

Part I

HISTORICAL LEGACIES

To understand today's China, it is crucial to know something about its past. And especially important for our purposes are those aspects of history that have direct relevance for contemporary developments, whether because of the precedent they set or because current leaders present themselves as breaking away from them or carrying them forward. With this in mind, and determined to avoid a wearying and confusing march through all the dynasties, the following three chapters offer up a selective (but I hope illuminating) quick run through the two millennia plus that get China from Confucius to Mao. The first chapter introduces major early Chinese schools of thought (especially the ideas of Confucius, since today's leaders seek to present today's China as a place where "Confucian" and Communist ideals complement one another). It also looks at the place that democratic traditions have had in China, showing that these are not just recent imports from the West. The second chapter focuses on political structures and major political ideas, including the concept of the "Mandate of Heaven," which legitimated imperial rule with reference to the interplay between spiritual and earthly dynamics. As well, it examines the similarities and differences between the ways that successive ruling houses (dynasties) governed China from the 3rd century B.C.E. until 1912, the year that China's last emperor abdicated and a republican form of government

was established. Rounding out this first part of the book is a chapter on "Revolutions and Revolutionaries," which looks at the events and people who transformed the country during the period lasting from 1912 until Mao's death. It ends with a look at Mao's posthumous legacy, emphasizing the varied ways that the former leader has been seen and treated in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since his demise in 1976.

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SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Who was Confucius?

Confucius (551 B.C.E.–479 B.C.E.) was a teacher and philosopher who lived during the Zhou (Chou) Dynasty (1045–256 B.C.E.), in what is known as the Spring and Autumn era (722 B.C.E.–481 B.C.E.). As with those of his near contemporary Socrates, none of Confucius's writings have survived, and his views come down to us via a text produced after his death.¹ This is the *Analects*, which contains short statements attributed to Confucius (the origins of the "Confucius says" fortune cookie slips, though these were invented either in Japan in the 1800s or in California in the 1900s) and dialogues between the sage and his disciples.² The book covers a range of topics, from how a "true gentleman" behaves in his daily life (right down to how he eats with proper decorum) to how a ruler should govern (with a benevolent concern for the well-being of his subjects). One of its most famous statements, linked to both the high value placed on education in Chinese culture and the meritocratic aspect of the Chinese political tradition, is that people are pretty much alike at birth but become differentiated via learning. Another well-known adage from the *Analects* says simply that it is a great pleasure to have friends come to visit from afar.

This adage gained new fame on August 8, 2008, when it was quoted at the start of the Beijing Games. The line, which was

quoted again by a young man who put a question to President Obama during the Shanghai “town hall” meeting that was part of the American leader’s November 2009 trip to China, had obvious relevance for the Olympic Opening Ceremony, since the live audience for the grand spectacle held in the Bird’s Nest Stadium included foreign leaders, among them George W. Bush (the first sitting American president to attend the Olympics in a foreign country) and Russia’s Vladimir Putin. Quoting Confucius also fit with the overall goal of the pageant and of Chinese Olympic publicity efforts generally, which was to demonstrate that the PRC has become a country that is open to the outside world and respectful of China’s ancient as well as revolutionary traditions and values.

What were Confucius’s core ideas?

The vision of morality sketched out in the Analects emphasizes the importance of three things: education, ritual, and relationships that are hierarchical yet provide benefits to both superior and inferior. Education was important because it was by studying the classical texts that a person could learn about and begin to emulate the actions of the most virtuous figures of past ages, including the legendary sages Yao and Shun (who lived long before the founding of the Zhou Dynasty) and figures such as the Duke of Zhou (who lived just a few centuries before Confucius). Ritual was important because it was a physical acting out of the best practices of earlier—and, to Confucius’s way of thinking, purer—ages. And relationships in which there was a clear distinction between superior and inferior were valued, since in these the responsibilities of each side were clear.

What was his political vision?

Confucius saw political relationships as familial relationships writ large, meaning, for example, that rulers should behave

toward those they governed the way that fathers should behave toward their children. He emphasized the importance of four relationships in particular, all of which he saw as reciprocal and all of which he thought involved analogous combinations of benevolence coming from one party and deference from the other. These relationships were those of ruler and minister, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, and husband and wife. (Later, followers of Confucius added a fifth relationship, more egalitarian than the others but never stressed as much: that between friend and friend.)

In each of the four main dyads discussed by Confucius, the former party was expected to protect the latter, and in return the latter was expected to be obedient to the former. The social order was threatened whenever people failed to act according to their prescribed roles.

Confucius lived in a time of civil wars and general instability, which continued during the Warring States era (475–221 B.C.E.) that followed soon after his death. He presented his views as providing a blueprint that, if followed by a just ruler, would guarantee that a state would have order within its own borders. He also promised that a ruler who adhered to his teachings would expand the reach of his state, since people living in other kingdoms would flock to live in such a peaceful, well-governed land.

How important was history to Confucius?

History was crucially important to Confucius. He claimed that a golden age of harmony had existed during the Western Zhou era (1046–770 B.C.E.), the time of the Duke of Zhou, the historical figure he admired most. Confucius called on people to study that age, which he lauded as a time when people knew their proper places within the social order.

According to the Analects, the first thing that a true king could do to improve the current age was to honor the past and revive the rituals and even the music of Western Zhou times,

as a means to help all members of society rediscover proper deportment. This ruler should also ensure that his own behavior toward his subjects was a model of paternal benevolence at all moments, since this would lead to emulation by all others in a comparably superior position, so that a land with a good ruler would inevitably be one with good fathers (and other lineage elders) and good husbands.

There was a self-serving side to this argument. To accomplish these things, Confucius and his followers claimed, it would serve the true king well to rely upon advisers who were thoroughly versed in classical works and had made a specialty of studying the ways of the past. In other words, Confucius and his followers suggested that rulers heed the advice of scholarly specialists in ritual such as themselves.

Has Confucius always been venerated in China?

Confucius has not, in fact, always been venerated in China, but rather has had many ups and downs over the centuries. In some periods, his teachings have been ignored, though the notion that the best officials would be scholars and that education was important was prized throughout much of China's past, and in some eras, he has been despised.

You would not know this from the way he was treated during the Olympics. Not only did the Opening Ceremony begin with a quote from the Analects, but also a modern-day member of the Kong lineage that claims Confucius as an ancestor (the foreign term "Confucius" is derived from Kong Zi, or "Master Kong") played a symbolically important role in the pre-Games torch run. During the Opening Ceremony, three thousand performers dressed as the sage's disciples paraded through the Bird's Nest Stadium. This imagery was meant to suggest that for millennia (and presumably without interruption), Confucius has been a kind of national saint, a core symbol of China.

