

Central Themes and Key Points

CENTRAL THEMES FOR A UNIT ON CHINA

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Originally designed in the 1980s to support the New York State 9th-10th grade Global History requirement, the themes are designed to provide an infrastructure for the myriad facts and dates encountered in studying the long histories of the East Asian countries. The themes are reprinted here for educators seeking new perspectives to bring to bear on the individual histories of each of the East Asian countries — China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam — and of South and Southeast Asia also.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMES

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These recurrent "central themes" may be referred to repeatedly in the study of Chinese history, suggesting distinctive patterns to students, until a portrait of cultural difference is accumulated. Of many possible themes, six are discussed here as illustrative of Chinese culture and its relation to the world:

Theme 1: National Identity and China's Cultural Tradition

China is one of the oldest continuous civilizations in history and the dominant cultural center of East Asia; with flourishing philosophical, political, economic, artistic and scientific traditions, China developed a strong cultural identity as a universalistic civilization. China has struggled for the last century with the challenge of forging a new identity in a world of nation-states and of redefining its cultural values in a modern world.

Theme 2: Agriculture and Population: The Agrarian Dilemma in China's Modernization

China's economy depended traditionally on wet rice agriculture, a labor-intensive method of cultivation with uneven demands for labor input. Chinese farmers solved this problem by using their families as their labor forces. Traditional agricultural technology and population growth thus became closely related: the best chance a Chinese peasant had to improve his life was to have a large family, intensify the family effort to cultivate rice in the traditional way, then use whatever extra income the family generated to buy more land until the amount of land owned matched what the whole family, working together, could farm at maximum productivity — or even exceeded the family's capacity, an impetus to expand the family size. This was a highly sophisticated system. It provided neither incentive for modernization nor surplus for the state, however, as population and output remained in equilibrium. Collectivized agriculture was introduced in the 1950s as a means of generating agricultural surplus to support urban industrial development, but it proved not to be a satisfactory solution. Under the economic reforms inaugurated in the 1980s, farming is once again contracted to individual peasant families. While successful in raising output, the return to family farming is working against the other essential policy of population control.

Theme 3: Family and State: The Importance of Hierarchy and Paternalism in the Ordering of Society

Government and society in China were traditionally grounded in the Confucian philosophy, which held that the correct ordering of relationships within the family was key to the ordering of society in general; emphasis was on hierarchical relationships and the paternal line, with the eldest male holding supreme authority and responsibility for the family unit. The state claimed to be modeled on the family, with the emperor serving as the father of the people. Government in China was characterized by rule of man not law, rule by moral example, and rule by personal rather than official authority. These cultural patterns and assumptions continue to influence the Chinese political system and shape popular expectations of the role of government in China today. They are also reflected in the structure of work unit relationships in Chinese factories, schools, and institutions.

Theme 4: The Perfectibility of Man and the Moral Role of Government

The dominant strain of Confucian thought stressed the perfectibility of man, through self-cultivation, education, and the practice of ritual. One of the government's main functions in the Confucian state is to educate and transform the people, by moral example of the emperor and his officials. The belief that the state is the moral guardian of the people and that men are perfectible is reflected in a number of institutions, historically in the merit bureaucracy, or civil service, in which all officials are supposed-to be selected for

their moral qualities, and more recently under Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), in the style of Communist party leadership, the treatment of deviance, and the revolutionary role assigned to the peasantry in China.

Theme 5: The Relationship Between the Individual and Society in China

The relationship between the individual and the state in China is understood not in adversarial terms, as is characteristically the case in the modern West, but in consensual terms. China did not, therefore, develop an elaborate system of civil law; instead, mediation between aggrieved parties is stressed, with local leaders emphasizing negotiation, compromise, and change through education rather than assignment of blame and punishment. Neo-Confucian ideals also held that it was the responsibility of the educated individual to serve the state and the society.

Theme 6: Commercial Development in Place of Industrial Development

The geographical and political unity of China provided an environment in which the Chinese developed an intricate market network extending deep into the countryside in the form of periodic, rural markets that are in turn linked to regional markets. China differed from Europe, where the existence of many small countries led to trade barriers and local shortages that forced technological improvements within individual countries. In the Chinese situation, the absence of trade barriers and the existence of a huge and varied geography and population with much regional diversity meant China never was under pressure to develop labor-saving devices or to engage in expansionist or colonizing activities to the extent of those undertaken by the West and Japan in the modern period. The corresponding lack of industrial development put China in a disadvantageous military and economic position when faced with foreign encroachment in the 1800s, and industrial development has been a priority since that time. The re-emergence of the traditional Chinese market system in contemporary China has greatly facilitated economic growth under the reforms of the 1980s.

