

CHINESE GOVERNMENT

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ANCIENT PERIOD

Classical China

Overview China and the imperial state emerged in several stages beginning as early as the 12th century BCE. Ultimately, by the end of the classical period, the Chinese had constructed a large territorial empire and established the tradition (not always successfully sustained) that government and Chinese territory should be one and the same. It had created a unifying political culture, in Confucianism, that particularly sustained the upper class throughout the empire – a marked contrast to the Persian Empire in this regard. And it had created a variety of government functions including, but surpassing, the basic trinity of military, law and judicial structure, and public works.

Early dynasties Regional kingdoms began to form in northern China from about 1766 BCE onward (though earlier dynasties may have preceded.) This was associated with the earliest evidence of writing in the region. Aside from this early origin, it is not clear that there was anything particularly noteworthy about the government involved: the main point was the establishment of a tradition of an imperial state that could survive any particular dynasty – a point frequently emphasized by later historians. This idea of imperial continuity was enhanced when the Zhou dynasty unseated the Shang in 1122. To justify their usurpation, the Zhou developed the idea that the emperor had a divine mandate – was in fact the Son of Heaven. The concept would be used to emphasize the god-like power of the emperor, but it also had a distinctive twist compared to other assertions of divine sponsorship. The Chinese Son of Heaven concept embraced the notion that the gods supported a particular dynasty only when it responsibly served society. The mandate could be withdrawn if this responsibility was not served – but then it would apply to an appropriate replacement. In fact, the Zhou government was not particularly powerful, frequently distracted by regional wars and checked by the powers of the landed aristocracy. But the claim of a special mission for the imperial government could be embellished in the future. (The idea would also be taken over in Japan and Vietnam, but with less nuance, more simple assertion of god-like status.)

Political culture Under the Zhou, three major schools of thought developed. Daoism was a religion that emphasized spirituality and balance in life; it was not usually overtly political, and could in fact combine with philosophies that paid more attention to the state – though there were some episodes of Daoist rebellion. The great innovation was Confucianism, which emphasized the goal of stability and prosperity in this world. In Confucian doctrine, the state assumed central importance as the anchor of an ordered society, with appropriate deference due to the emperor. An upper class should be ready to serve the state, expecting obedience from the mass of the population in return for which it would rule wisely, in the general interest. The family, a microcosm of the wider society, would serve as a training ground in hierarchy, deference and responsibility. Finally, at odds with Confucianism, the Legalists placed greater emphasis on raw state power, essential to keep people in line. While Legalism ultimately lost out to Confucianism in terms of government support, the two systems might combine to shape policy in practice. The main point was the strong emphasis, in Chinese culture, on the centrality of government and a value system that would support it, as well as helping to shape a social structure strongly oriented toward public service (for the upper class) and obedience. The political-cultural combination provided distinctive service to the Chinese government in the classical period and well beyond.

Territorial expansion The Qin dynasty forcibly unseated the increasingly enfeebled Zhou regime in 221. Its principal emperor, Qin Shi Huang, introduced a number of new features to Chinese government. Supporting Legalism, he actually attacked Confucian ideas as too soft. More to the point, he advocated a forceful central government that would effectively end the disorder of the later Zhou, backed by a strong military. He vigorously expanded government functions, undercutting the aristocracy and administering the peasantry more directly. Public works blossomed, including a major road system and the beginnings of massive, earthen defensive wall. Reforms of the writing system, currency and weights and measures were designed to stimulate the economy. Above all, the Qin greatly expanded imperial territory, conquering other regional kingdoms and extending government control to the south – even for a time into what is now Vietnam. From this point onward the Chinese government would typically claim control over the entire Middle Kingdom (and sometimes beyond), creating a massive territorial base.

The Han The ruthlessness, and heavy taxation, involved in Qin initiatives provoked considerable backlash, as the Qin gave way to the Han dynasty at the end of the third century, opening approximately 400 years of successful rule – including maintenance and consolidation of the expansive imperial territory. Han success would further consolidate the tradition of strong government in China, while removing some of the rough edges that the Qin had introduced. Several major features are worth noting.