This notion would have seemed strange to many people living in China at various points in the past, including the early

1970s. Forty years ago, the odds would have seemed very long indeed that the day would ever come when Confucius would be accorded this place of honor in a national ceremony presided over by a head of the Chinese Communist Party.

At that point, late in the Maoist era (1949–1976), Confucius was excoriated in a mass campaign that presented him as a man whose hide-bound, anti-egalitarian ideas had done great harm to many generations of Chinese men and even more damage to many generations of Chinese women. He was blamed for having supported a wide range of unjust and immoral practices, from ancestor worship to viewing daughters as far less valuable than sons, which had kept China in a "feudal" state for millennia. And yet, in today's China, his views, albeit sometimes in modified form, are back in favor—so much so that in August 2008 television audiences throughout the country and around the world could see the then paramount leader of the Communist Party, President Hu Jintao (1942–), smiling down on those three thousand actors cast as Confucius's disciples, all of whom, incidentally, belonged to the performing troupes of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Had Confucius been an athlete and risen that quickly from has-been status to glory, Western television broadcasters would surely have dubbed him the "Comeback Kid" of the Beijing Games. As it was, the announcers tended to simply follow the script provided to them by the Xinhua (New China) News Agency and refer to the respectful treatment of Confucius as a natural expression of China's reverence for the traditions and great men of the country's past.

Was Confucius celebrated in his own times?

The sage was not particularly successful in gaining followers in his own lifetime. He would occasionally win the ear of a ruler, but he never had the opportunity he sought of being the long-term adviser of a major king. And things did not improve dramatically in the centuries immediately following his death,

though important refinements of and additions to his thought were made during that time by figures such as Mencius (372–289 B.C.E.), second in importance only to Confucius in the development of what would later become known as Confucianism (the notion that their ideas constituted a clearly defined creed, comparable to a Western religion, was a much later invention).³ Up until the end of the Warring States period, in fact, Confucius's ideas were still but one school of thought, others being Daoism (Taoism), Legalism, and a host of now obscure creeds that were occasionally embraced by one or another ruler of the many competing kingdoms that made up what we now call "China." Even when Confucius's teachings took hold, it was often in a diluted form, combined with aspects of competing schools.

The proponents of some rival schools of thought, moreover, scoffed at Confucius and his beliefs. He was sometimes mocked by Daoists, who took a more egalitarian view of social relations than did the followers of Confucius and prized spontaneity over rituals, and by Legalists, who insisted that rulers should not strive to be admired for their virtues but rather take steps to ensure that they were respected and feared for the way they distributed rewards and punishments. The Daoists and Legalists, though disagreeing with one another on many things, agreed that the emphasis that Confucius put on the study of dusty classics was misguided. The former thought it wrong because the golden age they admired was the era of simplicity that preceded the creation of early Zhou Dynasty texts. The latter, a group of pragmatists, argued that rulers should adapt to the challenges of each new age.

As late as 221 B.C.E., when several of the embattled kingdoms of the Warring States were brought under the control of the head of the kingdom of Qin (Ch'in), it was still far from clear that Confucius would end up the most influential of early philosophers. The founder of the Qin Dynasty (221–206 B.C.E.), who became known to posterity as China's first emperor, had no time for Confucian ideas. He favored the Legalists, who told

him how to maximize his authority, rather than the scholars, who told him how to behave benevolently. Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor, is now remembered (correctly) for the Terracotta Army built to serve him after death and (incorrectly) for creating the Great Wall. While he did build some large fortifications, the tourist sites one visits today and are often told date back to his time actually tend to be remnants of a much later wall-building dynasty, that of the Ming (1368–1644).⁴ Yet the legend that Qin Shi Huang created the Great Wall is believable because the Legalist ideas he embraced enabled him to summon huge armies of laborers on demand.

The few historical accounts written near the lifetime of the first emperor, all crafted by historians serving the next dynasty, present Qin Shi Huang as a cruel despot.⁵ In these works, he is described as providing a model of how not to rule, and as being someone who was so hated by his subjects that the dynasty he had dreamed would go on for centuries was overthrown by a popular rebellion that broke out soon after his death, just as his son's reign was beginning. As a result, while one can find traces of Legalist influence in the belief systems of many later dynasties, the creed was almost never officially endorsed after the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) was founded.

When did the ideas of Confucius gain influence?

It was not until the Qin Dynasty (whose name helped lead to China's being called "China," a term that sounds nothing like the primary Chinese terms for the country, such as "Zhongguo," meaning "Middle Kingdom") had fallen and the Han one was established that the ideas of Confucius became a core part of official ideology. And even then, Confucianism was combined with elements drawn from other schools of thought, such as Daoism and the Yin-Yang line of cosmological thinking (that emphasizes the interconnectedness of things that seem clearly different or even opposite), which was

sometimes thought of as simply a part of the Daoist creed but was at other points viewed as its own school of thought.

Confucian ideals and practices were extolled by most successive dynasties, though they were often, as in the Han period, braided together with concepts and rituals taken from other creeds. These included Daoism (always a presence) and Chinese folk religious traditions. In addition, Confucianism was eventually influenced greatly by ideas associated with the imported but quickly domesticated belief system of Buddhism, which reached an early point of high influence in China during the Tang (T'ang) Dynasty (618–907), a cosmopolitan era when many ideas and objects flowed in through overland trade routes such as the Silk Road. Buddhist concepts were crucial in contributing to modifications within the Confucian tradition during the Song (Sung) Dynasty (960–1279) that were so great that the term “neo-Confucianism” is used to describe them.

How was Confucius viewed a century ago?

An important dip in Confucius's fortunes came in the early 1900s. Many Chinese intellectuals of the time argued that an attachment to “Confucian” values was responsible for the country's decline. They blamed Confucius for China's position of backwardness vis-à-vis the West and Japan, a formerly Confucian country that had begun to embrace European and American ways in the mid-19th century.

The most important pre-1949 anti-Confucian upsurge occurred during the New Culture movement (1915–1923). This was an iconoclastic struggle that one leader, Hu Shi (Hu Shih) (1891–1962), a student of the American philosopher John Dewey, would describe as “the Chinese Renaissance” in a book by that title based on lectures he gave in Chicago in the 1930s. The Chinese Renaissance also had things in common with the Enlightenment (its radical questioning of tradition and prizing of rationality) and the Western counterculture movement of the 1960s (its celebration of the value of youth, for example, and its celebration of new forms of art and literature).⁶

Participants in the New Culture movement, including a young Mao Zedong and the great Chinese writer Zhou Shuren (Chou Hsu-ren) (1881–1936), who published under the pen name Lu Xun (Lu Hsün), wrote scathingly about how Confucius had shaped a China in which age was venerated at the expense of youth, women were repressed, individualism and creativity were stifled, and a cult of tradition prevented innovation. To join the modern world, they argued, China needed to jettison Confucius and everything that he represented, embracing the best that the West had to offer as, they claimed, Japan had done—resulting in its rising in global influence. They also insisted that intellectuals stop using classical Chinese, which was far removed from vernacular forms of communication, and develop a “plain speech” (*baihua*) form of writing to take its place.