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THE THEMES IN CONTEXT

I. The Physical/Historical Setting of China

Ancient Civilization and Dominant Cultural Center

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1. Chinese civilization is one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations. Civilization developed in China from earliest times in the valleys of three major rivers, the **Huang He (Yellow River)**, the **Chang Jiang (Yangtze)**, and the **Xi Jiang (West River)**. These river systems, running west to east, have shaped agricultural development and population growth throughout China's history (Theme 1). The Chinese coastline and the Grand Canal (first constructed in 605 C.E.) were important for providing north-south communication, furthering unification of the country and mitigating the regionalism fostered by the intersection of mountain chains.
2. Mountains and deserts in the west of China limited its contact with other major centers of civilization in the Middle East and South Asia. Elements of Chinese civilization — literary Chinese and its writing system, Confucian thought, and Buddhism (in forms developed and refined in China after its origination in India) dominated the high culture of East Asia, creating a cultural sphere that encompassed what are today Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. China's traditional self-image was as a cultural center of the world. This is apparent in the Chinese name for China: **Zhongguo**, which means Middle Kingdom or Central Kingdom. (Theme 1). The Chinese thought of their culture as universalistic, that is, outsiders could join or become assimilated into it. This strong identity as a universalistic civilization has been an important unifying factor throughout China's history, even during times when the country was divided (Theme 1). The Chinese written language, which transcends dialects, has also been an important element fostering China's cultural unity throughout history.
3. China was unified by its first emperor, **Qin Shi Huangdi (Ch'in Shih Huang-ti)**, who established the Qin (Ch'in) dynasty in 221 BC. Consolidated under the Han dynasty (206 BC-222 AD.), the empire was comparable in dates, size, and strength with the Roman Empire. The Roman and Chinese empires traded through intermediaries on an overland route through Central Asia; Chinese silk was an especially prized commodity in Rome. The English name "China" is derived from "Qin." Poetry, fine porcelain, calligraphy, landscape painting, philosophy, political thought, historical writing, scientific advances in astronomy, chemistry, and medicine, and the production of fine silks and teas all flourished in China from earliest times, but particularly during the 7th to 12th centuries, China's "golden age", under the Tang and Song (Sung) dynasties (Theme 1).

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1. China's economy depended traditionally on wet rice agriculture most particularly in southern and central China, where the climate and soil support two and sometimes three growing cycles a year. (Wheat is the staple crop in north China, but due both to the nature of the crop and the climate, the output per field is lower than that of rice.)
2. In wet rice agriculture, seeds are sown in small seedbeds; the seedlings are then transplanted one by one to prepared paddy fields. While the plants are maturing, they must be kept irrigated, but as the rice ripens the fields are drained. The rice is then harvested and threshed by hand. Wet rice agriculture is labor-intensive (as is the cultivation of silk worms and tea) (Theme 2). Labor is particularly important when the fields are prepared, seedlings transplanted, and again when the rice is harvested. At these times, increasing the size of the labor force can significantly increase the productivity of each field. In some areas a farmer can increase productivity by double or triple cropping, a technique that requires even greater concentrations of labor, because the harvesting of one crop and the transplanting of the next crop occur virtually simultaneously. At other times during the winter or while the rice is maturing, the demand for labor is greatly diminished. Traditionally, Chinese farmers, with their families as their labor force, put everyone to work in the field when labor was needed (Theme 3). During slack periods, women and younger children could do other work for the family, including handicraft production.
3. Traditional agricultural methods and population growth were thus closely related. As output increased, population increased to the extent it could be supported; as population increased, the added labor led to increased production. The more workers available to help in the field, the more rice one field could produce, so it was to a family's advantage to have many sons (since daughters married out of the family, they generally were not considered assets). High infant mortality and the reliance of aged parents on their children for support reinforced the ideal of the large family. At the same time, the larger the family, the more rice the farm had to produce in order to feed them. Consequently, the best chance a Chinese peasant had to improve his life was to have a large family, intensify the family effort to cultivate rice, then use whatever extra income they were able to produce to buy more land until he owned just as much land as the whole family, working together, could farm at maximum productivity (Theme 2). In a minority of cases, even more land might be purchased for rental to tenants.

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Government and society in China were grounded in the Confucian philosophy, which held that there was a basic order in the universe and a natural harmony linking man, nature, and the cosmos (heaven); it also held that man was by nature a social being, and that the natural order of the universe should be reflected in human relations. The family unit was seen as the primary social unit; relationships within the family were fundamental to all others and comprised three of the "five relationships" that were the models for all others: sovereign-subject, husband-wife, parent-child, elder brother-younger brother, friend-friend. In this hierarchy of social relations, each role had clearly defined duties; reciprocity or mutual responsibility between subordinate and superior was fundamental to the Confucian concept of human relations. The virtue of filial piety, or devotion of the child to his parents, was the foundation for all others. When extended to all human beings, it nurtured the highest virtue, humaneness (jen), or the sense of relatedness to other persons (Theme 3).

Family

1. In traditional Chinese society, therefore, the family, not the group or the individual, was central. The kinship network linked related families and also the living with the deceased through veneration of ancestors.
2. The eldest male held supreme authority within the family (Theme 3); the status of females was unequal. Property was owned jointly by males and passed on to males equally. Emphasis was on the paternal line of ancestors; great importance was attached to honoring these ancestors to ensure the continuity and prosperity of the family. Marriages were arranged by families.
3. Because of the strong sense of identification between an individual and his family and the idea of mutual responsibility, population registration, taxation, and self-policing were carried out for the government not by individuals but by families grouped, for administrative efficiency, into larger units under the bao-jia (pao-chia) system. Families and neighbors were responsible for mutual surveillance.

