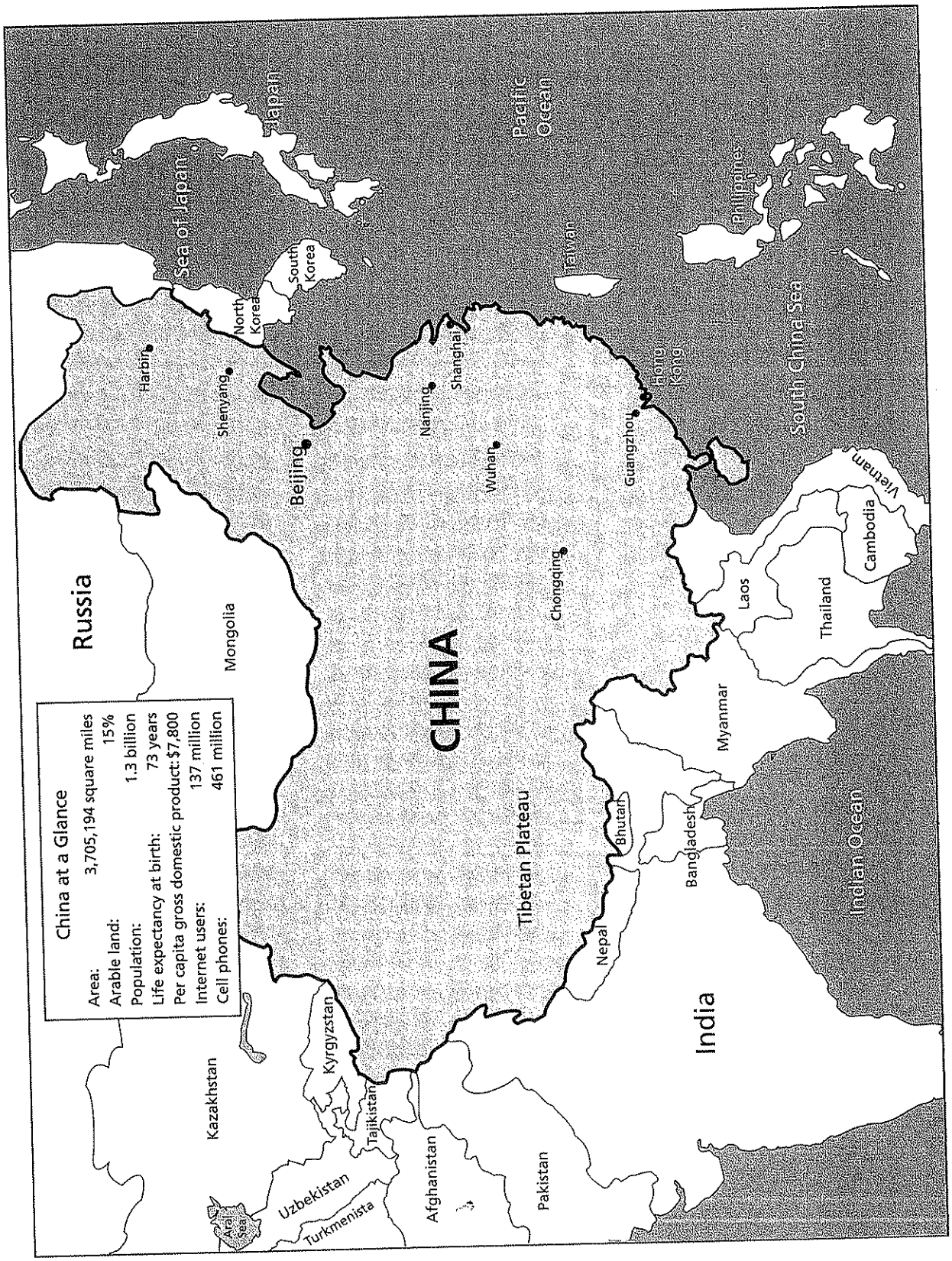
# Contemporary China



# Introduction: China in the Twenty-First Century

In the late 1970s, China emerged from three decades of economic isolation imposed by Mao Zedong, the leader of China's communist revolution. Mao's policies had produced a society which valued equality and uniformity. China was able to feed and clothe its population, the largest in the world, but there were few opportunities for individual advancement.

At the time of Mao's death in 1976, Li Xiaohua was a peasant working on a state-run wheat farm in northern China. Like millions of his countrymen, Li closely followed the struggle for power among China's political elite that followed Mao's death. He was pleased when Deng Xiaoping emerged at the head of China's Communist Party, and he supported Deng's program of economic reform.

Today, Li is one symbol of China's transformation. He has become a multi-millionaire businessman, and drives around Beijing, China's capital, in a red Ferrari. He was the first person in China to own one. Under Mao, private cars were unheard of. As late as 1981, only twenty people in Beijing owned their own vehicles. The China that Deng and Li helped to create now has annual vehicle sales that approach four million.