Confucianism and cultural support Han emperors actively supported Confucian scholars (after briefly flirting with Legalism), and sponsored school programs (mainly for the upper class) that instilled Confucian values. This emphasis was extended to the newer southern territories, helping to build an upper class imbued with some common principles that were, in turn, aimed at supporting a stable and responsible government. While the Han did not seek full linguistic unity, it did promote Mandarin for the upper class throughout the empire. And the government helped relocate some northern Chinese to the south, with a similar goal of encouraging imperial integration (this is a policy still pursued in China, as with the relocation of Han Chinese to the northwest).

Functions The Han maintained the wide government functions already initiated by its predecessors – creating the most active state in the classical world. Standardized coinage helped promote commerce. Elaborate public works now included the construction of a massive north-south canal that helped coordinate the economies of two rather different agricultural regions. The government subsidized practical scientific research (including work in astrology). It organized granaries to protect cities against famines. A major law code was combined with an extensive court system, actively aimed against a variety of crimes – including some against women; and the effort was bolstered by a formal police force (possibly the oldest in the world).

Structure and foreign policy At the outset, the Han took over an organizational structure involving a number of regional kingdoms, but these gradually lost independence in favor of the activities of a centralized bureaucracy. Given the size of the empire – it took 30 days to reach the outlying areas from the capital – it would be misleading to suggest detailed integration, but the effort was extensive. The Han faced a variety of military challenges, but ultimately extended imperial territories. However, this was not on balance a highly militaristic regime. The Han worked to conciliate nomadic groups on its western border through gifts and marriage alliances, and (on the whole) avoided war where possible. This was in keeping with the most prominent Chinese work on warfare, Sun Tzu's *Art of War* (5th century BCE) and differed, on the whole, from the military-diplomatic policies of some other classical societies (including Persia).

Bureaucracy and training Under the Han the Chinese bureaucracy was the largest in the world, and the Chinese pioneered in both training and recruitment. The government-sponsored Imperial School, at its height, had 30,000 students, and there were feeder schools in many cities – all emphasizing training in classical literature and Confucianism. Most bureaucrats were recruited by personal connections within the landed upper class – though they were formally trained. The Han also experimented with an examination system that would produce some additional recruits. Through this, a small number of talented young men from the lower classes, whose education was often sponsored by a local magnate, could reasonably hope to enter the bureaucracy. Fueled by the nature of the Han state and the values of Confucianism, service in the educated bureaucracy became the highest social goal, easily outstripping business success and forming the fabled scholar-gentry class (or Mandarins).

Legacy The Han dynasty was toppled by invasion in 220 CE, after a period of decline. Over three centuries of invasion and civil strife ensued, before a dynasty was restored in the 6th century. But the basic features of classical Chinese government were remembered, and valued, which is why they were substantially restored and embellished when conditions permitted. The capacity for restoration was itself distinctive, testifying to the classical achievement and setting parameters for Chinese imperial government for centuries to come.

Study questions

1. What were the most distinctive features of the Chinese system of government?
2. Why was such a large bureaucracy sought and maintained?
3. How did government and empire come to be so closely intertwined in the Chinese tradition?

Further reading

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POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

Postclassical China

The postclassical period After the fall of the great empires, Han, Rome, Gupta, formation of massive empires became less common for several centuries. Partly this reflects the arrival of newer regions onto the civilization map, where there was simply neither sufficient experience nor resources to build the most ambitious political structures (sometimes, despite certain efforts). Partly it reflected the chaos that followed imperial collapse, where it proved difficult to pick up the pieces – an obvious factor in Western Europe and to an extent India. A final element, however, involved the rise and spread of missionary religions – Buddhism, Christianity and Islam – that might take attention and leadership away from the secular realm and divert resources as well. How governments interacted with religion, particularly religions they could not fully control, became a more important factor in the patterns of government more generally than had been the case in the classical period. In many societies, for example, education became even more decisively a religious preserve, and while this could still generate suitable government officials there was potential competition for attention.

