed the same.

**Q11.** Drawing on the whole section, write a paragraph arguing the “rupture” reading of modern China and a paragraph arguing the “endurance” reading. Then state which you find more convincing, and why, using at least two pieces of evidence from the section.

---

## Answers

**Q1.** (a) Any two of: the republic replacing the emperor (1912); the founding of the People's Republic (1949); the removal of presidential term limits (2018). (b) Everyday life and living conditions (it remade family life), though it was also a change in law and institutions — either reading earns full marks if a reason is given.

**Q2.** (a) About 33 years in 1960; about 78 in 2023. (b) About 20 per cent in 1960; about 66 per cent in 2023. (c) The famine years of the Great Leap Forward — the low 1960 figure records the toll of that famine, so it should not be read as a simple long-run trend.

**Q3.** (a) Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo) and Shanghai. (b) British people in the ports answered to British officials, not to Chinese law.

**Q4.** (a) The British settlement in 1845; the French Concession in 1849. (b) The Shanghai Municipal Council (from 1854); for most of the period only foreign residents who paid local taxes could vote for it, even though most residents were Chinese. A few Chinese members were added only from 1928.

**Q5.** (a) 1905: the imperial exams were abolished, ending Confucianism's grip on official careers. 2004: the first Confucius Institute opened. (b) Because the vertical scale shows a judgement about the idea's public standing, not a measured quantity — models like this show patterns and invite argument, they do not measure.

**Q6.** (a) Five. (b) Workers, peasants and soldiers — heroes of the revolution. (c) The old stories of emperors, generals, scholars and gods that traditional opera had performed for centuries.

**Q7.** Model points — trade: the treaty ports replaced the Canton System, foreign imports undercut people who wove cloth by hand (change), but most people still farmed as before (continuity). Railways: foreign-built lines changed transport and gave foreign powers economic reach (change), but the first line was pulled up, showing how contested the change was (continuity of Qing caution). Missionaries: schools, hospitals and Christianity entered China (change), but their presence also provoked backlash such as the Boxer Rising (continuity of resistance). Concessions: foreign-run districts inside Chinese cities, such as Shanghai (change), but most of China's territory remained under Chinese rule (continuity). Any two, each with a stated change and a stated continuity.

**Q8.** Model points: Confucianism was the state's official teaching and the basis of the exams under the Qing; the exams were abolished in 1905 and the New Culture Movement attacked old teachings from the 1910s; the Cultural Revolution attacked temples and smashed Confucian teaching, especially in 1966–76 and the 1974 campaign; yet from the 1990s temples were rebuilt, Confucian values were promoted again in schools and media, and Confucius Institutes opened abroad from 2004. The claim means that a value system rooted in family duty and respect for learning proved too deep for any single political movement to remove. At least three dated examples, with the claim explained in the student's own words.

**Q9.** Model points: destroyed — schools, libraries, artworks, temples and old books were attacked as part of the war on the "Four Olds"; made — the state replaced the old culture with the eight model works and the Little Red Book. Cultural expression mattered because in a one-party state art carries political messages: controlling what people saw and heard was a way of controlling how they thought, and the model works' heroes and villains taught the revolution's view of the world. The Little Red Book shows the same logic in print: one short text, repeated everywhere, became the most powerful cultural object in the country. Any answer that covers destruction, replacement, and why control of expression served political control.

**Q10.** Model points vary by chosen phases. Example — Phase 1 (1949–57) and Phase 4 (1978–2012): in Phase 1 the party remade society from above through land reform and the Marriage Law (change), while establishing the one-party structure that has never changed (continuity). In Phase 4 the party allowed markets and private business (change), while keeping its monopoly on political power and control of the army and media (continuity). Any two phases, each with one change and one continuity in political institutions.

**Q11.** Model points — rupture: the emperor replaced by a republic and then a party-state; the exams abolished; family life remade by the Marriage Law; the Cultural Revolution’s attack on old culture; urbanisation and the rise of income after 1978. Endurance: a strong central state throughout; family duty and respect for elders still taught; the prestige of examinations continued in spirit (today’s gaokao); art still carries moral and political messages, from court painting to model opera to modern media. A good answer states one piece of evidence in each paragraph and gives a reasoned preference; either preference earns full marks if the reasoning is sound.

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## Competing readings of China's past

**Curriculum trace** — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 History, Levels 9 and 10

**Owns** VC2HH10K29

**Draws on** — VC2HH10K29.E01, VC2HH10K29.E02 (**the China block: the elaborations this section teaches; the book's taught society is China**) · VC2HH10K29.E03–VC2HH10K29.E12 (**E03–E05 India · E06–E07 Indonesia · E08–E09 Japan · E10–E12 Vietnam: valid link keys for other builds and other choices, not this book's taught case**)

**Builds on** — sections 5A to 5E, which told the story of China itself. This section does not retell that story; it examines the interpretations and debates built about it. It also links back to section 1A's study of European imperialism in Asia, and forward to the skills of sections 7F and 8D.

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Sections 5A to 5E traced China's long story: a powerful Qing empire, a century of defeats and invasions, revolutions, and the rise of the People's Republic. Much of that story — the dates, the treaties, the wars — is settled fact. This section takes one step up from the story. It does not retell what happened. It looks at what people have *done* with what happened — the **interpretations** they have built about it, the **debates** those interpretations still cause, and the way the telling of China's history has itself changed over time.

Two questions carry the whole section. First: what has China's 'century of humiliation' meant, and who gets to say? Second: how does the reading of the past sit inside one of the world's most serious living disputes — the debate over the ownership of Taiwan? On each question, more than one reasoned position exists. That disagreement is not a weakness in history. It is what makes history an argument worth studying.

By the end of this section you should be able to: tell a fact from an interpretation; explain why the same events have been told differently in different times; set out each side of a debate about China's history in its strongest form; press each side with its hard questions; and use sources to build your own measured interpretation.

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### Before we begin: what do these words mean?

Several words in this section are **contested** — people do not all agree on one fixed meaning, and which meaning you choose can change your conclusion. We state how each is used here, so every question can be answered on that meaning alone.