But there are difficulties with China's growth too. Zhang Feifei used to work in a low-skilled job at a factory in a large town. She lost her job in 2006, and discovered she could not get another one without paying a bribe she could not afford. She was forced to turn to prostitution to survive.

Today's China offers some citizens opportunities for huge financial success, but many others are struggling. Although wealth is not distributed equally among China's 1.3 billion people, the pace of economic reform has turned China into an economic giant. China's economy has surpassed even Japan's, placing it second in the world. (The U.S. economy is the largest.) Since the late 1970s, China's economic growth has averaged between 8 and 9 percent annually, growing even more rapidly in 2006 and 2007. No major country in modern times has grown so fast for such a long period. This speedy growth has brought many out of poverty but threatens to increase inflation, government debt, and environmental destruction.

China's transformation is changing international relations almost as fast as it is changing the lives of the Chinese people. For much of human history, China was the richest, most powerful country in the world. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, foreign countries dominated China. Today, China is again reasserting its influence in world affairs. Just as the 1900s have been referred to as the "American century," the year 2001 may have marked the beginning of the "Chinese century."

The implications for the United States are enormous. China has become the United States's second-largest trading partner. At the same time, disputes over China's failure to accept some international trade standards and the country's poor human rights record have frequently threatened to turn into a trade war.

China's place on the world stage is perhaps of even greater significance for the future. China has built up the world's largest army in terms of manpower while holding down spending on high-tech equipment. Moreover, China has pressed ahead with plans to modernize its nuclear arsenal. U.S. officials fear that the coming generation of Chinese leaders may seek to flex China's military muscle in East Asia and beyond.

In the coming days, you will have an opportunity to reflect on the U.S. relationship with China, confronting the same questions U.S. policymakers consider. The optional reading reviews the early history of U.S. interactions with China. Part I explores the economic, social, and political transformation of China since the late 1970s. Part II introduces you to the issues that shape U.S. policy toward China today. Finally, you will have the opportunity to consider four options for the future of U.S.-Chinese relations.

# Optional Reading: The History of U.S.-China Relations

Historically, the Chinese have called their country the "Middle Kingdom" and have considered themselves at the center of civilization. Until the 1800s, their view of China's five thousand-year history was largely justified. Chinese culture was unmatched in its continuity and sophistication. The Chinese system of government was remarkable for its ability to maintain order, manage an efficient bureaucracy, and build roads, bridges, and canals over a vast empire.

At the time Europeans were exploring the Americas, China seemed poised to move on to still greater accomplishments. The Chinese were responsible for many of the most important inventions of the modern age—the compass, printing press, and gunpowder among them. Chinese ships in the late fifteenth century were superior to those produced in Europe, and Chinese sea captains expanded trade ties throughout Asia. China's unified empire stood in sharp contrast to the quarreling kingdoms of Europe.

## A Meeting of Opposites

As Europeans turned outward to conquer new territories and probe the frontiers of science, the Chinese turned inward. China remained a country of rich traditions and wealth, but the Chinese cut themselves off from the advances occurring in Western Europe.

***Why did Europeans begin selling opium to China?***

Led by the British and the French, European merchants began visiting China regularly in the 1700s. Chinese officials initially paid little attention to the traders. They viewed all outsiders as uncivilized barbarians and assumed that there was nothing the Chinese could learn from them.

> ***"The kings of the myriad nations come by land and sea with all sorts of precious things. Consequently, there is nothing we lack."***
> —Emperor Qianlong, ruled from 1735-1796

Europe and the American colonies prized Chinese goods—silk, porcelain, furniture, artwork, and especially tea. The tea that American patriots dumped into the sea at the Boston Tea Party in 1773 was, in fact, from China. While the West (Europe and the United States) increased its demand for Chinese tea, China did not want most of what the Europeans had to offer in trade. Europeans spent their reserves of silver to pay for Chinese products and needed something to sell to the Chinese. In the early 1800s, they increasingly turned to


Reprinted from *Barbarians and Mandarins.*

Foreign officials paying tribute to the Chinese emperor.

opium, an addictive drug produced in British colonies on the Indian subcontinent.

***How did the Opium Wars change China's relations with the West?***

Opium brought enormous profits to the European traders. By the end of the 1830s, millions of Chinese were addicted and China had a trade deficit with the West. Chinese authorities tried to stop the opium trade by force and rejected British appeals for negotiations. In response, British merchants called on their government to support them militarily.

The Opium War of 1839-42 shattered the illusion of Chinese superiority. British warships leveled Chinese coastal defenses and destroyed the Chinese southern fleet. British troops occupied several major trading cities, including Shanghai. The Chinese emperor had no choice but to open negotiations with the British.

Britain's victory turned the tables on China's relationship with the West. Under the Treaty of Nanjing (or Nanking), signed in 1842, and another treaty the following year, the British imposed a new set of rules for international commerce. The treaties forced China to lower its tariffs (taxes on imported goods) to 5 percent, so that European goods would be cheaper for Chinese to buy. (U.S. tariffs were around 30 percent at the time.) It also forced China to open five additional ports to foreign trade and hand over the island of Hong Kong to Britain. Additionally, Westerners accused of crimes in China were to be tried according to Western laws by officials from their home countries.