Postclassical China: overview China was in most respects a political outlier, re-forming a powerful empire and refining its institutions still further. After several centuries of disruption, core features of the Han dynasty were restored (though under new dynasties) and then elaborated. The challenge of religion was, ultimately, addressed head-on, with renewed Confucianism the clear beneficiary. China also benefited from rising trade (carried mostly by Arab and other merchants) and manufacturing, generating new wealth, larger cities, and more substantial tax resources. China in the period featured two major dynasties, the Tang and Song, followed by a brief and (to many Chinese) unpleasant interlude of Mongol control.

Religion Christianity and Islam were not major factors in postclassical China. Islamic armies were turned back on the western frontier, and a handful of Arab merchants in southern coastal cities were tolerated without great difficulty. Only a trickle of Christians, mainly Nestorians, sought entry. Strong governments, particularly under the Tang, set up border check points in the west along the Silk Roads, making unwanted entry more difficult for people without appropriate documentation. Buddhism was another matter. It spread widely from the late classical period onward, aided by trade contacts with India and by deteriorating conditions after the fall of the Han. Many Chinese were converted, and restored dynasties, notably the Tang, for a time welcomed the religion, seeing it as a source of cultural support. Chinese Buddhists largely responded by emphasizing their loyalty to the state and family values, modifying traditional Buddhist precedent in the process. But Confucianists were suspicious of Buddhism as unduly

spiritual and apolitical, a distraction from secular and family goals, and a considerable diversion of resources. The Tang dynasty about-faced, and began to persecute Buddhists, seizing many monasteries. They did not eliminate a Buddhist minority but they eliminated its political potential. This was a truly interesting response, a clear precedent, reflecting but also promoting the primacy of government in cultural and religious affairs.

Bureaucratic innovations: Tang Tang rulers commanded the scene from 618 to 907 CE. In foreign policy, they combined additional territorial conquests with diplomatic missions, seeking and obtaining tribute from various neighboring governments, while also offering gifts and marriage alliances (an old policy). The government sent emissaries as far away as India and the Middle East. The regime carefully regained control over the inception point of the Silk Roads, eagerly fostering trade. Early on the dynasty introduced an elaborate law code, though building on prior precedent, that stipulated a variety of crimes and a graded series of punishment from caning with bamboo to death (the severity of punishments varying with the status of the victim). The code long survived in China and was imitated in neighboring territories like Vietnam and Japan. The Tang reestablished roving regional sheriffs, who began to introduce new forensic methods into the detection of crime. Regions were divided into prefectures, with local magistrates under the prefect; military districts were divided similarly. Roving commissioners were sent around to keep an eye on the regional officials. Administratively, the Tang set up several key ministries, over areas like the military, justice, recordkeeping, finance and public works – another arrangement that lasted for centuries. This was a far more centralized system than the Han had established, with no semi-autonomous regional rulers. One department, headed by the Censor-in-Chief, sought to keep an eye on the behavior of the other top officials and ministries. Massive record keeping reflected the need for a systematic approach to taxation, and also served to help regulate property claims. The Tang also undertook a systematic census. The bureaucratic examination system was revived and restored, emphasizing tests based on the Confucian classics with essays required on governance and even poetry. But appearance and behavior were evaluated as well, which gave a particular advantage to upper-class candidates. But the tests were in principle open to almost all males, and some mobility did occur. The Tang expanded the state-run secondary school system, topped by a National University, to offer relevant training (again however, only to a minority). The Tang also promoted equality of inheritance, as a means of cutting down the independent power of landowners by preventing the undue expansion of estates. Overall, the Tang represented an active imperial government, bolstered by a number of administrative innovations and the characteristic large bureaucracy – large at least by the standards of the time. While a number of powerful rulers represented the dynasty at points, the system could run without a strong emperor.

The Song Ruling from 960 to 1279 (though in the later part of the period, overseeing a truncated empire), the Song largely maintained Tang policies though with less interference in economic activities, more reliance on private initiative. Principal innovations involved new welfare efforts and the further development of the examination system. The government sponsored some retirement homes, public clinics and paupers' graveyards. The postal system was beefed up to encourage efficient communication throughout the empire. The merit-based examination system gained greater attention, and really began to open the bureaucracy to talent from various social levels – though sons of aristocrats had continued advantages, prompting resentments among other educated groups. Early in the dynasty about 30,000 students stood for exams annually, but by the end of the dynasty the number had soared to 400,000. The central bureaucracy itself employed about 20,000 people, but there were also jobs in local administration and other areas – including tutoring. Funding for the training system expanded considerably.