- **Interpretation.** In history, an **interpretation** is a historian's reasoned account of the past, built from evidence. It selects facts, weighs them, and explains them. Two historians can share the same facts and still offer different interpretations, because they select and weigh differently. An interpretation is not a guess: it is judged by its evidence and its reasoning.
- **Perspective.** A **perspective** is the point of view of a person or group *inside* the past, shaped by who they are and what they value (you met this idea in section 5D). An **interpretation** is the view of someone *looking at* the past. A Qing official in 1839 has a perspective; a historian in 2008 offers an interpretation.
- **Debate.** Here a **debate** is not a quarrel. It is a disagreement between interpretations, carried on with evidence and reasons. When this section says historians debate a question, it means that strong, reasoned positions exist on more than one side.
- **The 'century of humiliation'.** In this section, the *century of humiliation* is used in the sense given by the curriculum's own elaboration: the stretch of China's modern history — usually dated from the Opium War of 1839–42 to 1945 or 1949 — in which China suffered repeated defeats, forced treaties, lost territory and invasion at the hands of foreign powers. The phrase itself grew out of Chinese nationalist writing in the early 1900s and is widely used in China today. Notice what kind of term this is: the events are historical facts, but the *label* is itself an interpretation — one way of stringing those events into a single story. Historians argue about where the period begins and ends, and about how well one label holds everything that happened.
- **Unequal treaties.** This is the name given, most often by Chinese writers and officials since the early 1900s, to the treaties China signed after losing wars — treaties that opened ports, handed over territory and gave foreign powers special rights in China. The name carries a judgement: an agreement signed after a lost war, its users

argue, is not an agreement between equals. Historians who study the same treaties do not all accept that framing, which is exactly why the name is worth flagging as contested.

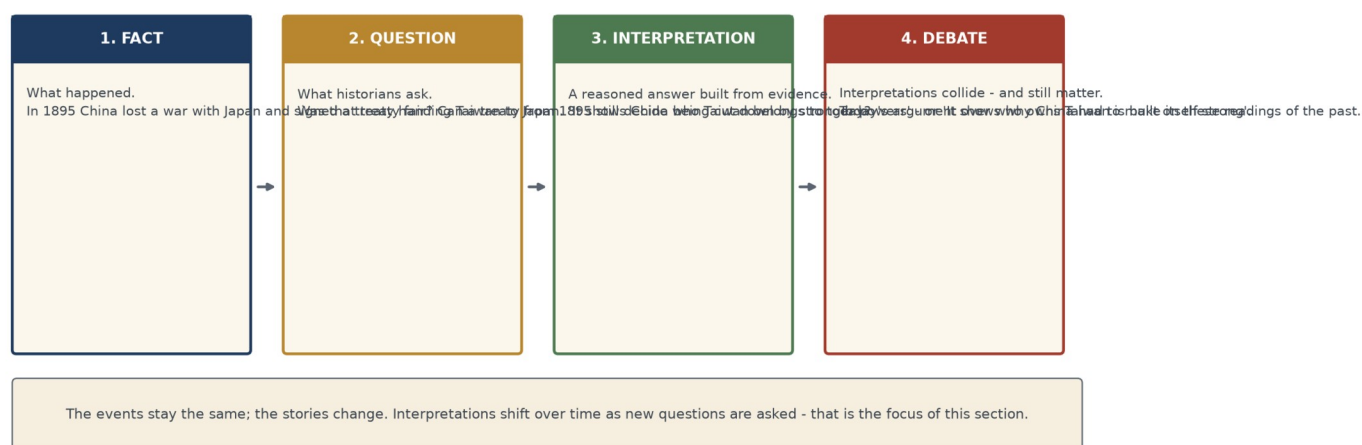
- **Ownership — the right to rule.** When this section speaks of the *ownership* of Taiwan, it means the legal and political question of which government has the right to rule the island and speak for it. In this section, that right to rule is treated as a question to be argued with evidence, not as a settled fact on either side.
- **Self-determination.** A principle, stated in the United Nations Charter (1945), that peoples have the right to choose their own government. Who counts as “a people” entitled to it is itself debated.
- **Status quo.** A Latin phrase meaning “the present state of affairs”. In the Taiwan debate, keeping the status quo means leaving the question open rather than forcing an answer.

Keep these meanings in mind as you read. When a question uses one of these words, notice which meaning is doing the work.

## 1. From fact to debate: the historian's toolkit (vc2HH10K29)

China's modern history is made of facts: the wars, the treaties, the revolutions, the founding of new governments. But the moment anyone asks *what those facts mean*, they have moved from fact to interpretation — and interpretations can collide. Figure 1 shows the four steps.

**From fact to debate: how historical interpretations grow**



*Four-step diagram showing how a fact becomes a question, then an interpretation, then a living debate, using the 1895 loss of Taiwan as the worked example*

Why is China's modern history such fertile ground for debate? Three reasons stand out.

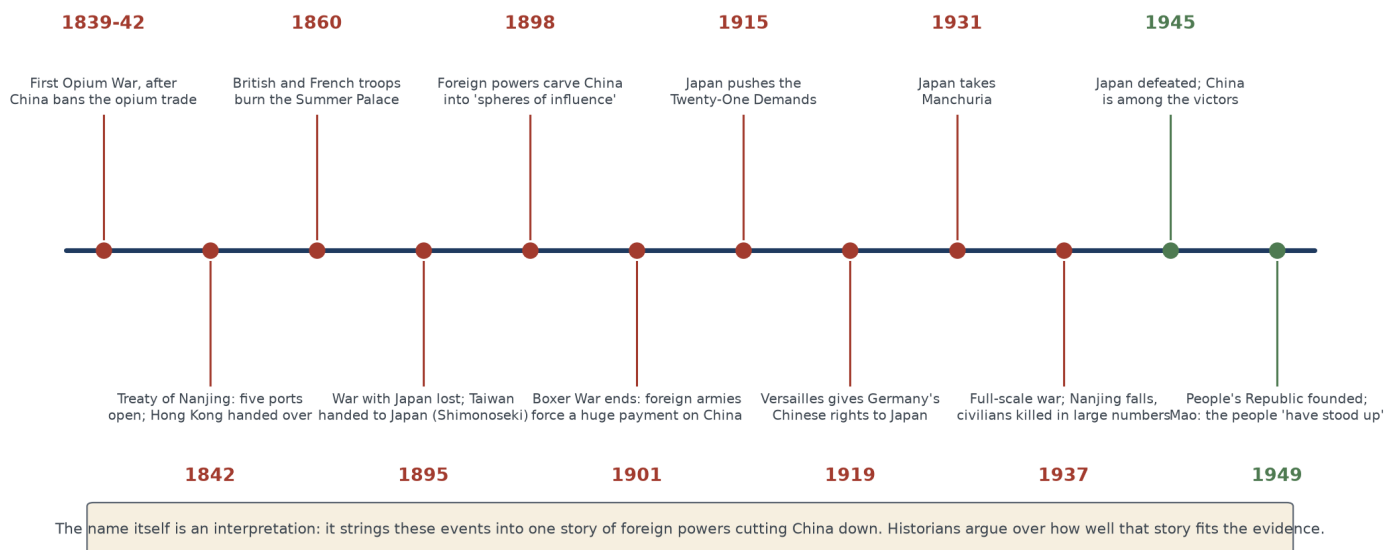
- **The scale of the change.** Few societies have been through so much in so short a time: the fall of an empire that had lasted two millennia, invasion, revolution, civil war, and the rise of a new kind of state. Different historians pick out different threads of that change.
- **The record is rich and uneven.** China's own archives, foreign diplomatic records, newspapers, speeches and schoolbooks all survive, and they do not all say the same thing. Which records a historian centres shapes what they find.
- **The past is still at work.** The events of this period are still appealed to in arguments happening now — in museums, in schoolbooks, in diplomacy. When a past still has a job to do in the present, people keep retelling it.