State

1. In traditional China it was assumed by adherents of all schools of thought that government would be monarchical and that the state had its model in the family (Theme 3). The ruler was understood to be at once the Son of Heaven, and the father of the people, ruling under the Mandate of Heaven. Traditional thinkers, reflecting on the problem of government, were concerned primarily not with changing institutions and laws but with ensuring the moral uprightness of the rule and encouraging his appropriate conduct as a father-figure (Theme 3). The magistrate, the chief official of the lowest level of government and the official closest to the people, was known as the "Father-mother" official. Even today, under a radically different form of government, the Chinese term for state is guo-jia or "nation-family," suggesting the survival of the idea of this paternal and consensual relationship (Theme 3 and Theme 5). The first and third of the "five relationships" — i.e., emperor and minister, father and son — indicate the parallels between family and state.
2. The notion of the role of the state as guarantor of the people's welfare developed very early, along with the monarchy and the bureaucratic state. It was also assumed that good government could bring about order, peace, and the good society (Theme 3 and Theme 5). Tests of the good ruler were social stability, population growth (a reflection of ancient statecraft where the good ruler was one who could attract people from other states), and ability to create conditions that fostered the people's welfare. The Mandate of Heaven was understood as justifying the right to rule, with the corollary right to rebel against a ruler who did not fulfill his duties to the people. The state played a major role in determining water rights, famine control and relief, and insuring social stability. The state encouraged people to grow rice and other grains rather than commercial crops in order to insure an adequate food supply, it held reserves in state granaries, in part to lessen the effects of drought and floods, particularly common in northern China. For fear of losing the Mandate of Heaven governments levied very low taxes which often meant that the government could not provide all the services expected of it, and that officials ended up extorting money from the people.

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The Perfectibility of Man and the Moral Role of Government

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1. The dominant strain of Confucian thought stressed the perfectibility of man (Theme 4). Confucius (a political philosopher who lived c. 551-479 BC) expressed a belief in the fundamental similarity of all persons and in the perfectibility and educatability of each individual. Mencius and Hsun Tzu, two of his prominent successors, held different views on human nature, Mencius arguing that it contained the seeds of goodness, and Hsun Tzu that, in its uncultivated state, human nature tended to evil. Both, however, believed that human beings were perfectible through self-cultivation and the practice of ritual (Theme 4). From the 11th century onward, Neo-Confucian philosophers, engaged in the renewal and elaboration of Confucian thought, subscribed to the Mencian line, stressing the potential goodness of human nature and the importance of developing that goodness through education.
2. Belief in the innate goodness and perfectibility of man has had strong implications for the development of the Chinese political system. The ruler's main function in the Confucian state was to educate and transform the people (Theme 4). This was ideally accomplished not by legal regulation and coercion, but by personal rule, moral example, and mediation in disputes by the emperor and his officials. Confucian political theory emphasized conflict resolution through mediation, rather than through the application of abstract rules to establish right and wrong, as the best means for achieving social harmony.
3. The belief that the state was the moral guardian of the people was reflected in a number of institutions. Most important among these was the merit bureaucracy, or civil servant, in which all officials were to be selected for their moral qualities, qualities that would enable them not only to govern, but to set a moral example that would transform the people. Because Confucianism was a moral system, the Confucian classics had to be mastered by prospective officials. Official position and examination degree, not wealth or business acumen, were universally recognized marks of status.

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The Individual and Society

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1. The relation between the individual and the state was understood not in adversarial terms, as is characteristic of the modern West, but in consensual terms (Theme 3 and Theme 5). Therefore, China did not develop an elaborate system of civil law. Instead, mediation between aggrieved parties was prescribed, with local leaders emphasizing negotiation, compromise, and change through education rather than assignment of blame and punishment.
2. Neo-Confucian ideals held that:
 - › the educated individual had a responsibility to serve the state (Theme 5);
 - › a morally upright official should courageously remonstrate with the ruler if his policies are damaging to the state;
 - › the state could prosper only if the people prospered; and
 - › any disruption in the economy or social order was probably due to corrupt political institutions.
3. These ideas contributed to the longevity, strength, and adaptability of traditional Chinese political institutions. The best people were motivated to serve in government. While corruption was not uncommon, the ideal of public service and responsibility for the people's welfare remained strong. A powerful tradition of remonstrance and reform helped to insure that the system adapted to change.

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Legalism and a Strong State

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A complementary philosophical strain in Chinese thought to Confucianism was Legalism, first applied in the short-lived dynasty of the first emperor, **Qin Shi Huangdi (Ch'in Shih Huang-ti, 221-207 B.C)**. Proponents of Legalism stressed an administrative approach to efficient and pragmatic government; universal and codified law rather than morality (in contrast to the Confucian emphasis); and state power as an end in itself. As first applied, Legalism proved too harsh and disruptive, but for two millennia thereafter the Chinese state combined aspects of the Legalist structure with the Confucian spirit, recognizing the effectiveness of a centralized, bureaucratic rule which could oversee massive public works, state monopolies, standardized weights, measures, and even script, attempt intellectual control, and enforce social order by suppressing revolt (Theme 1 and Theme 3).

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Advanced Commercial Development in Place of Industrial Development

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1. Geographic unity, river systems, and canals facilitated the development of internal trade in China. The mainland forms a natural unit almost cut off by mountains from the outside world. Its size and the political unity that prevailed for much of its late imperial history, however, promoted interregional trade within China (Theme 6). The absence of trade barriers and the existence of a vast and varied geography meant that shortages in one part of China could be made up through trade with another. Similarly, labor needs in one area could be filled by migration or by shifting manufacture to another area. Geographic factors that facilitated this internal trade were the Yangtze River, the complex network of rivers in the south, and China's long coastline. China, in contrast to the West and Japan, thus never felt pressure to develop labor-saving technologies or engage in extensive expansionist or colonizing activities. (This also contrasts markedly with the political and economic history of Europe, where the existence of many small countries led to trade barriers and local shortages, prompting individual countries to make technological advances and wage costly wars that contributed to the rise of large financial empires and political imperialism.)
2. The Chinese state control of commercial development fluctuated. Responsible for popular welfare, the state encouraged the production of staple food crops; merchants, on the other hand, were considered unproductive and therefore constituted the lowest class in the traditional Confucian hierarchy. From the **Tang dynasty (618-907)** onward, however, with growing population and expansion of territory, state control of the economy gradually receded. Except for strategic goods like salt and certain metals — like copper and lead needed for currency — the state did little to control commerce. (This contrasts with European states, where cities required a charter from the royal house, and with Japan, where cities were allowed to develop only in the castle towns of the daimyo and in Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo, these latter three having special functions connected to the central government). Moreover, the Chinese government did not rely very heavily on commercial taxation; its main sources of income were land and salt taxes. (This contrasts with Western Europe, where government taxes on commerce were heavy.) This environment fostered the development of an intricate market network which extended deep into the countryside and which was comprised of periodic, village markets with links to regional markets (Theme 6). A