> ***"The empire of China is an old, crazy first rate man-of-war [warship].... She may, perhaps, not sink outright. She may drift some time as a wreck, and will then be dashed to pieces on the shore. But she can never be rebuilt on the old bottom."***
>
> —Lord Macartney, British envoy to China from 1793-1794

Like merchants of other countries, U.S. traders also benefited from the Treaty of Nanjing. A treaty between the United States and China in 1844 closely followed the terms laid down by the British. Other Western nations were quick to insist on the same conditions.

***How was China further weakened in the nineteenth century?***

Many members of the ruling Manchu dynasty (1644-1911) viewed China's defeat in the Opium War as an accident. They failed to understand that their empire was in desperate need of change. Much of the strain was due to the rapid population growth of the 1700s, a century of stability and prosperity in China. As China's population approached 300 million in the early 1800s, millions of peasants were forced to leave the countryside in search of work and food. Local officials were often unable to maintain order.

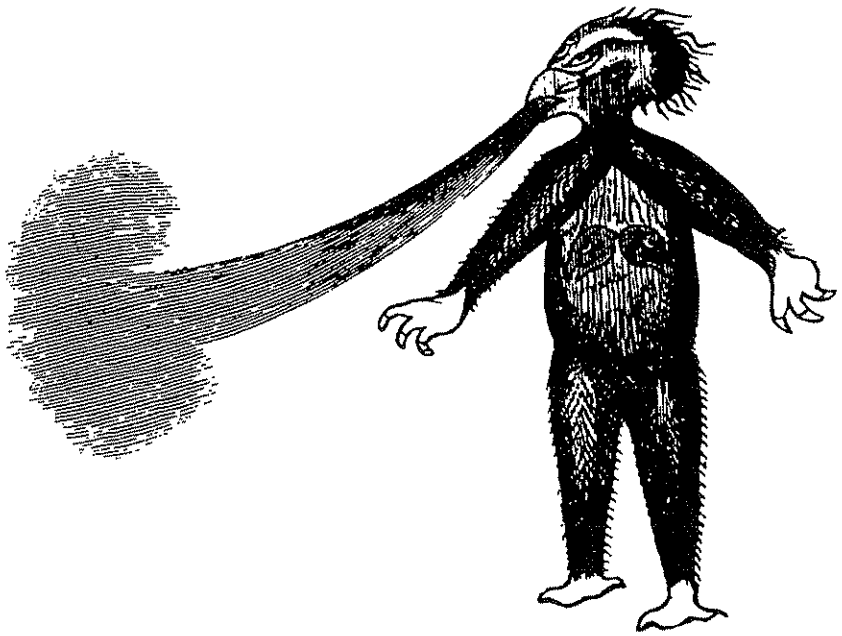
Frequent rebellions shook China in the nineteenth century. Most significant was the Taiping Rebellion, which raged from 1850 to 1864 and claimed at least twenty million lives. The leader of the Taiping (or "Heavenly Kingdom") movement was Hong Xiuquan. Protestant missionaries in China had influenced Hong, who believed that he was the brother of Jesus Christ. By 1853, Hong had organized an army of more than one million soldiers and established his rule over six of China's richest provinces. The rebels sought to establish their own society and government based on their version of Christianity.

As the Taiping Rebellion continued, the Manchu dynasty entered a new round of fighting with the West. In 1856, Chinese forts along the Pearl River in southern China fired on U.S. ships without warning. U.S. naval forces responded by bombarding the Chinese defenses. A larger conflict, often known as the second Opium War, erupted in 1857 when the Chinese refused to consider revising the Treaty of Nanjing and its other agreements with Western countries.

The Westerners insisted that international law was on their side. According to

the U.S.-China treaty of 1844, the agreement was to be reviewed after twelve years. Meanwhile, the British, French, and Russians asserted that they were entitled to the same privileges granted the Americans. Led by the British, the four Western nations backed their claims with military might.

The results of the war left a deeper scar on the Chinese people than had the first Opium War. Although the Chinese put up a determined resistance, the Western forces fought their way to Beijing, burned and looted the Summer Palace, where the emperor lived, and forced the emperor to flee. The British captured Ye Mingchen, the emperor's adviser on foreign affairs, and exiled him to India.



Reprinted from *Barbarians and Mandarins.*

Drawing of a "foreign devil" by a Chinese artist in 1839.

> ***"The barbarians [Westerners] are superior in three ways: firstly, warships; secondly, firearms; and thirdly, methods of military training and discipline of soldiers."***
>
> —Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu, served from 1785-1850

The conditions the West imposed after the second Opium War broadened the advantages gained in the Treaty of Nanjing. The opium trade was legalized. Westerners were permitted to travel into China's interior and take up residence in Beijing. In addition, Christian missionaries and their converts were to be officially tolerated. Once the Chinese agreed to the new concessions, the West helped the Manchu dynasty extinguish the fading Taiping Rebellion.