Some, but not all, New Culture veterans would stick to anti-Confucian positions for decades. Others, though, would eventually abandon these, after throwing their lot in with the Nationalist Party, which began as a culturally radical group but later became a culturally conservative organization.

The Nationalists of the 1930s, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), would, in fact, be responsible for a major Confucian revival. Chiang insisted that China's best route forward was to find a way to combine Confucian values with the most advanced technologies available in and best ideas coming from Japan and the West. Despite being a Christian, Chiang elevated the Chinese sage's birthday to the status of a state holiday. He argued that the emphasis on tradition, family, social order, and clearly delineated hierarchies in Confucianism could go hand in hand with the teachings of the Bible.

Is Confucianism a religion?

Confucius himself was more of a philosopher than a religious figure. Even though his emphasis on looking up to elders fit in well with the practices of ancestor worship, which predated his time and remained a mainstay of Chinese rural and

sometimes also court life for many centuries after his death, he claimed that it was so hard to understand the affairs of human beings that he was in no position to speculate about the details of the afterlife.

Nevertheless, throughout history, he has occasionally been elevated to the status of a saint or a godlike figure, with temples being devoted to him (including some that have recently been spruced up by the regime) and his hometown of Qufu being transformed into a pilgrimage site (with, lately, a bit of a theme-park aspect thrown in). Ironically, the period of rule by the Christian Chiang Kai-shek was a time in which Confucius was revered, as, even more ironically, is the current era of rule by the allegedly still atheist Communist Party.

Foreigners have often looked at China and said that the country has three major religions: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Though Confucianism is more a philosophy than a religion, Daoism and Buddhism are indeed important systems of thought in China. Yet religious identity is also far more fluid than in the Judeo-Christian West, as many Chinese will move among the three depending on context. Someone, for example, might worship at a Confucian temple right before an important school exam (due to Confucius's association with learning) but also consider him- or herself a practicing Buddhist, adhering to a vegetarian diet and reciting sutras every morning. Buddhism, like all other religions, was suppressed during the Mao era, but it has enjoyed a popular revival in recent decades. Like Confucian temples, many Buddhist ones have also recently been renovated and, sometimes, turned into tourist destinations where people can observe "releasing life" ceremonies (live fish and birds are released into the wild), walk through a restored temple complex, have lunch at a vegetarian restaurant, and finish their visit with a trip to the gift shop.

How did Confucius fare after 1949?

Not surprisingly, when the Communist Party took power on October 1, 1949, after driving Chiang into exile on Taiwan, the

birthday of Confucius immediately ceased being celebrated. The anti-Confucius campaign of the early 1970s was just the most radical and focused expression of an anti-Confucian viewpoint that predominated throughout the Mao years and that continued during the brief post-Mao period, when China's paramount leader was Hua Guofeng (Hua Kuo-feng) (1921–2008), a kind of place-holder authority figure who was soon edged out of the top spot by Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-p'ing) (1904–1997) and spent the last decades of his life holding only relatively minor official posts.

The first decades of Communist rule were, moreover, a time when, contrary to Confucian ideals, egalitarian values were celebrated—though new forms of inequality took root, with cadres emerging as a class with special privileges. During this period, the government worked to minimize the importance of the family as a social unit by creating new communal units, such as collectives and communes. It was a time when China's leadership stressed adaptation to present conditions and creating a new future rather than celebrating any past golden age. It was also one of those rare times in Chinese history when Legalism was sometimes viewed in a positive way. This is because Mao, in typically iconoclastic fashion, sometimes said that when it came to China's various imperial rulers, the first emperor, with his Legalist ideas, disdain for book-learning detached from pragmatic concerns, and ability to get big things done, was among the best.

Why is Confucius back in favor?

The renewal of official veneration of Confucius, though representing an about-face for the Communist Party, is not that hard to understand. It fits in with a general tendency by the current regime to emphasize continuity with the past. Official statements are full of references to the country's glorious "5,000 years" of "unbroken" cultural development and references to China being the "only unified and continuous civilization" that still has a presence in the modern world.⁷ This assertion

is a problematic one, given how many changes over time there have been in the size and shape of China as a country and the values and traditions of the people living within its borders. Nevertheless, a mix-and-match approach to the past is now the order of the day, in which anything that suggests past greatness is held up as worthy of respect.

The image of China's present as carrying forward elements of its distant past is actively fostered via positive references to and celebrations of not just Confucius but also other people who lived during ancient times and symbols linked to very early periods of history. This is true even of sites that were seen as reminders of the failings rather than the glories of the past as recently as Mao's time. For example, Mao did not treat the Forbidden City as sacred. He was happy to allow the home of the emperors of China's last two dynasties, the Ming and the Qing (Ch'ing) (1644–1911), fall into disrepair, and during the Mao years, the grounds sometimes contained sculptures that drew attention to the unjust ways that ordinary Chinese were treated by rulers and landlords in the dark period that came before the Communist Revolution. Now, however, the old palace complex has been carefully restored and is presented as a symbol of the glamour and beauty—not decadence—of the past. The Forbidden City is a site that visiting dignitaries are supposed to tour, as President Obama did on his first trip to China in 2009, and view as representing the glories of the country's artistic and architectural traditions.

It is also telling that the old pattern of feeling a need to choose between celebrating the words of Confucius or the deeds of the first emperor has been abandoned. The Analects and the Terracotta Warriors are now treated as complementary symbols of an ancient China that achieved great things in many realms.

This promiscuous pairing of ancient icons often thought to represent contrasting traditions fits in with the desire of China's current leaders to cultivate national pride by presenting the country as one that was great in the past and has

become great again on their watch. This is partly because it is in the regime's interest for people of Chinese descent in Taiwan, Australia, the United States, and other parts of the world (even those with no love for Communism) to identify with, travel to, and invest in the PRC.

There is also a more specific reason that Confucius is back. This is because there is a good fit between the emphasis that Confucius and his followers have always placed on social harmony and the focus that Hu Jintao and other current Chinese leaders have placed on stability.

Mao, in keeping with Marxist tradition, stressed that progress is made via conflict and struggle. By contrast, though China's current leaders claim to still adhere to Marxism, there are strong—and intentional—Confucian resonances to the slogans championing cooperation in creating a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*) that have become identified with Hu.