primitive national market, remarkable given China's vast territory, existed in certain essential commodities, such as grain, cotton, and tea. A number of factors, including China's size, the difficulties involved in using metal currencies in conducting long-distance trade, and the minor role played by government in regulating the economy, help explain why China was the first country to develop paper money, sophisticated brokerage practices, and banking institutions.

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II. Modern China

China Before the Modern Era

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China's stable social and political institutions spawned great scientific achievements, intellectual and artistic developments. The "golden age" of the **Tang** (618-907) and **Song** (Sung) (907-1127/1279) dynasties was followed by the commercial expansion and economic prosperity of the **Ming** (1368-1644) and early **Qing** (Ch'ing) (1644-1912) dynasties (Theme 1 and Theme 6). Marco Polo, travelling to China during the Yuan dynasty when the Mongols controlled China (1279-1368, between the Song and Ming dynasties) commented with amazement on the contrast between its civilization and that of Venice, an advanced enclave in Europe at the time. His tales of the Chinese cities were dismissed as fantasy by most Europeans.

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China in the 18th and 19th Centuries During the Period of European Economic Expansion

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1. In the 16th century, under the Ming dynasty, the Chinese economy was still the most sophisticated and productive in the world, and the Chinese probably enjoyed a higher standard of living than any other people on earth. The **Qing** (Ch'ing) or Manchu dynasty (1644-1912) continued this splendor. Contemporary Chinese called the 18th century, when all aspects of culture flourished, "unparalleled in history." China was a prosperous state with abundant natural resources, a huge but basically contented population, and a royal house of great prestige at home and abroad (Theme 1).
2. Yet by the late 18th century, the strong Chinese state contained seeds of its own destruction, particularly its expanding population. Having remained at 100 million through much of history, under the peaceful Qing (Ch'ing), the population doubled from 150 million in 1650 to 300 million by 1800, and reached 450 million by the late nineteenth century (cf. population of the United States was 200 million in the 1980s) (Theme 2). By then, there was no longer any land in China's southern and central provinces available for migration: the introduction of New World (American) crops through trade — especially sweet potatoes, peanuts, and tobacco, which required different growing conditions than rice and wheat — had already claimed previously unusable land. With only 1/10 of the land arable, farmers had an average of only three (3) acres, with many having only one acre. The right of equal inheritance among sons (versus primogeniture as practiced in Japan) only hastened the fragmentation of land holdings. To compound these problems, the state was losing its control in much of the country. By the 19th century, district magistrates at the lowest level of the Chinese bureaucracy were responsible for the welfare, control, and taxation of an average of 250,000 people (Theme 3). This left control and responsibility for government increasingly in the hands of local leaders whose allegiances were to their localities and families, rather than to the state.
3. The traditional labor-intensive and highly productive agricultural system that prevailed throughout the **Ming** (1368-1644) and **Qing** (Ch'ing) (1644-1912) periods, while very sophisticated, provided neither incentives to modernize nor surplus for the state, and eventually resulted in what has been called China's "high-level equilibrium trap" (or "agricultural involution"). A Chinese peasant had little capital to invest in machinery, his fields were small enough that his family could farm them effectively with manual labor and too small to make the use of machinery profitable. Wealthy landlords who controlled properties large enough to make the use of modern agricultural technology feasible, found it more profitable to rent the land to numerous small tenant farmers, from whom they collected an average of half the harvest in rent (Theme 2). Chinese peasants thus seldom had any surplus income. Because they produced most of the goods, including handicrafts, they needed, they did not stimulate a domestic market for manufactured goods (Theme 6).

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The West in China

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1. When the industrializing European states attempted to entice China into the newly forming world economy in the late 1700s and early 1800s, their overtures were rebuffed by the Chinese, who quite rightly felt that they had little to gain from trade with these states (Theme 1 and Theme 6). Western military power was far superior to that of the Chinese, however, and China was defeated in a series of military confrontations and forced to sign "unequal treaties" that opened Chinese ports (known as "treaty ports"), first to European, and then to American and Japanese traders. The Chinese were further humiliated by having to relinquish legal jurisdiction over sections of these port cities and over foreigners residing in China (Theme 1). Chinese were even excluded from facilities and areas controlled by foreigners. The Chinese were also forced under the treaties to allow Western Christian missionaries to proselytize in the interior of the country. Between the first major confrontation, the Opium War of 1839-42, and the early 1900s, the British, French, Germans, Americans, and Japanese competed for "spheres of influence" within China until it was at risk of being "carved up like a melon."
2. When a series of natural catastrophes (especially drought and famine) and man-made disasters (especially floods from deteriorating water-control works, made worse by over-reclamation of the wetlands, lowlands, and mountain slopes that were necessary to control water runoff) hit China in the late 19th century, the weakness of the state and the disruption of the economy due to the Western presence found China unable to provide for its huge population and faced with a series of rebellion across the country (Theme 3). The Taiping (1851-1864), Nian (Nien) (1853-1868), Moslem (1855-1873), and Boxer (1898-1901) rebellions all occurred in the latter part of the 19th century. During the Taiping Rebellion, rebel forces controlled a large portion of China, and established their capital in the city of Nanjing. The power of the central government was further weakened as military power was delegated to the provinces to control these rebellions.