That last point matters most. Retelling is not the same as lying: each telling can be built from real events. The difference is in what is selected, what is stressed, and what the story is asked to do. Sorting those things out is the historian's work — and it is the work of this section.

## 2. The events behind the story: China's 'century of humiliation' (VC2HH10K29.E01)

Before we can examine the interpretations, we need the events. Sections 5B and 5C taught them in detail; Figure 2 summarises the ones the story is built from.

**The events behind the story: China's 'century of humiliation', 1839-1949**



### *Timeline of the events of China's 'century of humiliation' from the First Opium War of 1839–42 to the founding of the People's Republic in 1949*

Read through the timeline once for the shape of it. From 1839, China lost war after war against foreign powers and was forced to sign agreement after agreement on their terms: the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), which opened five ports and handed Hong Kong to Britain; the burning of the emperor's Summer Palace near Beijing by British and French troops (1860); the loss of Taiwan to Japan after the war of 1894–95; the carving of the country into foreign "spheres of influence" (1898); the crushing payment forced on China after the Boxer War (1901); Japan's Twenty-One Demands (1915); and the decision at Versailles (1919) to hand Germany's special rights in China to Japan instead of back to China. Then came invasion: Japan's seizure of Manchuria in 1931 and full-scale war from 1937, during which Japanese troops took Nanjing and killed very large numbers of civilians and prisoners — an event whose exact death toll historians still argue over, though the event itself is clearly recorded.

The pattern only broke in 1943–49. In 1943, while World War II was still being fought, Britain and the United States gave up the special legal privileges in China that had been forced there a century earlier. In 1945 Japan was defeated, and China stood among the victors, becoming a founding member of the United Nations. And in 1949 Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China, declaring that "the Chinese people have stood up".

Here is a primary source from near the beginning of the period.

### SOURCE A

*A Chinese official argues against the opium trade*

'If people from another country came to your country to sell opium and tempted your people into buying it, Your Majesty would certainly be very angry ... In your own country, the smoking of opium is strictly forbidden ... How can you allow to be done to others what you do not allow to be done to your own people?'

Lin Zexu, an official of China's emperor, in a letter drafted for Queen Victoria of Britain, Canton, 1839, protesting the opium trade. The letter was never delivered to the Queen. Abridged and lightly modernised.

*Source A, an abridged 1839 letter drafted by the Chinese official Lin Zexu for Queen Victoria of Britain, arguing that if the British forbid opium at home they should not sell it to the Chinese*

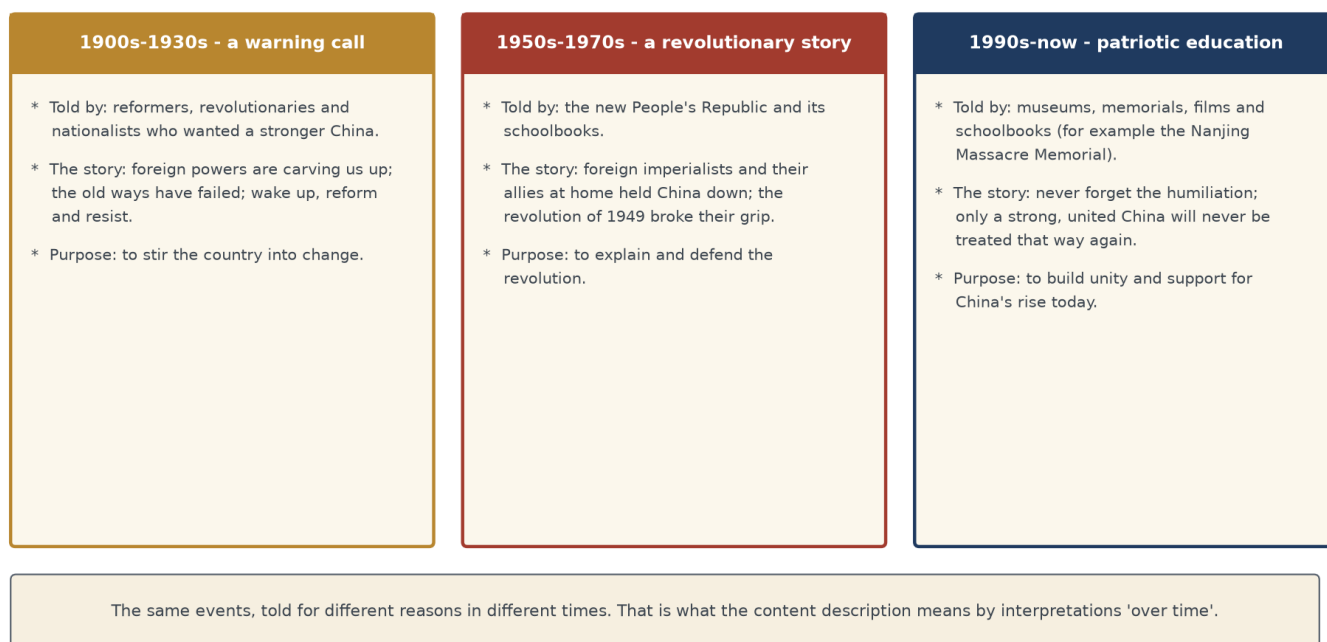
#### Worked analysis of Source A.

1. **What kind of source is it?** A primary source — a letter drafted in 1839 by Lin Zexu, an official of China's emperor, for Queen Victoria of Britain. It was never delivered to her.
2. **Context.** British merchants were selling Indian opium in China against Chinese law. When Lin Zexu destroyed the seized opium at Canton in 1839, the dispute became the First Opium War (1839–42) — the event that usually opens the 'century of humiliation' timeline.
3. **Content.** Lin Zexu makes a moral argument: the British ban opium smoking in their own country, so how can they allow it to be sold to others?
4. **Perspective.** This is the perspective of a Chinese official defending Chinese law and speaking to a foreign ruler from a position of moral confidence — written before the war showed how uneven the military balance was.
5. **Message.** The opium trade is unfair by Britain's own standards.
6. **Usefulness and limits.** The source is highly useful for understanding the Chinese view of the dispute that opened the period, and for seeing that Chinese officials argued back with reasons, not silence. Its limit: it is one official's case, written for a ruler who never read it, so it cannot by itself explain why Britain chose war. For that, a historian would add British records — and the treaty that ended the war (Figure 2, 1842) tells us who prevailed.

### 3. One past, three tellings: the story over time (VC2HH10K29.E01)

The curriculum asks you to examine how China's 'century of humiliation' has been interpreted — and the most striking thing about those interpretations is that they have changed over time, inside China itself. The same run of events has been told for different reasons in different times. Figure 3 sets out three tellings.