Mongols and after Mongols overturned the Song in the late 13th century, reestablishing unity in the Chinese empire. Mongols continued to use existing Confucian bureaucrats, but they were widely resented as barbarian upstarts. And procedures like the examination system were dropped for a time. After the defeat of the Mongols however, the Ming dynasty restored most of the political precedents that had been established by the Tang and Song. The Mongol period, vital in other aspects of world history, adds little to the history of government because of its short span, though it would strongly affect foreign policy for countries like China and Russia during the subsequent period.

Study questions

1. What were the most distinctive features of Chinese government under the Tang and Song?
2. Why did bureaucratic service carry such great prestige?
3. Why would the Mongols not seek to undo the basic administrative system?

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EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Early Modern East Asia

Overview The early modern period did not see a huge change in the basic structure or purpose of imperial government in China, though there were some interesting developments and a few new problems. Two dynasties divided the period, the Ming and Qing; the latter was introduced by Manchurian rulers who however quickly adopted Chinese political characteristics without major disruption. Political innovation was greater in Japan, where the Tokugawa shogunate introduced greater internal peace and stability from approximately 1600 onward. Governments in both countries developed successful policies in dealing with Western traders (policies that were quite different from those of the Islamic empires and Russia), though Japan opted for greater isolation than China did.

Ming dynasty Until its decline in the mid-17th century, the Ming government provided an unusually stable period in Chinese history. Administration of the provinces was carefully organized, with officials responsible for civil and for military affairs, and for surveillance. Beneath the provincial level were prefectures and then smaller units, each with a chief appointed official. Several roving officials periodically checked on provincial activities, reporting to the imperial administration. At the top, six major divisions were responsible for justice, the military, public works, revenues, personnel and ritual. The Ming reestablished recruitment from the rigorous examination system, which in turn focused on Confucian texts. The government organized a network of schools and teachers to feed into this system, with teachers evaluated every nine years. At the same time, the exam format became increasingly stylized and the whole system encouraged a conservative intellectual approach.

Policy orientation Fairly in the dynasty, in 1439, the decision was taken to end the great expeditions through the Indian Ocean. The government concentrated instead on building the modern Great Wall, to prevent nomadic invasion of the sort that had occurred with the Mongols, plus building a great new capital in Beijing. While Chinese merchants continued to be active in Southeast Asia, China depended for wider trade on the growing activities of Western merchants. These were carefully regulated, confined to entry through the Portuguese-controlled port of Macau. The imperial court also interacted with Jesuit missionaries, esteemed for their knowledge of science and their advanced clocks; but there was no serious cultural exchange. Under the Ming even this connection was broken in the early 18th century. The Catholic Pope insisted that Jesuits pull back from adopting Chinese costumes and habits, and in retaliation the government turned against the missionaries and any Christian converts. Qing emperors also launched new territorial expansion, acquiring Tibet (in reaction to a new regime that seemed threatening) and in the northwest.

Qing dynasty The Qing innovated in administration primarily by having dual Manchu and Han officials in key offices. Otherwise the Ming apparatus was largely retained, though administration had to expand to the new territories where direct imperial and military control substituted for the normal regional apparatus. The bureaucratic examination system probably became more challenged, with candidates often trying to write examination answers out in advance, guessing at the questions which tended to be repetitious; and cheating may have increased. The Qing also expanded a Ming policy of celebrating women known for good and virtuous behavior, for example including widows who did not remarry, seeking to bolster the

conservative Confucian family system. While Qing dynamism declined toward the end of the 18th century, this was still a viable regime; recent scholars have noted that its business and taxation policies were actually more favorable to economic activity than their counterparts in places like Britain. The results is a new debate over the extent to which Chinese government should be held accountable for the divide that was opening up with the increasingly dynamic early industrial economy of the West.