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China's Response to Imperialism

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1. The ability of the Western nations and then Japan to impose their economic demands on China by force of arms was jarring to the Chinese view of themselves as a highly developed civilization (Theme 1). Moreover, the Western notion of a system of international relations conducted among sovereign nation-states challenged Chinese identity as an advanced, universalistic civilization. Also, it was difficult for the Chinese, whose emperor had been recognized as the supreme authority by countries bearing tribute to the Chinese country, to adapt to the system that had evolved in Europe by the 1800s of sovereign nation-states interacting as equals. (Theme 1).
2. Much of the intellectual history of the late Qing (Ch'ing) and Republican periods (1912-1949) centers around the conflicting views within China of how it should respond. The ideas fall into roughly three categories:
 - › anti-traditionalism, which rejected the traditional claims of cultural superiority, dismissed Chinese culture as sick, corrupt, and useless, and advocated complete Westernization;
 - › pro-traditionalism, which sought to completely reject any import of Western culture and to strengthen the country through reform-within-tradition and cultural revival;
 - › the idea of adopting Western technology in order to preserve the essence of Chinese civilization ("Western learning for application, Chinese learning for essence") (Theme 1).
3. The Chinese emphasis on the moral role of government, the perfectibility of man, and the belief that moral qualities and not technical expertise merited reward and ultimately benefited society, led to an unwillingness to cultivate a class of technical experts, in industry or in government (Theme 4). This was in part at the root of China's inability to repulse the military and political incursions of the West and Japan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
 The Western view was that China was blocking the development of its market, but even after the opening of markets in China through the treaty ports, the "China Market" never developed to the extent the West had envisioned. Except for opium and machine spun cotton yarn, the West had little to offer the Chinese that they did not already make and market well (Theme 6). Western traders were also seldom able to break into the highly developed internal trading network within China. Thus, while colonial rule in this period led to the imposition of a modern trade system on other countries in Asia and Africa, this never happened in China. Instead, two trade systems existed side by side, the traditional one and a modern one centered largely on the foreign treaty ports (Theme 1 and Theme 6).
4. In trying to discover the source of the strength and success of the West, the Chinese applied their own basic ideas to the interpretation of Western concepts: "democracy" was understood as a highly developed form of individual respect for the state, and "human rights" were understood as the state's bestowing on every individual, not just officials, the responsibility to speak up on behalf of the welfare of the people and to insist on the moral uprightness of the rulers (Theme 5).

Revolution and War

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1. The combination of internal upheaval and foreign aggression led to the collapse of the Qing (Ch'ing) or Manchu dynasty in 1911 and calls for the establishment of a republic (Theme 1). Sun Yat-sen led the forces calling for a republican government and established the Goumindang (Kuomintang, KMT) or Nationalist Party in 1912. The collapse of the dynastic system ushered in the turbulent "warlord period," however, with regional power centers competing for control. The country was partially reunited under the army of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party in 1928, but it was invaded by Japan in 1937 and subsequently engulfed by World War II.
2. In the 1920s some Chinese found in Marxism an explanation for China's subjugation by the imperialist powers, a scientific method to achieve economic prosperity for all, and a means of defeating the imperialist powers through a revolution led by the working class (Theme 1). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was formed in 1921. During the Japanese occupation, the CCP established rural (as opposed to urban) bases in peasant areas, following the Long March of 1935-36 into the remote mountainous area of Yen'an. The CCP gained strength by calling for united resistance against the Japanese and experimenting with land reform and other policies to ease the plight of the peasants.
3. After World War II ended with the defeat of Japan in 1945, a civil war continued between the Nationalists and the Communists over the right to lead China's political and economic development and to re-establish China's position in the world. On October 1, 1949, the Chinese Communist Party, under the leadership of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Nationalist government evacuated to the island of Taiwan, where it established the Republic of China (ROC).

III. Contemporary China

China Since 1949

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1. Since 1949 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has exercised authoritarian power as a single party, making policy and controlling all state functions; party organizations exist in every social institution of any importance at all levels of society. Membership is selective and provides benefits in the form of access to scarce goods, housing power, status, and information. The party has evolved from an organization of revolutionaries committed to an ideology (a vanguard party) (Theme 4) to an organization of the privileged whose membership brings material gain, and whose proclaimed ideology justifies its monopoly of power.
2. The policies of the CCP have been directed at meeting the two central challenges facing China in the 20th century: economic development and modernization to benefit the world's largest population (Theme 2), and the reestablishment of China's position and identity as a world leader. (Theme 1)
3. From 1949 to 1976 the personality and policies/ideas of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), chairman of the CCP, dominated China's development effort. Ever since his death in 1976, new policy experiments have been undertaken to spur economic development. Among these has been the "open door" policy of increased economic and cultural interaction with Europe, the United States, and Japan, a departure from the policy that had prevailed for three decades of limiting China's participation in the world economy.

Maoist Policies

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1. Mao Zedong laid great stress on the need to adapt Marxism, a Western ideology, to the Chinese context (Theme 1); this led to the development of "Maoism" or "Mao Zedong Thought."