There was even a moment during the Olympics Opening Ceremony when the contours of this catchphrase's main character, “he” (harmony), were visually displayed in an eye-catching manner. And the list of fifty officially approved slogans for the large parade held on October 1, 2009, to mark the sixtieth birthday of the PRC included several with “hexie,” one of which called on the people to help the party “build a socialist harmonious society and promote social equity and justice.”

How exactly has the regime used Confucius in recent years?

In addition to sanctioning the sage's appearance during the Olympics and echoing the Analects and later Confucian texts in calls for “harmonious” social relations, since 2004, the Chinese government has sponsored the creation and funding of “Confucius Institutes” in many parts of the world. These are modeled in part on the German Goethe Institutes, and their stated intent is simply to further understanding of China's cultural legacy via things such as offering classes in

the Chinese language and courses on Chinese history that emphasize continuities with the past and the "5,000 years of Chinese civilization" idea. One key contrast with the Goethe Institutes and other comparable undertakings, though, is that, as Lionel Jensen stresses in a careful look at the topic, unlike their more independent German counterparts, Confucius Institutes are "largely underwritten by and must report to the Chinese government."⁸

In the West, controversy has sometimes followed these Confucius Institutes. In the most extreme cases, commentators have suggested that they are part of a Chinese Communist plot to infiltrate American communities. Pointing to the fact that the money and personnel to staff the institutes come from a ministry within the PRC government, such alarmism harkens back to the "Red Scare" of the 1950s. There is also, though, a much more sensible basis for concern. Namely, some scholars worry that a university that has funding coming from an arm of the Beijing government could end up curtailing intellectual freedom on campus, perhaps in subtle ways. The Chinese authorities have used many kinds of pressure—for example, to try to get officials around the world to refrain from meeting publicly with the Dalai Lama—so it is easy to imagine veiled or overt threats of a removal of Confucius Institute funds from an organization that sponsored a talk by him. Sometimes, representatives of the Chinese government are invited to attend campus speaker series supported by Confucius Institutes, so it is also possible that organizers of these series might steer clear of inviting foreign scholars with particularly close ties to dissidents in exile or mainland political prisoners to be part of these events, simply to minimize the chance for any awkwardness on the part of a patron.⁹

What is too rarely noted in commentaries on these Confucius Institutes is that, given the anti-Confucius stance of the Chinese Communist Party under Mao, Beijing's choice of nomenclature is shocking to those with a sense of history. It is as though, late in the history of the Soviet Union, Moscow had

set up "Tsar Nicholas Institutes" to spread understanding of Russian culture around the world.

The revival of official Confucianism, which has led to the restoration of temples devoted to Confucius and the erection of statues of the sage (in some parts of China, these now outnumber the ones of Mao left over from the days when those proliferated), is one of many echoes in today's China of the era of Chiang Kai-shek. Now, as then, the leader of a party that had previously been associated with upheaval (the Nationalist one also began as a radical revolutionary organization) is drawing inspiration from a philosopher who championed tradition and harmony.

There has also been a popular revival of interest in Confucius. One of the best-selling nonfiction books published in the PRC this century has been a work on the Analects by the academic-turned-media-personality Yu Dan. Her book, a kind of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* with Chinese characteristics that has sold millions of copies and has also appeared in English, has been criticized for bowdlerizing the ideas of Confucius. But there is no question that it has proved very popular.¹⁰

The government has hailed the Yu Dan phenomenon as evidence of the complementary nature of the people's and the regime's longing for social harmony. One could, though, also see it as part of a broader hunger among disillusioned people for something new to believe in—even if that something new is merely something very old repackaged in a novel way.

Yet the PRC regime has subtly scaled back its sponsorship of Confucius since the Olympics. One of the oddest incidents involving the sage occurred in 2011, when a thirty-one-foot-tall statue of Confucius was installed in Tiananmen Square, China's most symbolically fraught public space, that January. In April, however, the massive statue disappeared overnight. It had been moved to a courtyard within the National Museum, just off the square. While government leaders claimed this had always been their plan for the statue, the sudden and covert nature of the move raised eyebrows among those who

scrutinize the regime's actions to see which way the political wind is blowing.¹¹ Although the Chinese leadership continues to emphasize Confucius and the need to develop a harmonious society, the state revival of Confucianism is not as intense now as it was around 2008.

Did Confucianism hinder imperial China's economic development?

The influential German social theorist Max Weber certainly thought Confucianism hindered imperial China's economic development. According to Weber, while Protestantism encouraged the sort of innovation and concern with transformation that drives capitalism, the emphasis Confucius put on recapturing the glories of past times was a brake on development. In addition, Confucian texts often claimed that, aside from the ruling family, there were four basic social groups in China; the two most valuable ones in the eyes of Confucius and his followers were scholars (who made sure that the country was well governed) and farmers (who provided society with food); of lesser value were artisans (who were not essential but made products that were useful); and least valued of all, indeed despised, were the merchants (who did not contribute to the good of the community at all).

There are two problems, however, with thinking of Confucianism as a block on economic development.

First, as work by Kenneth Pomeranz has shown, as late as 1750, the most economically vibrant parts of Confucian China were roughly as commercialized and prosperous as the most economically vibrant parts of Protestant Europe. Factors other than modes of thought thus need to be seen as leading to what Pomeranz calls the "great divergence" between Western and Chinese economic development after that point.¹² Other things that made a difference, Pomeranz claims, included the distribution of natural resources (England was lucky to have large coal supplies located in parts of the country that were

close to its commercial centers, for example) and the various forms that imperialism took, with European empires expanding overseas, whereas the Qing just moved inland. Britain's extraordinary takeoff, he insists, had much to do with the fact that it could make use of land-intensive products from overseas, facilitated by the legacies of slavery and colonialism and compensating for Europe's relatively low agricultural yields per acre, and had domestic coal deposits that were relatively easy to access. The Qing had plenty of areas to mine, but they were in regions that were hard to reach before the era of railroads.

The second problem with the idea that Confucianism and advanced economic development cannot go hand in hand is that many of the economic success stories of recent decades have involved East Asian countries that, like China, were influenced greatly by Confucianism. After the rapid takeoff of Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, the notion that Confucian values stand in the way of capitalism seems untenable.

There is also the fact that today's China, while not exactly capitalist—some 70 percent of the top five hundred companies in the PRC are state owned and much of its overall wealth is in the form of government assets—has experienced a great economic boom. That this transpired in an era of renewed celebration of Confucius is another nail in the Weberian conceptual coffin.

In the wake of recent economic shifts, some people have turned Weber upside down and claimed that, while Confucian thinkers may have dismissed merchants as unproductive, the kind of family-centered and generally collectivist and cooperative approach to life fostered by Confucianism is conducive to certain forms of highly profitable business activities. Whether or not this is true, the idea that people who share "Confucian" values, however defined, are naturally well disposed to do business with one another definitely matters. The largest investors in joint enterprises

with the Chinese state have tended to be companies based in neighboring countries, including Taiwan, that see themselves as sharing a cultural bond, partly via Confucius, with the PRC.