## One past, three tellings: how the 'century of humiliation' story has changed over time



Three-column diagram showing how the 'century of humiliation' story was told differently in the 1900s–1930s, the 1950s–1970s and the 1990s to the present

- **1900s–1930s — a warning call.** Reformers such as Liang Qichao and revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen told the story of foreign aggression to wake the country up: the old ways were failing, the powers were carving China up, and only reform and unity would save it. The story's job was to stir change — and it helped feed the revolution that ended the Qing dynasty in 1911–12.
- **1950s–1970s — a revolutionary story.** After 1949 the new People's Republic told the period as a story of foreign powers and their allies at home holding China down, and of the revolution breaking their grip. The story's job was to explain and defend the revolution.
- **1990s to now — patriotic education.** Since the early 1990s the story has been told widely in museums, memorials, films and schoolbooks — for example in the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, opened in 1985. Its message is "never forget": only a strong, united China will never be treated that way again. Here the story's job is to build unity and support for China's rise today.

Notice what is doing the changing. The events stayed largely the same. What changed was *who was telling the story, when, and what they needed it to do*. That is exactly what the content description is after: how the readings of a society's past shift *over time*.

**Quick check (VC2HH10K29.E01).** Name the three tellings in Figure 3, and for each give one thing the tellers wanted the story to do. Then suggest one reason the telling changed after 1949.

### 4. Three readings historians use (VC2HH10K29.E01)

Inside universities, historians also read the period in different ways. Figure 4 sets out three readings, each in its strongest form, with the hard questions critics press on each. This is the pattern you will use again and again: strongest form first, hard questions second, then your weighing.

### Three readings of the century of humiliation

| The reading                                                                                                                                                                               | Its strongest case                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Hard questions critics raise                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The national humiliation story - the version told in China's schoolbooks and museums; studied by historians such as Rana Mitter ( <i>Modern China: A Very Short Introduction</i> , 2008). | The events were real and recorded: forced wars, unequal treaties, lost land, a burnt palace, foreign occupation. The story puts the victims at its centre, and it explains why a strong, united state matters to so many Chinese people today. | Were Chinese people only victims? They were also reformers, revolutionaries, merchants and fighters. Why does the story end exactly in 1949, at the moment the present ruling party took power? |
| China-centred history - look for change inside China, not just for reactions to the West (the approach used in Jonathan Spence, <i>The Search for Modern China</i> , 1990).               | China was changing from within all along: rebellions, reforms, new industries, revolutions. This reading restores the part Chinese people played in their own history.                                                                         | If China was changing on its own, how do we explain the repeated defeats and the huge scale of the harm forced on China from outside?                                                           |
| A world-history frame - put China inside the global age of empire (links to Section 1A of this book).                                                                                     | Many peoples in Asia and Africa met the same forces at the same time. Comparison shows patterns - why empires expanded, and how colonised peoples responded.                                                                                   | Placing suffering inside a world pattern does not make it smaller. China's losses were still huge, and a global frame can blur what was particular about China's experience.                    |

How to read this table: each reading selects certain facts and builds them into a story. The historian's job is to test every story against the evidence - its own side included.

*Table of three historians' readings of the century of humiliation, each with its strongest case and the hard questions critics raise*

- **Reading 1 — the national humiliation story.** The version told in China's schoolbooks and museums, and studied closely by historians such as Rana Mitter (*Modern China: A Very Short Introduction*, 2008). It puts the victims at the centre and explains why a strong, united state matters to so many Chinese people today. Its hardest question: were Chinese people only victims? They were also reformers, revolutionaries, merchants and fighters — and the story's neat ending in 1949, at the moment the present ruling party took power, invites suspicion that the ending was chosen to suit the teller.
- **Reading 2 — China-centred history.** Look for change inside China, not only for reactions to the West. The historian Paul Cohen gave this approach its name in *Discovering History in China* (1984), and it is the approach used in Jonathan Spence's celebrated history *The Search for Modern China* (1990). It restores the part Chinese people played in their own history. Its hardest question: if China was changing on its own, how do we explain the repeated defeats and the huge scale of harm forced on China from outside?
- **Reading 3 — a world-history frame.** Put China inside the global age of empire, as section 1A of this book does. Many peoples across Asia and Africa met the same forces at the same time, and comparison shows real patterns. Its hardest question: placing suffering inside a world pattern does not make it smaller, and a global frame can blur what was particular about China's experience.

An older approach, long influential among American historians and associated with John King Fairbank, treated modern Chinese history largely as China's *response* to the impact of the West. Paul Cohen wrote his China-centred reading in part as a challenge to that approach — a clear example of one interpretation provoking another.

Here is a secondary source: a historian's interpretation of the story itself.

### SOURCE C

#### *A historian's verdict on the story*

The 'century of humiliation' is not just an old wound. It is a living story, retold in museums, films and schoolbooks, and it shapes how China understands itself and the world today. Like every national story, it has a beginning, an ending and a job to do - and the historian's work is to ask who chose them, when, and why.

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Summary of the argument of the historian Rana Mitter, *Modern China: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Summarised for this section; it is a historian's interpretation, not a document from the past.

*Source C, a summary of historian Rana Mitter's argument that the 'century of humiliation' is a living story retold in museums, films and textbooks to shape how China understands itself today*

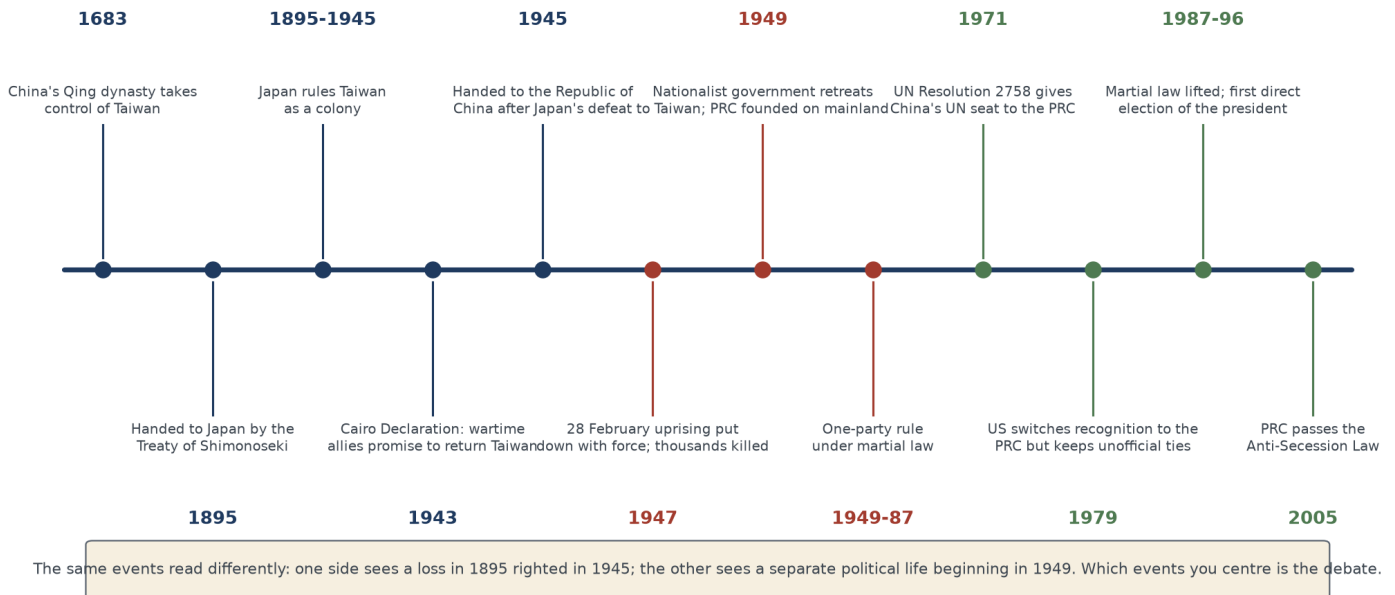
**Worked analysis of Source C.** This source is analysed differently from Source A, because it *is* an interpretation.