Tokugawa regime The Tokugawa clan gained control over most of Japan after victory in the endemic feudal wars, forming a government (under the figurehead emperor, who had virtually no real authority) in 1603. The regime was able to end internal conflict while retaining the feudal class in principle; each major feudal lord administered a province, but under some central authority; and some separate government officials operated as well, as the regime established a hierarchy of offices independent of the feudal system. The control of the central Shogun increasingly superseded separate feudal authority. And the central administration directly operated foreign policy, coinage, weights and measures, and public works. The feudal lords pledged loyalty to the Shogun. But normally each regional administration had considerable leeway, even in taxation policy, while carrying out public works and maintaining military order. All of this was a substantial departure from the political system of earlier centuries, and it underwrote growing internal economic prosperity. At the same time, in keeping with the new political tone, Confucian ideas spread more widely, though the government also supervised Buddhist and Shinto activities.

Foreign policy for several decades prior to the Tokugawa, Portuguese trade and missionary activity had attracted considerable Japanese interest. Briefly under the Tokugawa a mission was actually sent to Spanish America, in the interests of trade. But in 1635 the regime pulled back, introducing the Seclusion Laws. It feared the example of Spanish control of the Philippines, and the larger threats to Japanese culture and its feudal military structure. Christian missionaries were attacked. The regime decreed that only Chinese, Korean and Dutch ships could enter Japanese harbors, and then under strict limitations. Japanese were not allowed to travel abroad. For over two centuries the Tokugawa managed to make this policy work, without significant internal or external challenge.

Study questions

1. How did Japanese and Chinese foreign policies compare?
2. What were the main continuities, in China, from previous systems of government?
3. How was the Tokugawa shogunate able to establish greater internal stability?

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19TH CENTURY

19th Century China

Collapse China in the 19th century, particularly from the 1830s onward, provided an example of governmental collapse, overwhelmed by a variety of crises and unable to introduce significant reforms. The pattern is unexpected, given China's history of effective government, though of course there had been intervals previously as in the transitions from one dynasty to another. The range of problems in the 19th century was in some ways unprecedented. But the nation was also victim of the failure of some of the systems that had long supported effective rule, notably in the increasing rigidity and corruption of the Confucian bureaucracy. The result was, first, the ultimate collapse of the long tradition of imperial rule, as revolution began in 1911; and, second, the memory of a "century of humiliation" that continues to affect Chinese policy today.

Problems In 1839, after the government declined a British request to open the country to trade – including trade in opium, which the British sought to import from South Asia – a small Western force defeated the Chinese military, the first of several setbacks against Western attacks. As trade increased, not only in opium but in cheaper Western factory goods, China's balance of trade, favorable for many centuries, turned to deficits. At one point, a treaty, imposed by force, even required that the Chinese government translate all state documents into English. At the same time, massive population growth was increasing rural poverty and land hunger, compounded by an unusual drought. Then in midcentury a massive, bloody rebellion took years to suppress, and then only with Western assistance.

Response At crucial points, the Chinese government was hampered by difficulties in imperial succession, as emperors-to-be had not yet reached adulthood. Confucian bureaucrats largely resisted major change, making China's efforts by far the feeblest of all the traditional states. The examination system, which had already deteriorated, was producing officials who looked to the past, their quality reduced also by frequent cheating.

Reforms In 1861, as a new emperor ascended the throne at the age of 5, a group of reformers did manage to gain control for a few years in what was called the Tongzhi Restoration. Diplomatic initiatives were concentrated into a single office for the first time. The army and navy modernized, with the importation of Western weapons and armaments factories. But these moves did not go very far, and they were predicated on the notion that they would suffice to preserve an otherwise unchanged Confucian regime. In the final decades of the century, Western nations and Russia seized large strips of territory, mainly in the form of longterm leases; and China lost a humiliating war with Japan, ceding control over Korea. This led to a final reform effort in 1898, aiming at restructuring the bureaucracy, appointing new officials, and changing the education system. Bureaucratic opposition stalled further changes, and some reformers were executed. But a few reforms endured, and in 1905 the examination system was finally abolished, a huge move. Plans were underway to draft a constitution, and elections for provincial assemblies were held for the first time. In the meantime, however, a number of liberals, many educated abroad, pressed for more sweeping change. Then the death of the emperor and the succession of another minor, in 1908, set off a series of uprisings in 1911, affecting the majority of the provinces. Imperial rule was abolished in 1912, as China, now a republic, launched what would turn out to be over 30 years of struggle to determine the shape of a durable new regime.