*Does China have an indigenous
"democratic" tradition?*

Chinese modes of thought are sometimes described as particularly well suited to authoritarianism, and the emphasis on hierarchy and deference within Confucianism and on harsh punishments within Legalism lend credence to this notion. And yet, there are also some elements of the multistranded intellectual tradition of China that are more democratic than authoritarian.

For example, as already noted, Daoist classics encourage people to view hierarchical relationships with skepticism and question whether those in positions of superiority are any better than or different from anyone else. This is not a "democratic" notion in the specific sense of suggesting that elections be held to determine who should lead a country, but it is a viewpoint that provides a basis for challenging rather than accepting power relations within a society.

In addition, even within the Confucian tradition, there is a democratic strand. This is linked to the concept, not exclusively Confucian but certainly associated with Confucianism, of the "Mandate of Heaven" (*Tianming*) as the basis for political authority. The idea here is that emperors were the earthly representation of Heaven (*Tian*), a depersonalized spiritual force whose role in running the universe was comparable to that of the emperor's role on earth (literally, *Tianxia*, or "the realm of all under Heaven").

Heaven offered a mandate (*ming*) to each new dynasty, according to this view, but this right to govern was revocable. If an emperor failed to carry out his role correctly, Heaven could transfer the mandate to a new ruler.

Mencius provided the most elaborate early vision of the workings of this process. He claimed that rulers deserved to govern only as long as they demonstrated a true affection for the people and protected their interests. This complemented the emphasis in the *Analects* on the ruler being like a "father" to his subjects. Mencius went so far as to claim that rulers who failed to behave benevolently toward those below them in the social order forfeited their right to be treated deferentially.

In one famous formulation, he stated that while rulers govern "by the will of Heaven, Heaven hears with the ears and sees with the eyes of the people." This meant that if the people, with good cause, were thoroughly dissatisfied, Heaven would naturally find it suitable to stop protecting the emperor and would add its support to those seeking to establish a new dynasty. In such a case, rebellion was both likely and morally justified.

This is, again, not an argument for elections, which those of us living in the West and some other countries (India, for example) tend to equate with democracy. Still, it is an important expression of a kind of democratic sentiment.

*What is the Chinese term for democracy
and what exactly does it mean?*

The standard Chinese term for "democracy" is "*minzhu*," which, like many complex concepts, is composed of two characters with separate meanings. "*Min*" means "people," while "*zhu*" means "rule."

This compound word, like the original Greek term for democracy (which has a parallel etymology tied to "people" and "rule"), can be interpreted in various ways. It can conjure images of direct rule by the masses or imply simply that the best government is led by a ruler who pays great attention to the interests of the population at large. There is another interpretation of *minzhu* that has long been popular among some highly educated Chinese. This might be called representative

democracy sans elections; the idea is that intellectuals should advise rulers to ensure that the interests of the people are respected.

One basis for this idea, which is linked to the emphasis Confucius put on learning, is that, from Han times onward, civil service examinations were used to fill many government positions. The use of tests that required mastery of Confucian precepts for those seeking high office became particularly important after the expansion of the system during the Song Dynasty. By no means did emperors always take the counsel of intellectuals, but the idea that intellectuals are natural spokespeople for the masses took root and has endured.

If the government's promotion of Confucianism represents one kind of reworking of an old idea to further a 21st-century mission, then efforts by critical intellectuals to present the current regime as morally bankrupt and to call for change in the name of the people represents another. Both proponents of the current order and those fighting to change the way China is governed can tap into elements of the country's multistranded intellectual and political traditions.

2

IMPERIAL CHINA

What were the main early dynasties?

A standard way to break up Chinese history is to start with 221 B.C.E., the year that Qin Shi Huang transformed various small states into something big enough to qualify as an empire. There were earlier dynasties ruling part or all of the land just north and just south of the Yellow River, which make up the heartland of what we now call "China" and where many Chinese capital cities, including the present one, Beijing, have stood.

The earliest of these ancient dynasties was the Xia (Hsia) (2070–1600 B.C.E.), often viewed as a mythic entity, since there is little reliable evidence to show that it even existed. Next came the Shang (1760?–1122? B.C.E.), whose rituals of state included the use of oracle bones (animal parts used for divination), some of which have been unearthed. These contain writing that can be linked to the characters that were used in classical texts and then eventually became the building blocks of modern Chinese. Following this came the Zhou (1046–256 B.C.E.), whose early years in power Confucius extolled as a perfect time. None of these dynasties controlled nearly as great a territory as the Qin.¹

The leader of the rebellion that toppled the Qin became the first emperor of the Han Dynasty, which would transform China into a much larger country and, as we have seen, would

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The leader of the rebellion that toppled the Qin became the first emperor of the Han Dynasty, which would transform China into a much larger country and, as we have seen, would

be the first to give the ideas of Confucius a central part in state ideology. The Han period of rule and expansion was roughly contemporaneous with and similar in some basic ways to the Roman age in the West.

The Han grand historian Sima Qian (Ssu-Ma Ch'ien) (c. 145 or 135–86 B.C.E.), China's first great writer of history and someone often still considered the preeminent Chinese chronicler, repudiated the activities of the Qin. Nevertheless, in the first of many ironic continuities of this kind, the Han left in place basic elements of the political system that China's first emperor had created, including the use of a civil bureaucracy differentiated from the military, a key Qin innovation. One indication of just how important the Han period was is that, while the term "Qin" helped provide a name for the country, the name of the following dynasty was taken as the name for the land's inhabitants. The majority population of the PRC is dubbed the "Han," and official statistical counts place nine out of ten citizens of the country in this broadly defined ethnic group.

How did dynasties rule?

One enduring feature of the Chinese imperial system was the special status of the emperor as both religious and political figure, a man who performed ritual functions as an intermediary between Tian (Heaven) and the human world. Another enduring feature was the central political role played not just by the monarch but also by members of his family (and, rarely, her family; with only a couple of exceptions, the ruler of imperial China was a man).

In China's imperial system, in contrast to many other monarchical ones, the successor to the emperor was not necessarily his eldest son. As a result, intense political maneuvering before and immediately after a ruler's death was common.

In addition, since the emperor often had children with more than one wife and one or more concubines, the stakes of succession were great for many people. And there were

many mothers, uncles, aunts, and so forth of a monarch or monarch-to-be who could wield influence, especially since close family members were sometimes appointed regents of young successors to the Dragon Throne.

The most powerful people in imperial China, other than members of the ruling family, tended to be either scholar-officials or eunuchs. The former group included ministers of state, provincial governors, and the crucially important local magistrates, who fulfilled at the local level a comparable mixture of ritual and political roles to those the emperor performed for the entire empire.