## The Expanding Role of the United States

The forces of modernization and industrialization led the United States and China in opposite directions in the nineteenth century. As China fell further behind the West, the United States rose to the status of a world power. In the decades after the U.S. Civil War, U.S. industry grew at a breakneck speed. By the turn of the century, the United States had surpassed Britain as the world's leading economic producer.

With economic progress the United States took a larger role overseas. The U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898 left the United States in control of the Philippines and the island of Guam. The U.S. foothold in East Asia focused new attention on the U.S. position in China.

***What did China's war with Japan demonstrate?***

At the same time, the Western powers' cooperation with each other on issues relating to China was breaking down. In the last years of the nineteenth century, Japan, Britain, France, Russia, and Germany scrambled for territorial

concessions (Chinese land that the imperialist powers hoped to control) and economic advantages in China. Each country sought to carve out a "sphere of influence" which it could control in order to regulate Chinese commerce. Although the United States wanted to make sure that it would not be shut out of trade with China, it was unwilling to commit troops and warships to join in the competition.

Japan's challenge to Britain's leadership role in China was especially critical. Like China, Japan did not previously welcome contact with the West. Four U.S. battleships under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry had forced the Japanese to open their country to foreign trade in 1853. After Perry's visit, Japan's leaders had launched their country on a crash course to catch up with the West.

The Japanese demonstrated their success in adapting Western industrial and military technology at the expense of the Chinese. In 1894, a war broke out between the two countries over their competing claims to territory on the Korean peninsula. Within six months, the Japanese had smashed China's fleet and defeated the Chinese army.

Reprinted from *Barbarians and Mandarins.*

Portrait of a participant in the Boxer Rebellion.

> ***"If we continue to drift with an army untrained, our revenues disorganized, our scholars ignorant, and our artisans without technical training, how can we possibly hope to hold our own among the nations?"***
>
> —Emperor Guangxu, ruled from 1875-1908

### *How did the Open Door policy shape U.S. relations with China?*

Elsewhere in Asia and throughout Africa, Britain, France, and other imperialist powers had already staked out vast colonial empires. U.S. policymakers hoped to devise a strategy that would prevent a similar land grab in China. Among U.S. officials, Japan's recent military success also stirred anxiety. In 1899, U.S. Secretary of State John Hay sent a note to the foreign powers in China requesting that they maintain an "open door" in their spheres of influence. The Open Door policy held that all countries doing business in China should compete on equal terms. (At the time, American commerce with China amounted to about 1 percent of total U.S. trade.) Although no treaties were actually signed, the United States upheld the Open Door as the foundation of U.S. policy toward China for the next half century.

The Open Door policy signaled that the United States was prepared to become more involved in China. In 1900, several thousand U.S. soldiers joined the other imperialist powers in putting down the Boxer Rebellion in Beijing. The Boxers were drawn from secret societies of martial arts experts who believed they were invulnerable to firearms. In an effort to expel outsiders from China, they had laid siege to the area in Beijing that was set aside for foreign diplomats. They were armed and supported by China's empress dowager (the emperor's mother), Cixi.

Once the rebellion had been crushed, the foreign powers demanded that the Chi-

nese government pay $300 million for the damage caused by the Boxers. The United States participated in the negotiations, but U.S. leaders were wary of the ambitions of the other powers. The United States presented itself as defender of China's independence and warned that the powers should not use the Boxer Rebellion as an excuse to acquire more territory in China. U.S. officials invested most of the $25 million they received as compensation for the rebellion in the Chinese educational system.

**Percentage of World Manufacturing Output**

| | 1750 | 1800 | 1830 | 1860 | 1880 | 1900 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| China | 33% | 33% | 30% | 20% | 13% | 6% |
| Britain | 2% | 4% | 10% | 20% | 23% | 19% |
| U.S. | 0.10% | 1% | 2% | 7% | 15% | 24% |
| France | 4% | 4% | 5% | 8% | 8% | 7% |
| Russia | 5% | 6% | 6% | 7% | 8% | 9% |
| Japan | 4% | 4% | 3% | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| Germany | 3% | 4% | 4% | 5% | 9% | 13% |

Data from *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers.*

***Why did nationalism in China strain relations with the United States?***

The United States was a source of both inspiration and resentment for a new generation of Chinese intellectuals who shaped the nationalist movement of the early 1900s. Chinese intellectuals admired the U.S. ideals of democracy and equal opportunity. When the Manchu dynasty undertook educational, governmental, and military reforms after the Boxer Rebellion, the institutions of the United States served as a model. At the same time, Chinese nationalists, who opposed the Manchu dynasty, recognized that many U.S. officials viewed them as backward and inferior. Moreover, they saw the bad treatment of Chinese immigrants in the United States as a reflection of U.S. attitudes.

In the mid-1800s, the United States had encouraged Chinese laborers to come to the United States to help build the railroads and work the mines of the American West. By 1868, there were more than one hundred thousand Chinese immigrants in the United States, most of them young men intending to return to China. In Western frontier towns, the Chinese were often the targets of violent attacks. Twenty-eight Chinese miners were massacred in Wyoming in 1885. The Chinese presence also sparked the first significant U.S. legislation to restrict immigration—the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In 1904, Congress banned Chinese immigration to the United States altogether. Chinese nationalists responded by boycotting American products in China.