Study questions

1. Why did China fail to introduce significant reforms during the 19th century?
2. Was China's "century of humiliation" due more to government failures or to external pressures?

Further reading

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20TH CENTURY

East Asia

Overview The nations of East Asia have had diverse political experiences over the past century. North Korea, freed from Japanese control but under Soviet influence, developed a strongly authoritarian family dynasty, which also managed to create a powerful military apparatus. South Korea and Taiwan underwent a somewhat familiar transition from authoritarian to democratic. Japan, after loss in war and American occupation, became a stable democracy. China came under communist control in 1949 and has maintained a strongly authoritarian regime, but with a number of shifts in policy and governance. The region may despite diversity display some core unity around a residue of Confucian values that emphasize stability and community cohesion – on strong display in the well organized regional response to the Covid pandemic of 2020-1. In another interesting similarity, in the 21st century regimes in the region struggled against population stagnation or decline without permitting much immigration.

Japan After authoritarian military rule during the 1930s and World War II years, Japan under American occupation became a democracy, with female suffrage. Emperor worship was banned, and the emperor became a ceremonial figurehead. Parliamentary democracy proceeded in Japan without major disruption, with considerable freedom for press, religion and the like. During much of the postwar period, while there was political competition, the Liberal Democratic Party dominated, meaning that negotiations within the party were often more important than inter-party transitions. The Japanese system was also noteworthy for the close relationship between government and business – what some competitors referred to as “Japan, Inc.” Government support for business helped propel the economy forward, making Japan at one point the world’s second largest economy. By the 1980s, government measures helped the nation deal with considerable environmental pollution, with air quality improved in major cities. The government also renounced militarism: Article 9 of the new constitution disavowed war, and while Japan did ultimately build a military force it was clearly defensive in nature, with public opinion (for the most part) firmly resisting fuller military development. By the 21st century Japan was facing new problems of population decline; here, government measures to encourage more female participation in the labor force and provide assistance in child care had more inconclusive results.

“Pacific Rim” Taiwan came under control of the Chinese Nationalist government in 1949, as it was forced out of China proper – though the People’s Republic continued to claim Taiwan as part of its territory. Initially, the new regime established authoritarian controls. Similarly in South Korea, its independence reestablished, an authoritarian regime took hold; this extended past the period of the Korean War, when North and South Korea clashed (with great power participation) with ultimately inconclusive results (though military expenditures remained high on both sides). Strong governments in both South Korea and Taiwan helped support rapid industrial growth, as the Pacific Rim became one of the world’s most dynamic industrial regions. By the later 20th century and into the 21st, both countries evolved toward functioning democracies, with multi-party competition and considerable protection for individual rights. The city-state of Hong Kong, under British rule, also established a functioning democracy. The British ceded Hong Kong back to the People’s Republic of China in 1997, which in turn pledged to maintain the existing structure – “one country, two systems”. However increasing repression within China spread to Hong Kong by 2020, and competitive democracy effectively ended.

China: government form The Chinese communist party won out, establishing the People’s Republic of China after prolonged civil war, in 1949, and quickly launched the process of building an authoritarian state. Competing political parties were banned, with a few token exceptions. As in the Soviet Union, party control extended widely; party representatives even oversaw each university. Mao Zedong, the revolutionary leader, maintained his ascendancy until his death, with a number of purges of potential opposition. After his death, the system changed to some extent: leaders served for fixed terms, with an orderly transfer of power. To be sure, a major democratic protest in 1989 was put down with great force, in what is sometimes referred to as the Tiananmen Square massacre. Early in the 21st century, however, there were some indications that the regime was informally loosening its hold, with more open political discussions on social media. However, a new president, Xi Jinping, took over in 2013 and quickly imposed greater controls. Anti-corruption campaigns put new pressure on top officials and business leaders alike, with a few imprisoned outright. Access to international social media was curbed through what was called the “Great Firewall”, and media systems within China were carefully monitored. Propaganda increasingly emphasized nationalist themes, along with abundant praise for the leader. The tradition of limited terms was scrapped, as Xi set up the possibility of ruling for life; and Xi’s political writings were elevated to the status of those of Mao himself. Most notably, the regime began to utilize advanced technology, including facial recognition systems, to increase the monitoring of ordinary citizens and “private” life.. This was an important (possibly ominous) extension of the powers of the authoritarian state.