Having only eunuchs as palace servants and banning men capable of impregnating royal wives and concubines from living in the palace ensured order within the imperial household; thus, in this realm, the potential for disputes over the paternity of potential heirs was minimized. The highest-ranking bureaucrats were always supposed to be more powerful than any eunuch, but due to their special access to the emperor and other members of the royal family, eunuchs sometimes had the greatest influence. When dynasties were criticized for becoming corrupt, eunuchs were often blamed—though in a misogynist vein, imperial decline was also sometimes attributed to the nefarious behind-the-scenes workings of palace women, from mothers of young emperors to the scheming concubines of elderly male rulers.²

What was the "dynastic cycle"?

The concept of the "dynastic cycle" held that one dynasty should periodically give way to another. The founders of dynasties (whether rebels who succeeded or the leaders of foreign armies who seized the country) could come to power, according to this line of thought, only because Heaven saw them as virtuous and deserving to rule. Over time, however, their descendants were likely to become less mindful of the people's needs, a variation on the Western adage that power

corrupts. The political order would then need to be purified through transfer of the mandate to a new group. This would restart the cycle of virtuous founder and decadent descendants.

Because the natural and the political worlds were viewed as analogous to and in sync with one another, indications that the Mandate of Heaven had been lost by the current leader and was ready to be claimed by a new one included unusual events, such as natural disasters. Eclipses could also be interpreted as signals of Heaven's displeasure about some occurrence in the human world. Emperors therefore wanted to know when these would occur, in order to be prepared to offer the people a suitable interpretation of the event.

What were the political implications of this cyclical view?

In contrast to monarchical orders in which every new ruler can trace descent to a common ancestor (e.g., the current Japanese emperor claims to be part of the same lineage as the first one), an order in which there were occasional shifts in rulers was assumed to be a good thing.

Bureaucrats and ministers (who generally attained their posts by passing exams rather than by inheriting their positions à la European aristocrats) faced a tough choice whenever rebellions started or foreign armies threatened the state. They had to decide whether the current ruling house had lost the Mandate of Heaven or not, and whether, in guarding the interests of the people, they should or should not switch sides.

Finally, since new dynasties often maintained their predecessors' institutions, there was considerable continuity. A new dynasty often relied heavily upon officials who had served the previous dynasty and then jumped ship to join the new one.

Were all dynasties the same?

Despite the continuities listed so far, there were always important variations among dynasties, with each leaving its distinct

mark. One basic difference among dynasties is that they governed territories of radically varying sizes. A map of today's PRC shows borders defining "China" that came into being only after the Qing Dynasty had engaged in many decades of imperial expansion after taking power in 1644.

Even some very significant dynasties governed territories much smaller than this. Consider, for instance, that the Song (960–1279), who ruled a land mass much less than half the size of the PRC, not only oversaw the institutionalization of the civil service system but also governed during a period of rapid economic development so dramatic that some scholars locate the start of "modern" China in that period.

The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) had a larger domain than that of the Song. But Ming emperors controlled neither Tibet, the mountainous region far west of the Yellow River heartland that the PRC claims has been part of China for many centuries, nor Xinjiang, the region in the northwestern corner of the PRC whose name (the characters for it mean "New Frontier") refers to its late incorporation into the Chinese empire (during Qing times).

Just as there were dynasties that sometimes failed to govern lands that are now considered part of China, there were also emperors who ruled territory that is no longer part of the PRC. Vietnam, for instance, was sometimes but not always part of the Chinese empire before the 20th century, and there were periods when parts of it were or were not under the control of China's emperor.

In addition, dynasties that came to power via wars of conquest took on the roles of the rulers they displaced but always modified the system they inherited. This was especially true of dynasties that had their ethnic and cultural roots on the steppes of Central and Northeastern Asia, in regions such as Mongolia and Manchuria that were to the north of and less agricultural than the Chinese heartland.

Under Kublai Khan and other rulers of the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), for example, Confucian exams were suspended.

And the early Manchu emperors of the Qing wrote some documents in their native language and some documents in Chinese.

The Qing set up a dual-track official system in which some posts were reserved for ethnic Manchus, while others were given to members of the Han ethnic group, to which the majority of people living south of the Great Wall belonged. The Qing also maintained special troops (the "Banner forces"), composed only of people who traced their descent to the northern steppes.

How did dynasties interact with foreign countries?

One shared characteristic of most dynasties was a view that the land the emperor governed was of central importance. Chinese emperors, like the heads of many other empires, tended to think of their domain as the most important in the immediate region, perhaps even in the entire world. Partly because Confucian thought emphasized clear hierarchies, the emperors expected heads of other states to treat them with deference, in return offering these entities protection and benevolence.

Nevertheless, the way that individual dynasties and indeed individual emperors dealt with the outside world varied. Some rulers were much more open to and involved in international trade and exploration than were others. There were Ming emperors, for example, who welcomed Jesuits from Europe, partly because Western advances in astronomy were helpful in predicting eclipses. It was also a Ming emperor who funded the fabled naval expeditions of Zheng He (Cheng Ho) (1371–1433), who most reputable scholars are convinced did not "discover America" (as a 2003 best-seller would have it) but did guide a fleet that probably made it as far as Africa.³

Other rulers were suspicious of outsiders and took a more restrictive stance toward international connections. They

were convinced that increased contact with foreigners was unnecessary and perhaps dangerous.

Most notably, in the late 1700s, the Qing decided to limit Western traders' and missionaries' access to China. Chinese trade with Southeast Asia was robust and operated through many ports, but Westerners eager to exploit new markets for their goods and find new souls to convert were allowed to drop anchor at only one southern city, Guangzhou (Canton). The only exception to this rule concerned the Portuguese, who had a beachhead of their own in Macao, a city near Guangzhou that had been ceded to them as a colony.

What was the Opium War?

The policy of prohibiting foreign ships from anchoring in most Chinese ports was a source of discontent for Westerners who dreamed, as their counterparts of both earlier and more recent times have, of finding in China's heartland an endless supply of customers and converts. They did not believe the Qing line that China was a self-sufficient empire capable of producing all that its people required and that, hence, the West had nothing of great value to offer.

The frustration of Western traders and missionaries grew in the early 1800s as the British desire for (and indeed dependence on) tea produced in China grew. Since European and American merchants had failed to find any product that the Chinese wanted to buy in comparably significant quantities, a trade imbalance favoring China developed, leading to the flow of silver out of the West and into the Qing Empire.

To counteract this, and to take advantage of easy access to the high-quality poppies grown in India, which had become a British colony, traders from Britain began to market opium in China (with American merchants, who often got their poppies from Turkey, following suit). These traders hoped that opium would prove as addictive for the Chinese as tea had proven for Londoners.