***How did nationalism lead to civil war in China?***

Although the boycott fizzled, Chinese nationalism gained a sharper focus in the early 1900s. The chief aim of the nationalists was to reassert Chinese authority over their country and overturn the "unequal treaties" with Western nations and companies that had begun with the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing. Nationalists viewed the Manchu rulers, descendents of a conquering tribe from the northeast of Manchuria, as outsiders. They also blamed the Manchus for allowing China to fall under the domination of the West and Japan.

Chinese nationalism helped spark a series of revolts that toppled the Manchu dynasty in 1911. However, the nationalists lacked the strength to carry out their plans to form a constitutional republic. Instead, power revolved around military strongman Yuan Shikai and his officers. Yuan attempted to create a new dynasty with himself as emperor, but both the nationalists and many of his generals opposed him. By the time of his death in 1916, China was sinking into the chaos of civil war.

### *Why did Chinese nationalists feel betrayed by President Wilson?*

China's weakness left it vulnerable to Japanese expansion during World War I (1914-18). In 1915, Japan took over the German sphere of influence in the Chinese province of Shantung and demanded new concessions from China.

Many Chinese nationalists looked with hope to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, who offered a vision for a new international system to end the war. Wilson championed the principle of self-determination—the right of nations to govern themselves—and argued that justice and fair play should guide international relations. Wilson also proposed creating a new international organization, the League of Nations, to prevent future wars.

At the peace conference convened at the end of World War I, Wilson faced opposition. When he called for Japan to withdraw from Shantung, Japanese leaders threatened to walk out of the conference. The president feared that support for the League of Nations would be undermined if they left, so he gave in to the Japanese.

In China, many of the nationalists who had admired Wilson for his advocacy of self-determination were outraged. On May 4, 1919, hundreds of thousands of Chinese students demonstrated in China's major cities to protest the decision of the peace conference. What came to be known as the May 4th Movement prompted a boycott of Japanese goods and deepened Chinese anger toward foreign domination. The growing appeal of Chinese nationalism also helped fuel support for two political parties—the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communists—parties that would shape Chinese politics in the coming decades.

### *How did the Kuomintang become the ruling party in China?*

The Kuomintang (or Nationalist Party) was founded by Sun Yat-sen in 1912 and won the largest number of seats in the election for parliament in 1912-13. But it was difficult for the party to consolidate power because of the many different political and military groups in China at the time. Until his death in 1925, Sun and the Kuomintang were caught up in a multi-sided struggle for control of China.

The Chinese Communist Party got its start in 1921 under the leadership of Mao Zedong. While the Kuomintang drew support largely from educated city dwellers, the communists sought to create a popular base among the peasants. From the outset, the communists looked to the newly formed Soviet Union for assistance.

Sun's death in 1925 brought a new leader and a new strategy to the Kuomintang. Chiang Kai-shek, a military commander, built an army capable of unifying China. Over the next three years, he defeated warlords who challenged him, turned against the communists, and forced the Soviets, who had taken over some areas of China, out of the territory under his control. By 1928, Chiang was strong enough to declare himself the ruler of China.

### *Why did the United States not respond to Japanese aggression in China?*

The United States recognized Chiang's government and granted China the authority to determine its import tariffs. This action reversed a key provision of the "unequal treaties" from the nineteenth century.

By the late 1920s, U.S. influence in China had grown. U.S. companies played a leading role in developing China's transportation and communications systems. Protestant missionaries operated a network of colleges that served to transmit American values to China's elite.

But the bonds between the United States and China were not strong enough to withstand the general trend of U.S. foreign policy after World War I. In 1920, the Senate rejected U.S. participation in the League of Nations. For the next two decades, the United States tried to avoid becoming involved in another international conflict like World War I, which much of the American public saw as a failure.

When Japan attacked China in 1931, the world was not prepared to stand up to the aggression. Japan's leaders considered the coal and iron ore reserves of Manchuria vital

to their country's industrialized economy. By 1932, the Japanese had set up a puppet government in Manchuria, renaming the region "Manchukuo."

U.S. diplomatic efforts to stop the Japanese attack failed. Although President Herbert Hoover sent a few U.S. warships and troops to China in 1932, the United States was unable to oppose Japan with a significant military force.