2. The Chinese belief in the perfectibility of man through education, self-cultivation, and the moral example of rulers was reflected in the CCP style of rule under Mao: party members, steeped in ideology, were meant to lead by their personal commitment and moral example (Theme 4). Mao's philosophy was particularly evident in the treatment of those who deviated from party policy. If anyone strayed from the party line, a "struggle" would be undertaken to reform and return the "deviant" to what was viewed as a useful role in society. "Rectification campaigns" and "criticism/self-criticism" meetings were used to convince people of the error of their opinions (Theme 4 and Theme 5).
3. The Chinese belief in man's perfectibility through education might also be seen in Mao's belief that by participating in the revolutionary struggle, the peasantry could become the key element in the Chinese revolution. This contrasted with the orthodox Marxist view that urban workers, the proletariat, were central to the revolution, but it was appropriate to China's situation as a predominantly peasant society (Theme 1 and Theme 4). Mao disparaged pure book learning however, and emphasized education through practice.
4. Also in contrast with orthodox Marxist theory, Mao believed that man could overcome objective conditions and accomplish things by sheer force of will (or "voluntarism") as depicted in the traditional Chinese fable of "The Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains," which he cited. This has led to tension between being "red" (i.e. politically, and by extension, morally cultivated) and being "expert" (i.e. having scientific, technical, or intellectual experience). This conflict became particularly acute during The Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1968-76), when Mao encouraged "de-professionalization" and "de-urbanization" of industry and in lieu of formal education, sent students to the countryside to live with and learn from the peasants, who were idealized as the source of revolutionary zeal. Party members, whose qualifications were primarily political, had authority over experts, such as factory managers and school principals, reflecting again the Chinese notion that moral qualities, not technical experience, ultimately benefit society (Theme 4).

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Policy Changes Since Mao

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1. Following Mao's death a new approach to economic development was espoused by China's leaders under Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-p'ing). Market mechanisms and material incentives are gradually replacing state control and moral exhortation as techniques for managing the economy, and there is greater interaction with international markets (Theme 6). Foreign investment is welcomed and China's provinces, particularly in the coastal area, are vying to compete with the other newly emerging economic powers in Asia — Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore.
2. China occupies the third largest land area in the world (surpassed only by the Russia and Canada), with the world's largest population (Theme 2), estimated at approximately 1.25 billion people in 2000, or approximately 1/5 of the entire world's population. Population control has become a central element in China's economic development policies, in the recognition that continued growth could negate any gains made in this area and would impose impossible demands on the government's plans to provide adequate food, housing, education and health care.
3. As of 1990, approximately 800 million people were employed in agriculture and 200 million in the urban sector. The goal is a reversal of this 4:1 ratio early in the 21st century, with 80 percent of the population employed in industry and services — a social and economic transformation of major proportions.

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Agrarian Policy and Economic Development

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1. In order to achieve economic modernization, the government that came to power in 1949 had to find a way to squeeze the very small surplus out of the countryside (where 80 percent of the population lived) and invest it in industry (Theme 2). Leaving it to the market was seen as slow, inefficient and inequitable, so the commune system of collectivized agriculture was implemented . Property was pooled to form large tracts of land that could be farmed more efficiently. Land was owned jointly by large groups of peasants who by sheer force of human labor rather than relying on state investment, would together carry out projects of land reclamation and water control. They were rewarded for their communal labor by a system of work points, while the state exacted as much surplus as possible for investment in industrial development. Families were given only very small plots for their personal farming, and markets for the sale of rural produce were limited mostly to the

exchange of goods among local residents. Although the commune system did allow the state to extract the maximum surplus from the countryside, at times it was disastrous, resulting in widespread famine, particularly during 1959-62 at the end of the Great Leap Forward. It was ultimately judged inefficient and having major disincentive effects, and was abandoned in the early 1980s.

2. China continues its efforts to maximize agricultural output while controlling population: it feeds approximately 1/5 of the human race on only 7 percent of the world's arable land; with a population five times that of the United States, it has only half as much land suitable for farming. Under agricultural reforms instituted in the 1980s and expanded further into the 1990s, farming is now contracted to individual peasant families who are encouraged to increase output through market incentives. In addition to the cultivation of crops, peasant families are now encouraged to engage in animal husbandry and various forms of family manufacturing and service enterprise. Rural industry — both owned and operated by village and town governments as well as private and family businesses — has expanded very rapidly into the 1990s. Industry needs to absorb agricultural labor, made available with the introduction of efficient techniques of production, and to provide additional sources of income. Farmers are encouraged to cultivate larger tracts of contiguous fields to improve efficiency. Emphasis on population control is closely related to these policies. The new agricultural policies have been successful in raising output, but the return to family farming works against population control (Theme 2).
3. Another reason for the success of China's economic reforms since the 1980s in raising output is the almost instantaneous re-emergence of the traditional Chinese market system (Theme 6). Local periodic markets, free markets, the use of brokers, local forms of credit, networks of "merchants" and handicraft producers have all reappeared beside the large-scale state-run industries, the smaller rural cooperative industries, and the dynamic, fast-growing sector of small private enterprise. Even local towns are growing and becoming more prosperous as the government once again permits those in rural areas to move to cities or at least to towns. (Permanent migration to large cities is still prohibited for fear of losing an agricultural work force and to avoid the difficulty of feeding a large urban population — however, uncounted tens of millions of rural Chinese are able to stay in the towns and cities as temporary, seasonal migrants).