1. **What kind of source is it?** A secondary source — a historian's account, published in 2008, built from many primary sources.
2. **Context.** Mitter wrote decades after the events, able to study how the story has been told across the whole period — including tellings made for purposes he does not share.
3. **Content.** His central claim: the 'century of humiliation' is not just an old wound but a living story, retold in museums, films and textbooks, and it shapes how China understands itself and the world today.
4. **What he selects and stresses.** He selects the *telling* of the story as his subject — who tells it, when, and to what purpose — rather than retelling the events themselves. That selection is what makes his work an interpretation of interpretations.
5. **Where it sits in the debate.** Mitter does not deny the harm of the period; he asks readers to see the story as something built, with a beginning, an ending and a job to do. In terms of Figure 4, he stands with the historians who test Reading 1 rather than simply repeat it.
6. **Usefulness and limits.** Highly useful for this section's central skill — examining interpretations. Its limit: one historian's summary cannot show the full weight of evidence behind Reading 1, so a historian would test Mitter against the primary record — treaties, speeches, schoolbooks — just as they would test anyone else.

## 5. The history behind a living debate: Taiwan (VC2HH10K29 . E02)

The second elaboration this section teaches asks you to explain the arguments over Taiwan's ownership. That debate is front-page news today, and it is also, at its heart, a debate about history: each side appeals to the past as evidence. To follow it, you need the past first. Figure 5 gives it in twelve steps.

## Taiwan's history at a glance: the past that both sides of the debate call on



*Timeline of Taiwan's history from Qing control in 1683, through Japanese rule from 1895 to 1945, to the present-day arrangements shaped after 1949*

Two moments on that timeline matter most to the debate, and they pull in opposite directions. One side centres **1895 and 1945**: Taiwan belonged to China's Qing dynasty from 1683, was taken by Japan in a war, and was promised back in wartime and handed back in 1945 — a loss righted. The other side centres **1949**: the island and the mainland have been governed separately ever since, and the island's people have since built their own political life. Which events you centre is, in large part, which side of the debate you are on.

Here is the wartime promise both sides argue about.

## SOURCE B

*A wartime promise about Taiwan's future*

'It is their purpose that ... all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa [Taiwan] and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China.'

---

The Cairo Declaration, 1 December 1943 - a wartime statement issued by the leaders of the United States, Britain and China. 'Formosa' was the name then used for Taiwan. Abridged.

*Source B, an extract from the Cairo Declaration of 1 December 1943 in which the wartime allies state that territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China*

### Worked analysis of Source B.

1. **What kind of source is it?** A primary source — a wartime statement issued on 1 December 1943 by the leaders of the United States, Britain and China meeting at Cairo. 'Formosa' was the name then used for Taiwan.
2. **Context.** Japan was still occupying China's territory. The allies were beginning to plan the post-war settlement, and China's government was then the Republic of China.
3. **Content.** The allies state their purpose that territories Japan had stolen from the Chinese — Manchuria, Formosa (Taiwan) and the Pescadores — shall be restored to the Republic of China.
4. **Perspective.** This is the perspective of wartime leaders promising a post-war order. It was made for victory and for the China that existed in 1943 — the Republic of China, not the People's Republic founded in 1949.
5. **Usefulness and limits.** The source is central to the debate, because each side reads it differently. One side reads it as a clear promise that Taiwan belongs to China, later carried out by the hand-back of 1945. The other side points out that it was a statement of wartime purpose, not a signed peace treaty — and that the peace treaty with Japan in 1952 ended Japan's rule without naming who Taiwan went to. Notice the skill at work here: the *same* source serves two interpretations, because the two sides ask different questions of it.

## 6. Three positions, each in its strongest form (VC2HH10K29.E02)

The debate over ownership has three main positions. House rule in this book: every position is presented in the **strongest form its own supporters would recognise**, and every position meets its hard questions. Marks go to the quality of your reasoning, never to the conclusion you reach. Figure 6 sets all three out.

## The debate over Taiwan: three positions, each in its strongest form

| Position                                                                                                                | Its strongest form                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Hard questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Taiwan is part of China - the PRC position, set out in the Anti-Secession Law (2005).                                | Taiwan belonged to China for two centuries before 1895. Its loss to Japan was wartime theft; the Cairo Declaration (1943) and the 1945 hand-back righted that wrong. The UN gave China's seat to the PRC in 1971, and most countries accept the PRC as China's government.                                                                      | The 1952 peace treaty ended Japan's rule without naming who Taiwan went to, and the PRC signed neither of the post-war treaties with Japan. Can a wartime promise settle ownership? And should the wishes of the 23 million people who live there now count for nothing? |
| 2. Taiwan already runs as its own country; its people should choose their own future - the self-determination position. | The PRC has never governed the island. Since 1949 Taiwan has had its own government, army, money and travel documents, and since the 1990s its leaders are chosen in free elections - the usual marks of a state, as listed in the Montevideo Convention (1933). The UN Charter speaks of the rights of peoples to choose their own government. | Only a small group of states recognises Taiwan as a state, and most UN members accept the 'one China' position. Self-determination usually applies to colonies - does it apply to an island whose ownership is disputed?                                                 |
| 3. Keep things as they are - the status quo position.                                                                   | Long-running surveys (National Chengchi University, Taipei) find that most people on Taiwan want to keep the present arrangement: safety, prosperity, no war. Leaving the question open has kept the peace for decades.                                                                                                                         | An open question is not an answer, and no treaty defines the present arrangement. Each side says the other is changing it. Can it hold as China grows stronger and island identity hardens?                                                                              |

How to read this table: every position is given in the strongest form its own supporters would accept, and every side meets hard questions. Marks in this book go to the quality of reasoning, never to the conclusion reached.