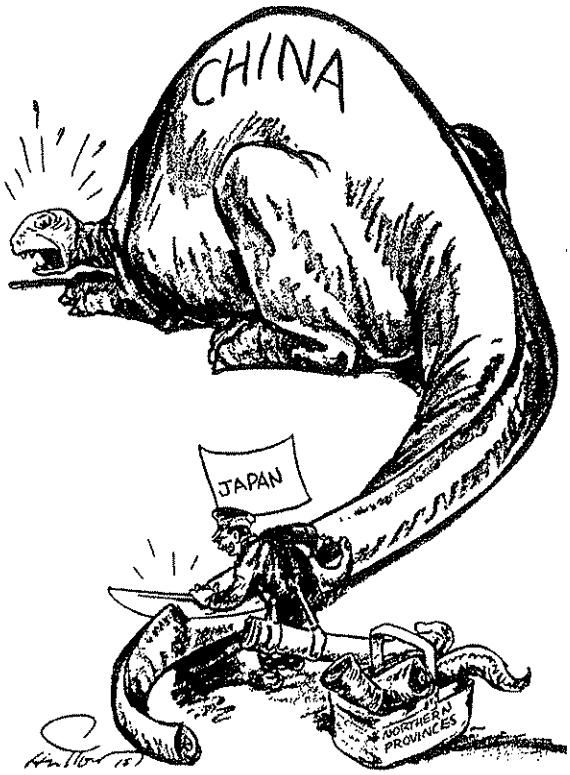
> ***"If she [China] lacks the strength to protect herself from aggression and exploitation, she cannot reasonably expect the other nations to do the job for her."***
>
> —Thomas Lamont (1870-1948), Wall Street banker

Other world leaders expressed their outrage while also avoiding conflict. The League of Nations turned away from this crucial challenge. U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, facing the Great Depression, was even less inclined to defend China than Hoover.

***How did Japan's aggression affect U.S. policy in China?***

In 1937, Japan plunged deeper into China's heartland. By the end of the year, Japanese forces had taken Nanjing (also called "Nanking"), the capital of Chiang Kai-shek's government. As hundreds of foreign residents watched, the Japanese unleashed a campaign of murder, rape, and looting against the civilian population. More than two hundred thousand Chinese were massacred and much of the city was burned to the ground.

The massacre at Nanking (re-labeled four years later as the "Rape of Nanking"), turned the U.S. public against Japan, but U.S. policy hardly budged. Part of the reason was that U.S. officials in China were reporting that Chiang's army devoted more of its energy to fighting Mao Zedong's communists than to fighting the Japanese. A few were even convinced that China would be better off under Japanese control.




Hugh Hutton in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

> ***"The Japanese imperialists attack us and even plan for our extinction. Owing to the existence of the communist bandits, we cannot offer unified, effective resistance to the aggressor."***
>
> —Chiang Kai-shek

Over the next few years, the Japanese tightened their hold over much of coastal China. Japan's foreign policy ultimately changed the attitude of U.S. leaders. In September 1940, the Japanese formed an alliance with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. The United States responded by offering aid to the Chinese and restricting exports to Japan. Japan's surprise attack against the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, brought the United States into World War II.

***Why was China a low priority for the United States in World War II?***

World War II created new links between the United States and Chiang Kai-shek's government. American military advisers and

equipment strengthened the resistance of the Chinese army. As a sign of solidarity, the United States abandoned the remaining parts of the "unequal treaties" that were still in effect and lifted the ban against Chinese immigrants to the United States.

The China front, however, remained an area of low priority for U.S. military planners. The United States focused instead on defeating the Nazis in Europe and then smashing Japan's island empire in the Pacific. The large-scale commitment of American troops that Chiang lobbied for never arrived. Indeed, the Japanese army at the end of World War II was still firmly entrenched in China.

## China After World War II

Among the chief goals of U.S. officials in China during World War II was to prevent a civil war between Chiang's Kuomintang forces and the communists. Many Americans were disgusted by the corruption and indifference of Kuomintang bureaucrats, and praised the communists for putting up a more effective battle against Japan. Nonetheless, the United States made sure that Chiang's government was given a prominent place in the postwar international system. In addition to the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France, China gained a seat on the Security Council at the founding meeting of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. As one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, China gained the right to veto any Security Council decision.

### *How did communists come to power in China?*

U.S. leaders also hoped to arrange a political compromise between the communists and the Kuomintang. Negotiations soon broke down, and Mao Zedong denounced the United States for aiding Chiang's government. In 1946, the long-simmering civil war between the Kuomintang and the communists began in earnest. The communists gained the upper hand. In 1948, Mao's forces swept south from their strongholds in northern China. Thousands of Kuomintang troops defected or deserted, leaving behind most of their U.S.-supplied equipment.

In early 1949, Chiang began to transfer the government's gold reserves to the island of Formosa (present-day Taiwan). What remained of his army was in retreat in the months that followed. On October 1, Mao proclaimed the People's Republic of China on the mainland, and Chiang left for Formosa.

### *How did the Cold War affect U.S.-Chinese relations?*

U.S. foreign policy underwent a dramatic shift after World War II. The United States emerged from the war as the world's foremost military and economic power. At the same time, the war had strengthened the position of the Soviet Union. In the late 1940s, the U.S.-Soviet wartime alliance gave way to hostility between the two superpowers. U.S. policymakers increasingly viewed Soviet communism as a global menace, especially after the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb in September 1949.

In response to the Soviet threat, American leaders redefined the U.S. role in the world. Most Americans came to agree that the country would need to make a determined effort to contain the expansion of Soviet communism.