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The Family and State in China Today

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Family

The family unit persists as the primary unit of social and economic organization in China (Theme 3), despite periodic attempts by the government to incorporate family enterprise into larger socioeconomic units, such as communes. As noted above, recent economic reforms have actually reinforced the traditional importance of the family as an economic unit. This creates problems for birth control programs, as rural families want more children to work the family plots and as people still want sons who will continue the family line and provide ritual sacrifices to parents after they die. Economic liberalization has brought a return to large expenditures for funerals and other family-centered ritual events. Marriage, while now often initiated by the couple, remains a family affair, divorce is discouraged and mediation to resolve marital discord is stressed (Theme 3).

State

1. The persistence of the ideal of state management of society presents a potential obstacle to development. Government is still viewed as responsible for people's welfare and for solving people's problems (Theme 3). Mao's concern with grain production and procurement, to insure adequate supplies to feed the entire population, was in part responsible for economic dislocation and famines in the 1960s. (The requirement of regional self-sufficiency in grain resulted in its being grown in areas more suited to producing commercial crops). Fears of grain shortages are reflected in the state's determination to maintain grain quotas and in demands for regional self-sufficiency.
2. State enterprises have proven difficult to reform, because they have been responsible for ensuring full employment and for funding and delivering a wide range of social insurance and urban services to citizens. The fastest growing sectors of China's economy have been outside of the state sector, and as a result the percentage of output produced by state industry has shrunk from 80 percent in 1980 to less than 50 percent in 2000. The fact that the state sector is shrinking in total importance leads some to believe that China may "grow out of" the state sector, making the task of reform less difficult than it would otherwise be. After 20 years of reform, however, the state sector itself is being placed under increasingly severe financial pressures, as national and regional governments are refusing to subsidize

state enterprises at their previous levels. As a result, there are now relatively severe problems of layoffs and unemployment in China's larger cities, especially in the northeastern and central regions where older heavy industries are located. The challenge of providing unemployment insurance and new jobs for the millions who have been laid off since the mid-1990s is now a pressing social and political issue.

Individual and group

1. The individual's position within the group, whether family or work unit, remains important (Theme 5). In urban areas during the Mao era, most people were assigned to a work unit (factory, office, school) by the government. People rarely change work units, usually remaining in the same work place for the rest of their lives. If a person does find another job, in most cases permission to change must be obtained from the old work unit. Work unit officials keep employee dossiers in which they record personal and political information, adding to them as they see necessary. If the individual is transferred, so is the dossier. However, after the mid-1980s large numbers of people from rural areas began to work in jobs that were temporary in nature, and especially along China's southern coast they worked for foreign enterprises run by businessmen from Hong Kong, Taiwan, or elsewhere. Work in this kind of establishment was more similar to that in other regions of the world outside of China, and this represents the beginnings of a major change.
2. A work unit identity card is the basic form of adult identification, like a driver's license in the United States. It establishes the person's right to reside in the city of employment, (one must be registered in order to establish legal residence in a Chinese city). The larger cities, where life is more comfortable, are officially closed to new permanent residents. However, tens of millions of "temporary residents" now reside in Chinese cities for varying lengths of time during the year. These people find temporary housing in the cities, send much of their earnings back to relatives in the countryside, and eventually return to their places of origin to establish businesses or return to agriculture.
3. In the Mao era work units provided almost all new housing in urban China, and it was very scarce in the early 1980s. At that time there was an average of 6 square yards of housing space per capita, the demand for a larger or better apartment is great. After almost two decades of massive housing construction in Chinese cities, the average housing space has doubled to roughly 12 square yards per person, and urban apartments have plumbing, toilet and shower facilities, heating and electrical systems that were still rare in the early 1980s. A small real estate market has developed, and rents have gone up. Most urban housing remains under government control, apportioned through work units. However, many work units now offer the occupants of apartments the right to purchase their homes outright.
4. In the Mao era, work units also provided meal services, health care, recreational programs; distributed certain kinds of consumer items or foods that are expensive or hard to buy. They usually provided private bus transportation to and from work and sometimes maintained their own guest houses. They provided letters of introduction to enable the bearer to buy scarce airplane or train tickets in comfortable sections. Leaders of work units would also get involved in the personal life of their employees. They provided advice on marriage partners (and in some cases strongly discouraged or refused to allow a marriage to be registered); counseled those seeking a divorce, and usually encouraged them to try to work things out. They mediated in cases of juvenile delinquency among young employees or older employees' children. Work units usually assumed responsibility for ensuring that the children of employees find employment, often establishing a subsidiary unit such as a transportation service or a repair shop, to provide employment. Most of these unusual aspects of the work unit had changed by the end of the 1990s. Meal services became less important as private restaurants and fast food outlets became widespread; health care benefits were maintained but employees had to bear much higher costs; as consumer items became widely available, the role of the work unit in procuring them for employees declined almost completely. And the role of the work unit and its leaders in the personal life of employees has declined considerably.
5. Because the workplace provided so many important services, workers tended to stay in the same job, no matter how dissatisfied they were. As a result, work unit leaders had a great deal of power over them, an especially onerous situation during political campaigns prior to the 1980s, when the party

dictated that its organizations in work units target people for political harassment. It has also led to serious problems of low morale and inefficiency. No matter how poor their performance, workers are almost never fired. Thus, to have a job is to possess an "iron rice bowl." Under the economic reforms of the 1980s, the government began to remove these guarantees of permanent employment, as layoffs, retraining, and transfers became more common. Political campaigns are largely a thing of the past. Labor relations in China are now more similar to countries elsewhere, with pay levels and conditions of employment being the primary concern of workers. In response, strikes and worker protests have become relatively common.