*Table of the three positions in the debate over Taiwan — that Taiwan is part of China, that Taiwan's people should choose their own future, and keeping the present arrangement — each in its strongest form with its hard questions*

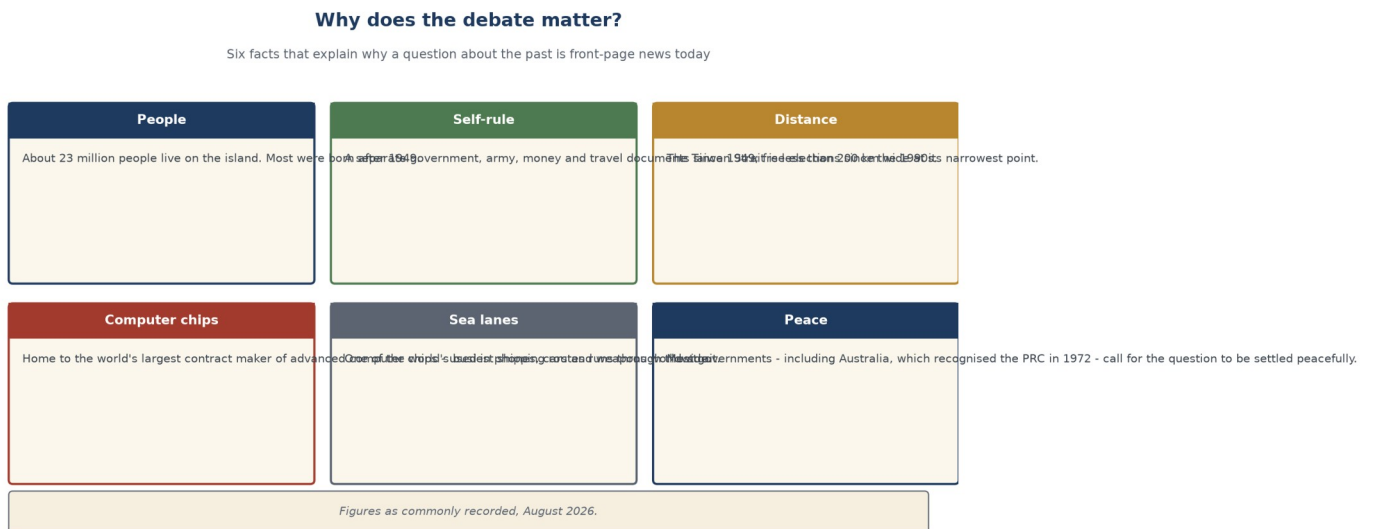
- **Position 1 — Taiwan is part of China.** This is the position of the People's Republic of China, set out in law (the Anti-Secession Law, 2005). Its strongest form: Taiwan belonged to China for two centuries before 1895; its loss to Japan was wartime theft; the Cairo Declaration (1943) and the hand-back of 1945 righted that wrong; the United Nations gave China's seat to the People's Republic in 1971; and most countries in the world accept the People's Republic as China's government. Its hard questions: the 1952 peace treaty ended Japan's rule without naming who Taiwan went to, and the People's Republic signed neither of the post-war treaties with Japan. Can a wartime promise settle ownership? And do the wishes of the 23 million people who live on the island today count for nothing?
- **Position 2 — the people of the island should choose their own future.** This is the self-determination position. Its strongest form: the People's Republic has never governed the island; since 1949 Taiwan has had its own government, army, money and travel documents; and since the 1990s its leaders have been chosen in free elections — the usual marks of a state, as listed in the Montevideo Convention of 1933. The UN Charter speaks of the right of peoples to choose their own government. Its hard questions: only a small group of states recognises Taiwan as a state, and most UN members accept the 'one China' position. Self-determination is usually applied to colonies — does it apply to an island whose ownership is disputed?
- **Position 3 — keep things as they are.** This is the status quo position. Its strongest form: long-running surveys by the National Chengchi University in Taipei find that most people on the island want to keep the present arrangement — safety, prosperity, no war — and leaving the question open has kept the peace for decades. Its hard questions: an open question is not an answer, and no treaty defines the present arrangement; each side says the other is changing it. Can it hold as the balance of power shifts?

**A fair hearing.** Notice that none of these positions is silly, and none comes without a cost. Position 1 rests on the longest run of evidence about the past. Position 2 rests on the clearest evidence about the present. Position 3 rests on the plain fact that forcing an answer could mean war. A strong answer to any question in this section gives each position its due before it weighs them.

**Quick check (VC2HH10K29 .E02).** For each position, name one piece of dated evidence its supporters appeal to. Then write one hard question for the position you find most convincing — pressing your own side is the discipline this book rewards.

## 7. Why the debate matters today (VC2HH10K29 . E02)

History debates are not museum pieces. This one touches the lives of millions and the peace of a whole region. Figure 7 sets out six facts that explain why a question about the past is front-page news today.



*Six fact tiles explaining why the debate over Taiwan matters: the people of the island, its separate government since 1949, the narrow strait, its role making computer chips, the busy shipping routes, and calls for a peaceful settlement*

- **People.** About 23 million people live on the island, and most were born after 1949. Any settlement touches their lives.
- **Self-rule.** The island has had its own government, army, money and travel documents since 1949, and free elections since the 1990s.
- **Distance.** The Taiwan Strait is less than 200 kilometres wide at its narrowest point — close enough that a conflict there could not stay local.
- **Computer chips.** The island is home to the world's largest contract maker of advanced computer chips, used in phones, cars and weapons worldwide.
- **Sea lanes.** One of the world's busiest shipping routes runs through the strait.
- **Peace.** Most governments — including Australia, which recognised the People's Republic of China in 1972 — call for the question to be settled peacefully.

This is where the section's two threads meet. The 'century of humiliation' story tells many people in China that the island's separation is an unfinished wound from the era of foreign aggression. The island's own history since 1949 tells its people that they have built a political life of their own. Both readings are built from real events — and that is why the debate is an interpretation problem, not just a matter of looking facts up.

## 8. Reading any claim about China's past (VC2HH10K29)

The skills of this section travel. Whenever you meet a claim about China's past — in a textbook, a speech, a museum display, a film or a post online — the four questions in Figure 8 will do the work.