China’s government: functions Immediately on taking power, like the Soviet Union before it, the new regime began extending school systems and public health facilities, quickly establishing an effective government role in these areas – ultimately including rapid expansion of the university network. Other reforms were introduced: the government finally ended footbinding once and for all, and it also moved against arranged marriage, in favor of more individual choice. Building on but extending earlier traditions, the regime also worked to establish careful controls over culture. Government propaganda extolled the regime and its leader. Movies and other media were carefully monitored, initially to avoid Western

influences. In the 1960s, Mao orchestrated the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-76), forcing many intellectuals and professionals to do rural labor, limiting the universities, attacking traditional cultural monuments, all designed to assert power and undermine the Confucian tradition. By the 1970s this disruptive effort ended, university prestige was reestablished, and selected Confucian traditions were treated with greater respect (the regime even established a “Confucius Institute” to extend soft power operations abroad, teaching Chinese language and literature). Over the longer term, considerable cultural supervision remained. Religion was carefully monitored: a new Buddhist-like movement, the Falun Gong, was persecuted; Christian groups needed government approval to function publicly (this included a special agreement with the Catholic Church); in the 21st century the regime cracked down on the Muslim Uighur ethnic group in the northwest, setting up compulsory reeducation camps and blocking traditional religious practices (while also moving Han Chinese settlers into the region). The new regime was characteristically fairly cautious in foreign and military policy, though it intervened against United States involvement in the Korean War. Mao did insist on a nuclear role, claiming that otherwise China would be “bullied”. And under Xi, military expenditures increased considerably; a network of bases was established in the South China Sea; aggressive moves on the frontier with India increased, as did threat to Taiwan. Under Xi as well the Chinese launched a “Belt and Road” initiative in 2013 to extend infrastructure into central and southeast Asia, plus parts of Africa and Europe, to extend Chinese economic operations and, arguably, expand political influence as well. Finally the regime began to crack down on adverse publicity in other countries, using economic sanctions to counter what it saw as dangerous criticisms in areas like human rights policies.

Economic and demographic policy Mao attempted several different economic policies, aimed at industrialization and self-sufficiency. Initially, government support for heavy industry imitated the Soviet approach. Then a “Great Leap Forward” policy sought to take advantage of the huge population by emphasizing small manufacturing operations. The effort failed (though many Chinese may have gained useful new experience), which is one reason Mao then turned to the Cultural Revolution as distraction. In the later 1970s, however, the regime moved to a new approach. While state controls over the economy remained tight, private enterprise and even foreign business gained new latitudes (along with unprecedented openness to international visitors and advisors, with many Chinese allowed to study abroad). China seemed to be pioneering a combination of authoritarian politics and a relatively open economic system, even joining the World Trade Organization. The results were spectacular, in rapid economic growth, urbanization, and reduction of poverty. Along with this the regime imposed a unique system of demographic control, to end excessive population growth and its drag on the economy: many families were limited to a single child, and some women were forced to abort or were even sterilized as part of this process. In the 21st century the regime encountered growing problems with choking pollution and began haltingly to develop a new environmental approach. It also faced population ageing; birth rate limitations were eased, but it was not clear that the regime could actually motivate a significant increase in the birth rate. Here, along with the effort to extend great power status, were clear issues for the future.

Study questions

1. Did government systems and policies in East Asia demonstrate any common features?
2. What have been the many changes in the governance system in communist China since 1949?
3. Do government systems help explain the unusual economic success of most East Asian nations in the past half-century?

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