6. In the planned economy of the Mao era, many desirable items and services were in scarce supply and unavailable on markets — access to better schools, consumer goods, housing, jobs, supplies or raw materials for businesses and factories. Because of this, the cultivation of personal connections, or *guanxi* (kuan-hsi), reflecting the traditional Confucian emphasis on personal rule, continued to be important. There are signs, however, that the role of money is increasing relative to connections, as many of these items are becoming more widely available, yet at the same time much more expensive. Urban China is now a highly commercialized and competitive society.

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State and Society: Democracy and Centralism

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1. By reinterpreting Western ideas, the transitional thinkers of the late 1800s and early 1900s left for later generations an unresolved tension between democracy and centralism. Basically, this dilemma is whether democratic rights and other human rights are valuable only to the extent that they help individuals to serve the state (Theme 5), or whether it is also legitimate for the individual to exercise these rights for his own benefit. Some Chinese argue that if the latter is not permitted, the former cannot be achieved.
2. The Chinese must address the question of how their understanding of democratic values and human rights fits into the international dialogue. The official position in China is that Western-style "bourgeois" democracy is false and highly limited. Only "socialist" democracy is authentic, in the sense that it is founded on a true unity of interests among all citizens and between citizens and the state (Theme 3 and Theme 5). But there is a strong popular and reformist view in the PRC today that the official version of democracy is a hollow shell, merely a rationalization for one-party dictatorship or the dictatorship of a strong personality, while the true Chinese democratic ideal of all the citizens pulling together for the welfare of the entire nation (Theme 5) can only be achieved if the citizenry enjoys real freedoms, as in the West.
3. The official position is that human rights are granted and limited by the state in accord with national conditions so as to maintain an orderly process of development; the dissident and reform view is that Western-style freedoms are a universally valid claim of the individual against the state which must be protected, and that to do so ultimately fosters political stability and economic growth.

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China's Cultural Identity: Defining What It Means to be Chinese

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1. The Chinese continue to wrestle with the question of what is it that makes them Chinese: how can they modernize without losing sight of their traditional values and their national identity? Does modernization mean Westernization (Theme 1)? Throughout the country, social and political groups have had different opinions on this, leading to internal conflicts between pro- and anti-Westerners; cries of "spiritual pollution" resulting from Western influence continue to be heard.
2. The view that China's heritage itself was the major obstacle to economic development and modernization was given cataclysmic expression in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, especially at its height in 1966-67, when old books were burned, cultural relics destroyed, and all traces of Confucian thoughts denounced. In the 1980s a reevaluation of China's cultural and historical traditions was embarked upon (Theme 1).

3. The economic reforms of the 1980s have led to disagreement among those who favor the "open-door" policy of contact and economic exchange with the West and those who fear the "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization" of social and economic values that have accompanied economic exchange with the West. Just as in the late 1800s, three positions can be discerned among the Chinese leaders:

- › a "neotraditional" interpretation of Marxism that contains many traditional Chinese values (deference to seniors, paternalistic government, economic self-sufficiency, a Chinese-centered rather than cosmopolitan culture). In recent years the Marxist elements have been submerged into a more general nationalistic pride in China's economic development and its rising political importance in the world system;
- › complete Westernization, including the abandonment of socialism and Marxism (since it is illegal to voice these ideas openly, it is difficult to gauge the strength of this opinion), a position held mainly by younger people and reformers;
- › adoption of Western technology and managerial methods, while attempting to isolate these elements culturally.

The idea of a Chinese-style socialism represents this desire to adopt all that is useful from the West while still retaining a distinctive, and indeed superior, Chinese cultural identity (Theme 1).

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IV. China Today in Global Context

China Today

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1. China's traditional self-image as a universalistic civilization and a world cultural center has made it difficult to forge an identity in a world of nation-states. Against this background, Chinese intellectuals and political leaders have debated the question of how China is to view itself: as a member of the socialist world, the third world, or the Western-oriented international trading society that encompasses Europe, the Americas, Japan, and the rest of the Pacific Rim. This is not an either-or choice necessarily, but there has been discussion and disagreement within China over what its strategic stance should be as it forges a new identity as a nation-state in an increasingly interdependent world (Theme 1).
2. China, with its large population, massive resource-rich territory, and an economy that has developed rapidly for two full decades, appears to be on the road to becoming a great power. China has a substantial nuclear arsenal, is a rising regional military power, and is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council.
3. Within the Pacific region, China is potentially a major economic and political force. Its relations with Japan, Korea, and its southeast Asian neighbors, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, will be determined by how they perceive this power will be used. The Chinese government's stance toward the democratically elected governments on Taiwan constitute a major regional problem. Taiwan's government increasingly claims the right to international autonomy, while the central Chinese government maintains its claim to be the sole legitimate state over all Chinese territory, including Taiwan. This has led to increasing tensions in recent years.
4. Since the late 1980s Japan is China's primary trading partner and source of foreign investment. The Chinese remain sensitive to Japanese atrocities committed in China during W.W.II but the two countries share a long history of cultural interchange and commonalities.
5. After decades of strained relations, trade, cultural and educational exchange between the United States and China continue to increase. Although both countries agree that Taiwan is part of China, the United States has long supported the government on Taiwan and insists that reunification with the mainland should be achieved by peaceful means; China maintains that this is an internal matter to be settled by the Chinese themselves and protests the continuing U.S. commitment to preventing military attack on Taiwan. Having experienced foreign encroachment and intrusion in their internal affairs from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, the Chinese remain sensitive to any perceived challenges to their national sovereignty.

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