## Reading any claim about China's past: four questions

|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <b>Who is telling this, and when?</b><br>A speech, a schoolbook, a museum display, a post online - and in what year was it made? The same story told in 1920, 1960 and 2020 can be doing three different jobs. |
| 2 | <b>Which events do they centre, and which do they leave out?</b><br>Every account selects. Notice what is foregrounded - the loss of 1895, the promise of 1943, the split of 1949 - and what is missing.       |
| 3 | <b>What do they want the story to do?</b><br>Warn? Unite? Defend a policy, or argue for one? A story with a job to do will stress the evidence that suits that job.                                            |
| 4 | <b>What other evidence would you check it against?</b><br>Treaties, laws, speeches, survey figures, other historians. One account alone is a claim; accounts checked against each other are evidence.          |

*These are the same questions you will use again in Sections 7F and 8D of this book.*

*Four-step checklist for testing claims about China's past: who is telling it and when, which events it centres and leaves out, what it wants the story to do, and what other evidence to check it against*

1. **Who is telling this, and when?** A speech, a schoolbook, a museum display, a post online — and in what year was it made? The same story told in 1920, 1960 and 2020 can be doing three different jobs.
2. **Which events do they centre, and which do they leave out?** Every account selects. Notice what is in the foreground — the loss of 1895, the promise of 1943, the split of 1949 — and what is missing.
3. **What do they want the story to do?** Warn? Unite? Defend a policy, or argue for one? A story with a job to do will stress the evidence that suits that job.
4. **What other evidence would you check it against?** Treaties, laws, speeches, survey figures, other historians. One account alone is a claim; accounts checked against each other are evidence.

These are the same questions you will use again in sections 7F and 8D of this book, where they become your standing toolkit for any historical debate.

Figure 9 shows a model paragraph answering a typical question for this section, with a checklist of why it works. Study it as the shape of your own answer to practice question Q8.

## Model paragraph: comparing two interpretations

### Question: Explain how readings of history shape the debate over Taiwan.

The debate over Taiwan is, at its heart, a debate about history. Those who argue that Taiwan belongs to China centre the long story of the 1800s: Taiwan was ruled by China's Qing dynasty from 1683, and its loss to Japan in 1895 is remembered as one of the deepest wounds of the 'century of humiliation'. In this reading, the Cairo Declaration of 1943 and the hand-back of 1945 put that wrong right. Those who argue that Taiwan's future belongs to its own people centre a different past: since 1949 the island has never been governed by the People's Republic, and its people have built their own way of life with free elections. In this reading, the wishes of 23 million people today matter more than old treaties. Both sides use real events. The difference is which events they select - and that is what historians mean by interpretation.

### Why this paragraph works

- Answers the question in its first line.
- Names both positions and gives each its strongest form.
- Uses dated evidence: 1683, 1895, 1943, 1945, 1949.
- Shows the mechanism: same past, different selections.
- Ends by linking back to the section's key idea - interpretation.
- Takes no side. Marks go to the reasoning, not the conclusion.

*Model paragraph comparing the two readings of history behind the Taiwan debate, with a checklist of why the paragraph works: it answers the question, names both positions, uses dated evidence, shows the mechanism, and takes no side*

## Sources for this section

Retrieval date for all online sources: **26 August 2026**.

1. Lin Zexu, letter drafted for Queen Victoria of Britain, Canton, 1839, protesting the opium trade — abridged and lightly modernised here from the standard English translation, which has been reprinted in many public collections of primary sources on modern China. The letter was never delivered.
2. The Cairo Declaration, 1 December 1943 — wartime statement issued by the leaders of the United States, Britain and China; text as recorded by the United States National Archives.
3. The Anti-Secession Law, People's Republic of China, passed by the National People's Congress, March 2005.
4. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758, 25 October 1971 — recognising the representatives of the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate representatives of China to the United Nations.
5. The Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, 1933 — the four marks of statehood (a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter relations with other states).
6. The United Nations Charter, 1945, Article 1 — the purpose of developing friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.
7. Rana Mitter, *Modern China: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
8. Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990).
9. National Chengchi University Election Study Center, Taipei — long-running trend surveys on identity and the unification-independence question.
10. Wikipedia: "Century of humiliation", "Taiwan", "Treaty of Shimonoseki", "Cairo Declaration". All retrieved 26 August 2026.

## Practice questions

### With help

**Q1.** Key ideas. (a) Define **interpretation** and **perspective** as this section uses them, and say how they differ. (b) What is a **debate** in the historian's sense? (c) What two things does the phrase 'century of humiliation' combine?

**Q2.** The events. Use Figure 2. (a) Which event usually opens the 'century of humiliation' timeline, and in which years was it fought? (b) Name two agreements or losses of the 1890s shown on the timeline. (c) What changed for China between 1943 and 1949? Give two examples from the timeline or the text.

**Q3.** The tellings. Use Figure 3. (a) Name the three tellings of the story. (b) For each, state one thing the tellers wanted the story to do. (c) Which telling is linked to the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall?

**Q4.** The readings. Use Figure 4. (a) Name the three readings historians use. (b) Give the strongest case for ONE of them. (c) Give a hard question for a DIFFERENT one.

**Q5.** The debate. Use Figures 5 and 6. (a) Which two moments on the timeline pull the debate in opposite directions? (b) Name the three positions in Figure 7. (c) Give one piece of dated evidence that Position 1 appeals to, and one that Position 2 appeals to.

**Q6.** Sources. Use Sources A, B and C. (a) Which sources are primary and which is secondary? (b) How can you tell? (c) What does Source C give that Sources A and B cannot?

### On your own

**Q7.** Testing an interpretation. Choose ONE reading from Figure 4. State its strongest case in one sentence, press its hard question in one sentence, and judge in one or two sentences how well the reading survives. Marks go to the reasoning, not the conclusion.

**Q8.** Constructing an interpretation. Answer the question — *Explain how readings of history shape the debate over Taiwan.* — in one paragraph. Use Figure 9 as your model: answer the question in your first sentence, name both readings with dated evidence, show how the same past is put to different uses, and close by linking back to the idea of interpretation. Take no side; marks go to the reasoning.

**Q9.** Comparing sources. Source A (1839) and Source B (1943) are both Chinese-side voices from the period. What does each reveal about how China met the outside world, and why do they sound so different? Use the words *perspective* and *context* in your answer.

**Q10.** Continuity and change. Using Figure 3, explain why one historian could say the telling of the 'century of humiliation' has changed a great deal over time, while another could say it has stayed the same story throughout. Give evidence for both views, then give your own weighed judgement in one sentence.

**Q11.** Significance. "The loss of Taiwan in 1895 was the most significant single event of the 'century of humiliation'." Do you agree? Name the criterion you use to judge significance, and defend your answer in three or four sentences.

**Q12.** The living debate. Set out Position 1 and Position 2 from Figure 5's timeline and Figure 6, each in its strongest form. Then say which is better supported by the evidence in this section, and why. The marks go to the fairness of your setup and the quality of your weighing.

## Answers

**Q1.** (a) An interpretation is a historian's reasoned account of the past, built from evidence; a perspective is the point of view of a person or group inside the past. The historian looks at the past; the perspective belongs to someone in it. (b) A debate is a disagreement between interpretations, carried on with evidence and reasons. (c) Settled facts (the defeats, treaties and invasions) and an interpretation of them (the label that strings them into one story of humiliation).