The Qing introduced strict laws against buying and selling opium, but the foreign strategy proved effective, and a trade imbalance favoring the West developed. Western traders were always finding new ways to get the drug into China (thanks to help from Chinese smugglers, in many cases), and demand for the narcotic in China consistently grew, particularly in areas near Guangzhou.

Tensions mounted, with each side claiming the moral high ground. The Westerners insisted that free trade was a God-given right that the Qing were barbarically denying them, and they argued that if only they were granted free access to all Chinese ports, they would find markets for goods other than opium. Qing officials, meanwhile, decried the Westerners for the villainy of flouting local laws and bringing a dangerous substance into the country.

War broke out in 1839, and Qing forces quickly suffered a series of military defeats. In order to stop the Western iron ships from heading toward the Chinese capital, the Qing signed a treaty very favorable to the foreigners.

What impact did the Opium War have?

The war had devastating effects: economically, it had been costly; politically, it raised doubts among some as to whether the dynasty had a firm hold on the Mandate of Heaven; and psychologically, the war undermined the longstanding notion that China was the most advanced and powerful country in the world.⁴

As part of the Treaty of Nanjing signed at the conclusion of hostilities, Britain gained partial control over Hong Kong, which it held as a Crown colony (and, later, a British-dependent territory) until returning it to China in 1997. (Full British control over Hong Kong was accomplished in stages throughout the 19th century, concluding in 1898.) Britain also secured the right for its merchants and missionaries to set up self-governing settlements in several other coastal cities, dubbed "treaty ports,"

including Shanghai; and the French and Americans, and later the Japanese, used force and the threat of force to ensure that the same privileges were extended to their nationals.

Why did the Qing Dynasty fall?

Until the 1970s, scholars often viewed the Qing as having had a firm hold on the country until the Opium War. The story of the first two centuries of Qing rule was presented as characterized largely by triumphs, with strong and long-reigning emperors extending the reach of the empire into Central Asia. In this narrative, the mid-19th-century clashes with the West marked the beginning of the end of a dynasty that had been in good shape. Now, historians have begun to appreciate that there were realms other than that of foreign affairs that strained Qing rule.

What internal developments weakened the Qing?

One source of strain on the Qing was demographic: the population of China grew tremendously in the late 1700s and early to mid-1800s, at least doubling (perhaps tripling or quadrupling) in a century. This placed a great deal of pressure on the country simply because there were more mouths to feed.

It also caused problems for the Qing because the number of magistrates did not increase. This meant that, by 1830, each of these multitasking bureaucrats (responsible for presiding over trials, collecting taxes, maintaining granaries, and officiating at local rituals) was overseeing many more people than ever before.

What was the significance of peasant rebellions?

The Qing also faced a problem of popular rebellions. These took many forms, ranging from piracy and banditry to religiously inflected insurrections led by prophets who called on

the faithful to rise up. Notable revolts included an uprising led by the Eight Trigrams sect in 1813, which was quickly suppressed, but at the cost of some 70,000 lives. Another was a holy war launched in the 1820s and the 1830s by the Central Asian leader Jahangir, who sought to free Xinjiang from imperial control.⁵

The White Lotus Rebellion that convulsed much of the Chinese heartland from 1796 until 1804 was even more significant. This revolt was linked to Maitreya Buddhism, a form of the originally Indian religion that was particularly popular in parts of China and Southeast Asia. The White Lotus Rebellion had a millenarian aspect to it; that is, its followers believed that a new age was about to begin and that those adhering to the faith would fare well in the coming order. Leaders of Chinese Buddhist sects often discouraged outright rebellion, encouraging their followers to wait quietly for change to come. But at some points they called for direct action, and these calls found especially receptive ears among people struggling with natural disasters such as droughts and floods or angered by what they viewed as excessive taxation.⁶

The White Lotus Rebellion, which began with tax protests in a poor mountainous area, was a classic example of a call for action that resonated within an economically desperate population. A potent addition to the mix was anti-Manchu sentiment and Han chauvinism—that is, a belief that control of China should be returned to members of the main Chinese ethnic group. For some participants, a key attraction of the movement was the belief that it would lead to the restoration of the Ming, the ethnically Chinese dynasty that had preceded the Qing.

The dynasty suppressed the rebellion, but at a great cost. According to a leading historian of Chinese religious movements, the Qing spent “the rough equivalent of five years’ revenue (200 million ounces of silver)” on military campaigns against the rebels, and their troops were defeated in enough battles that the “Manchu banner forces’ reputation

for invincibility” was permanently lost.⁷ When the Opium War broke out, the Qing Dynasty was already reeling from a series of major challenges, contending with both novel issues and popular rebellions of the sort that had toppled previous dynasties.

What was the Taiping Uprising?

The Taiping Uprising was a millenarian insurrection of enormous proportions that is probably the most important 19th-century event whose name is still not a household word in the West.

The Qing Dynasty was forced to contend with nearly continuous domestic revolts and additional international conflicts from the 1840s through the 1890s. The most devastating revolt of this period was the Taiping Uprising (1848–1864), a massive and bloody insurrection whose death toll far exceeded that of the nearly contemporaneous American Civil War.

The movement’s leader was Hong Xiuquan, a frustrated scholar who had had a breakdown after failing the civil service exams multiple times and suffered hallucinations that imbued him with a sense of divine purpose and seem to have been shaped by things he had read in a missionary tract years before. His visions convinced him that he was Christ’s younger brother and was destined to expel the Manchus (whom he came to think of as demonic figures and decried as members of a bestial race) from China and transform it into a Christian land. His particular version of Christianity was so outlandish to most foreigners that, while he initially gained some Western support, international forces ended up siding with the Qing against him.

At the height of the struggle, the fiercely anti-Confucian Hong (after failing the exams; he had no fondness for the sage) governed a territory roughly the size of France. He behaved in many ways like the founder of a new dynasty, even instituting a civil service examination system—with the novel twist that

candidates had to demonstrate mastery over his idiosyncratic interpretation of biblical teachings rather than Confucian classics and famous commentaries on those classics, the main staple of Qing official exams.

Why was the 1894–1895 Sino–Japanese War so important?

The Qing fought further wars with European powers after 1842, including one that ended in 1860 with foreign troops destroying one of the dynasty's most elaborate palaces, Yuanmingyuan, but the most significant international conflict of the second half of the 19th century was a war with Japan concerning which country would control Korea. That war began in 1894 and ended a year later with another defeat for the Qing. The Opium War had undermined the notion that the Qing governed the world's most powerful empire; this latest war demonstrated that it was no longer even the dominant regional power in East Asia.