George Kennan, an American diplomat who conceived the "containment" strategy of limiting the spread of Soviet influence, was not particularly alarmed by the communist takeover in China. He focused U.S. policy largely on Europe. According to Kennan, China was decades away from developing the industrial strength needed to mount a military challenge to the United States. In addition, most U.S. officials were convinced that a long history of conflicting interests would prevent the Soviet Union and Chinese communists from reaching an effective alliance.

As Mao's forces overran southern China in 1949, the U.S. administration of Harry Truman decided that further aid to Chiang Kai-shek was useless. Truman expected the communists would soon gain control over Formosa as well. U.S. leaders were more concerned with

preventing Mao and the Soviet Union from forming an alliance.

***How did the Korean War create more distrust between the United States and China?***

Communist North Korea's invasion of South Korea in June 1950 changed U.S. policy in East Asia overnight. Concerned about communist expansion, President Truman sent U.S. warships to defend Formosa. The United States led a dozen other nations under the authority of the United Nations (UN) in an international effort to stop the North Koreans.

By September 1950, UN forces under U.S. General Douglas MacArthur pushed the North Korean army back to the original border along the 38th parallel. MacArthur wanted to defeat the communist regime in North Korea. As his troops advanced beyond the 38th parallel, however, the communist Chinese army launched a massive counter-attack. China supported North Korea's efforts in order to counter U.S. involvement in East Asia.

Although the Chinese military was no match for the United States technologically, the Chinese had the advantage of numbers. Poorly armed Chinese soldiers threw themselves at U.S. positions in human-wave assaults. Roughly 250,000 Chinese and 54,000 American soldiers died in the war. UN forces retreated deep into South Korea.

MacArthur favored attacking China itself, even using nuclear weapons, to turn the tide of the war. Truman, however, feared that MacArthur's recommendations would trigger World War III, and he replaced his top general. UN forces slowly retook South Korea in the first half of 1951. Inconclusive fighting continued along the 38th parallel for another two years before a truce was reached in 1953.

***Why did China and the United States view each other as enemies in the 1950s and 1960s?***

In the United States, attitudes toward China crystallized well before the cease-fire. Americans saw China as a tool of the Soviet campaign to spread communism worldwide. U.S. diplomatic recognition of China was now out of the question. Moreover, the United States viewed the Kuomintang government on Taiwan as a critical ally against communism.

Mao contributed to the antagonism in U.S.-China relations. In the early 1950s, he drove out American missionaries, foundations, and colleges still operating in China. Russian replaced English as the foreign language promoted by the government. Americans were also appalled by Chinese attempts to brainwash U.S. prisoners of war captured in Korea.