**Q2.** (a) The First Opium War, 1839–42. (b) Any two of: the loss of the war with Japan (1894–95); the Treaty of Shimonoseki handing Taiwan to Japan (1895); the carving of China into foreign spheres of influence (1898). (c) Any two of: Britain and the United States gave up their special legal privileges in China (1943); Japan was defeated and China stood among the victors (1945); China became a founding member of the United Nations (1945); the People's Republic was founded (1949).

**Q3.** (a) A warning call (1900s–1930s); a revolutionary story (1950s–1970s); patriotic education (1990s to now). (b) For example: to stir the country into reform and resistance; to explain and defend the revolution of 1949; to build unity and support for China's rise today. (c) The patriotic-education telling (1990s to now); the memorial hall opened in 1985.

**Q4.** (a) The national humiliation story; China-centred history; a world-history frame. (b) Example (national humiliation story): the events were real and recorded — forced wars, lost territory, foreign occupation — and the story puts the victims at the centre. (c) Example (China-centred history): if China was changing on its own, how do we explain the repeated defeats and the scale of harm forced on China from outside?

**Q5.** (a) 1895 and 1945 (a loss righted) pull against 1949 (a separate political life beginning). (b) Taiwan is part of China; the island's people should choose their own future; keep things as they are (the status quo). (c) Position 1: the Cairo Declaration (1943), the hand-back (1945), UN Resolution 2758 (1971). Position 2: the separate government since 1949, free elections since the 1990s, the marks of statehood in the Montevideo Convention (1933).

**Q6.** (a) Sources A and B are primary; Source C is secondary. (b) A and B come from the time being studied (1839 and 1943); C is a historian's account made much later (2008). (c) C explains how the story itself has been told and used over time — an interpretation of interpretations — which documents from inside the moment cannot give.

**Q7–Q12.** See the fully-worked solutions below.

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## Fully-worked solutions

**Q7.**

Model answer (Reading 2: China-centred history). Strongest case: China was changing from within all along — rebellions, reforms, new industries, revolutions — and this reading restores the part Chinese people played in their own history. Hard question: if China was changing on its own, the reading must still explain the repeated defeats and the huge scale of harm forced on China from outside. Judgement: the reading survives well as a corrective — it fixes the weakness of stories that make Chinese people only victims — but it works best alongside the evidence of foreign harm rather than instead of it, because the defeats are facts no reading can wish away.

**Q8.**

Model answer. The debate over Taiwan is, at its heart, a debate about history. Those who argue that Taiwan belongs to China centre the long story of the 1800s: Taiwan was ruled by China's Qing dynasty from 1683, and its loss to Japan in 1895 is remembered as one of the deepest wounds of the 'century of humiliation'. In this reading, the Cairo Declaration of 1943 and the hand-back of 1945 put that wrong right. Those who argue that Taiwan's future belongs to its own people centre a different past: since 1949 the island has never been governed by the People's Republic, and its people have built their own way of life with free elections. In this reading, the wishes of 23 million people today matter more than old treaties. Both sides use real events. The difference is which events they select — and that is what historians mean by interpretation.

## Q9.

Model answer. Source A reveals a China still arguing from moral confidence: Lin Zexu's 1839 letter demands that Britain live up to its own anti-opium rules, and its perspective is that of an official of the Qing court before the war had exposed the military gap. Source B reveals a China at war, allied with Britain and the United States, being promised the return of lost territory; its context is 1943, a century of defeats later, and its perspective is that of wartime leaders planning a post-war order. They sound different because their contexts are different: one speaks before the century of humiliation has fully run its course, the other near its end, when China stood on the winning side.

## Q10.

Model answer. A historian saying the telling has changed a great deal would point to the three tellings in Figure 3: the story was a warning call to stir reform before 1949, a defence of the revolution between the 1950s and 1970s, and a patriotic-education narrative from the 1990s — different tellers, different purposes, different endings stressed. A historian saying it has stayed the same story would point to the continuities: in every telling the foreign powers are the aggressors, China is the wronged party, and the lesson is that weakness invites harm. Weighed judgement: the events selected and the moral shape of the story have continued, while the tellers, the purposes and the ending have changed — so both historians are right about half the picture, and the full answer holds change and continuity together.

## Q11.

Model answer. Using the criterion “how long the consequences lasted”, I agree: the loss of 1895 did not end in 1895 — it set up fifty years of Japanese rule, made the island the subject of wartime promises in 1943, and sits at the centre of a debate about ownership that is still unresolved today, which no other single loss of the period can match. A student disagreeing could score full marks on a different criterion — for example “scale of harm at the time”, which might elevate the invasion of 1937, or “number of people affected”, which might elevate the treaties opening China's ports — but on the stated criterion, 1895 is the strongest choice. Marking rewards the named criterion and the defended reasoning, not the choice itself.

## Q12.

Model answer. Position 1, in its strongest form: Taiwan belonged to China from 1683 to 1895; its loss was wartime theft; the Cairo Declaration (1943) and the hand-back (1945) righted the wrong; UN Resolution 2758 (1971) gave China's seat to the People's Republic; and most countries accept the People's Republic as China's government. Position 2, in its strongest form: the People's Republic has never governed the island; since 1949 it has had its own government, army, money and travel documents; since the 1990s its leaders have been chosen in free elections; and the UN Charter speaks of peoples choosing their own government. Weighing: Position 1 is better supported by the longer run of evidence about the right to rule the island, while Position 2 is better supported by the evidence about how the island has actually been governed and chosen its leaders since 1949. The fairest conclusion is that the two positions answer different questions — one about the past right to rule, the other about the present facts of government — and that is why the debate endures. Marks go to the fairness of the setup and the quality of the weighing.

## Key terms

| Term                   | Meaning used in this section                                                                                                      |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fact                   | A statement about the past that the evidence settles                                                                              |
| Interpretation         | A historian's reasoned account of the past, built from evidence                                                                   |
| Perspective            | The point of view of a person or group inside the past                                                                            |
| Debate                 | A disagreement between interpretations, carried on with evidence and reasons                                                      |
| Century of humiliation | The period, usually dated 1839–1945 or 1839–1949, of China's defeats, forced treaties and invasions — and the story told about it |
| Unequal treaties       | The name given to the treaties China signed after losing wars; the name itself carries a judgement                                |

| Term                          | Meaning used in this section                                                                        |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ownership (the right to rule) | The right to rule a territory and speak for it                                                      |
| Self-determination            | The principle, in the UN Charter (1945), that peoples have the right to choose their own government |
| Status quo                    | The present state of affairs; in this section, leaving the ownership question open                  |
| Primary source                | Evidence from the time studied (a letter, treaty, law, speech)                                      |
| Secondary source              | An account made later by someone studying the past, such as a historian's book                      |