***"Power grows out of the barrel of a gun."***

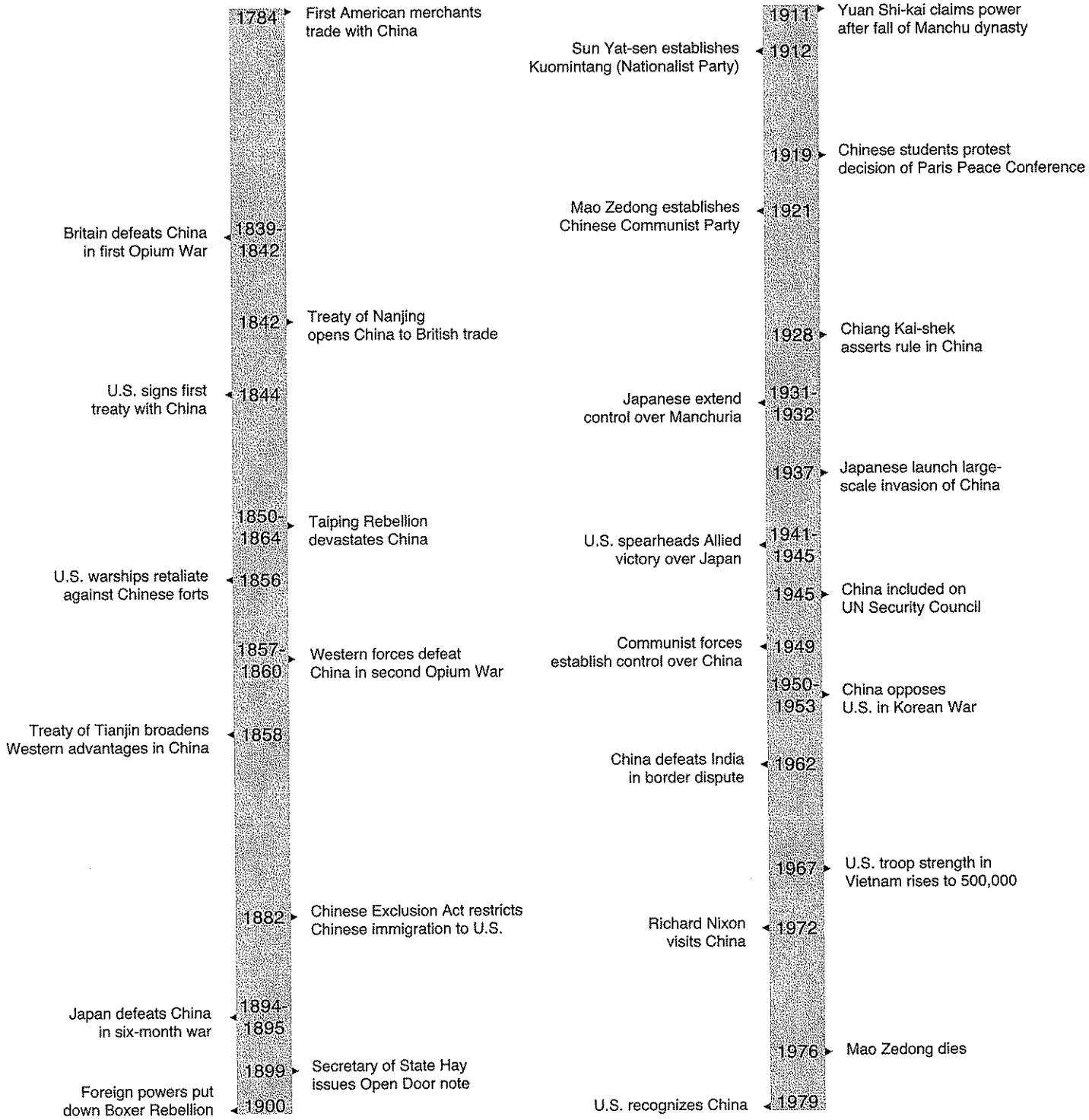
—Mao Zedong, 1938

During the 1950s, U.S. policy in East Asia concentrated on "containing" China. The United States signed defense treaties with most of China's neighbors and stationed thousands of soldiers in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. In 1954 and 1958, the United States pledged to use force to counter Chinese threats to invade two small islands claimed by Taiwan. U.S. hostility angered China and continued even after the Chinese-Soviet alliance unraveled in the early 1960s.

For many Americans, Mao's combative stance made China an even greater foreign policy concern than the Soviet Union. In 1962, the Chinese army quickly defeated India and occupied territory that had been in dispute along the border of the two countries. Two years later, China exploded its first atomic bomb. U.S. leaders explained America's growing involvement in the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s largely in terms of the threat posed by China.

As U.S. troop strength in Vietnam rose to five hundred thousand in 1967, Mao was leading his people down a still more radical path. Mao's Cultural Revolution, which took place from 1966 to 1969, was designed to overturn the traditional order of Chinese society. Mao sent millions of government officials and university professors to the countryside to work in the fields. Groups of students called

## Timeline of U.S.-China Relations From 1784-1979



Red Guards were given the authority to police the revolution by destroying anything old or representative of China before Mao. Meanwhile, Chinese and Soviet troops engaged in two serious border clashes in 1969. The Soviet army marched into northwestern China to force the Chinese to negotiate a settlement to the dispute.

Reprinted with permission from the National Archives and Records Administration.

President Nixon met with Chinese leader Mao Zedong during his 1972 visit.

### *How did U.S.-China relations improve in the 1970s and 1980s?*

Even as Mao veered toward extremism, U.S. policymakers in the late 1960s were rethinking U.S.-China relations. Ironically, the initiative came from President Richard Nixon, a political figure long known for his anti-communist stance. Nixon recognized that the United States and China shared a common mistrust of the Soviet Union. He was eager to realign the global balance of power at a time when Soviet influence seemed to be on the rise.

The first exploratory talks between the United States and China began in 1970. The following year, the United States lifted trade restrictions against China that dated from the Korean War. In the UN, the United States allowed a resolution that reassigned Taiwan's seats on the Security Council and in the General Assembly to China.

In 1972, Nixon visited Beijing. The president met with Mao, swapped toasts with top Chinese officials, and watched a ballet performance of *The Red Detachment of Women*. Nixon had achieved an important breakthrough in U.S. foreign policy.

For the next few years, political crises in both the United States and China prevented the relationship from developing. The Watergate scandal forced Nixon's resignation in 1974, while in China the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 set off a struggle for power.

The emergence of Deng Xiaoping as China's next leader signaled that further progress was possible. Deng was known as a moderate who sought to open China to the outside world. In January 1979, he visited the United States, touring factories and even wearing a cowboy hat at a Texas rodeo. Behind the scenes, he assured U.S. officials that China would not use force against Taiwan. The United States responded in March 1979 by officially recognizing China—and by withdrawing recognition from Taiwan.

At the same time, Congress was concerned about the future of U.S.-Taiwan relations and passed the Taiwan Relations Act which guaranteed continued trade and cultural relations with the island and provided American assurances for its security. The future of Taiwan remained a sticking point in U.S.-China relations during much of the 1980s and does so to this day. At the same time, expanding trade and investment, as well as a surge in student, scientific, and cultural exchanges, were fast creating important links between the two countries. China was not a U.S. ally, but a new era in U.S.-China relations was clearly underway.