This defeat led some intellectuals to call for the dynasty to embrace the kind of widespread adaptation of Western ideas and institutions that were credited with strengthening Japan, and they gained the ear of a reform-minded emperor. The result was a bold but short-lived effort to radically reshape China's political and educational institutions, which was known as the "100 Days Reform" of 1898. Conservatives within the dynasty fought back, however, and the emperor was placed under house arrest, though some institutions established by the reformers remained, such as the school that evolved into today's Peking University, China's most prestigious college.

The conservative faction, whose supporters included not just members of the ruling family but also some diehard Confucian scholars (though there were reformers who creatively proposed that Confucius would have approved of their reforms), argued that the West and Japan might have superior armed forces but that Chinese institutions were better, since they were rooted in superior values.

What was the Boxer Rebellion?

The Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901) is greatly misunderstood outside of China. It began with bands of young men attacking Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries in North China. It took on new dimensions in the summer of 1900, when these insurgents held Western and Japanese residents of Beijing hostage for fifty-five days, and the Qing Dynasty, which had vacillated between viewing the insurgents as bandits to be suppressed and loyalists to be praised, threw their support behind the Boxers. An international force of soldiers marching under eight flags lifted the siege.

The crisis continued well into 1901, as foreign soldiers carried out campaigns of retribution and members of the Qing ruling family fled the capital. It ended in September 1901, when the Qing Dynasty, which had been allowed to return to Beijing after a brief period of exile in the north, signed a treaty, known as the Boxer Protocol. This accord included a stipulation that a giant indemnity be paid to compensate for the loss of foreign lives and property, with no comparable recompense for Chinese suffering at the hands of invading armies.

Another key part of the protocol was designed to justify the continuation of Qing rule. The foreign powers had decided that, for all their complaints about the Qing, they preferred the dynastic devil they knew to any alternative. As a result, as part of the settlement of the crisis, both sides agreed to promote the fiction that the Boxers had been anti-dynastic "rebels," rather than members of a loyalist insurrection that had at times achieved official support.

How has this crisis been misunderstood?

Western misunderstandings of the Boxer Rebellion begin with the use of misleading nomenclature. It was not really a "rebellion," for the insurgents often expressed a desire to support the Qing. The motivation for the uprising was not

anger at the dynasty but a desire to rid China of Christianity, which the Boxers blamed for all the ills that had recently befallen the country, including a drought that was causing widespread misery. Another frequent source of misunderstanding is the notion that most of the people the Boxers killed were foreigners, when the vast majority of victims were Chinese Christians.

In addition, the participants did not rely on boxing. The term "Boxer" was coined by the English-language press because the groups involved made use of martial arts fighting techniques, claiming that by employing the right mix of drills and rituals they could make themselves impervious to bullets and defeat the better-armed Western forces. At the height of the crisis, however, the Boxer forces sometimes used weapons, and woodblocks from the time show pitched battles between two armies.

How does the reputation of the crisis differ in China?

In the West and in Japan, the Boxer Rebellion is presented as a tale of the rise and fall of a violent Chinese group. Emphasis is placed on the Boxers' superstitious beliefs, including their notion that they could make themselves impervious to bullets and that railway tracks should be torn up to appease local gods.

In China, by contrast, while the violence and superstitions of the Boxers are sometimes criticized, there is more emphasis on other aspects of the crisis, such as the grievances that led to the insurrection. These injustices included decades of foreign powers' extending their reach into Chinese territory, and the atrocities committed during the "Invasion of the Eight Allied Armies," including the looting of Chinese national treasures and the revenge killing of thousands of northern Chinese. In Chinese accounts now, the Boxer Protocol is described as one of many humiliating and unjustly one-sided treaties that foreign powers forced the Chinese to sign.

Why does this difference in views of the Boxers matter?

The specter of the Boxer Crisis has cast a long shadow over Chinese interactions with foreign countries. Allusions to the events of 1900 have been common whenever conflicts between China and other nations have occurred, but because of how differently the Boxers are viewed, these veer off in opposite directions.

A case in point occurred in May 1999, when NATO bombs hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, killing three citizens of the PRC. When Chinese protesters held rowdy demonstrations, hurling objects at the British and US embassies in Beijing and claiming that NATO had intentionally targeted the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, this was decried in some Western media as xenophobic Boxerism. China was once again behaving irrationally, these reports claimed, since the destruction of the Chinese embassy had been a mistake.

Some Chinese, however, invoked memories of 1900 in a completely different manner. The events in Belgrade, they insisted, showed that, once again, Westerners were determined to push China around. The fact that NATO includes some of the same powers (e.g., Britain, the United States, France, etc.) that were part of the coalition of "Eight Allied Armies" who occupied China in 1900 and 1901 gave added force to this very different allusion to the era of the Boxers.

How did Qing rule finally end?

The Qing Dynasty engaged in a last-ditch effort at radical reform after the Boxer crisis that struck many as an effort to do too little too late. It was then toppled in 1911 by a series of loosely connected uprisings and mutinies by imperial troops. These led to the abdication of the last emperor and the establishment of a new Republic of China (ROC), which persists, albeit in a greatly reduced territorial form, on Taiwan. The first president of this country was Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), who was inaugurated on January 1, 1912.

His installation as China's first president was modeled on that of a Western political leader, and efforts were made to convince foreign powers that everything associated with the dynastic system would be abolished. But Sun also participated in rituals that hearkened back to dynastic transitions and played to the anti-Manchu Han nationalism that had been a part of challenges to the Qing since at least the time of the White Lotus Rebellion. He visited the graves of the Ming emperors, for example, in a move that cast the revolution less as a move forward into uncharted terrain than as an act of revenge for the conquest of the country by foreign invaders from the north.⁸

Is the Chinese Communist Party a new dynasty?

Harrison Salisbury titled his best-selling study of the PRC's first decades *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng*, suggesting that the 1949 revolution that had established the People's Republic, like the 1911 one that had created the ROC, could be seen as yet another playing out of the dynastic cycle.⁹ And other Western writers have used imperial metaphors to underline the way that Mao, like emperors of the past, was a political figure who was also viewed as godlike, and to emphasize the secrecy with which the Communist Party leadership shrouds its operations and indeed its daily life—sequestered in a heavily guarded compound known as Zhongnanhai, which is located beside the Forbidden City.

In addition, within China, there are critics of the current regime who employ comparable imagery to discredit figures who claim to represent a revolution that broke completely with the past. For example, during the Tiananmen Uprising of 1989 (about which more later), protesters often described Deng as acting like an "emperor," and one wall poster portrayed him as a modern-day counterpart of the Empress

Dowager Cixi (Tzu Hsi) (1839–1908), who was the mother of one late Qing emperor and the aunt of another and functioned as de facto ruler of China for much of her lifetime. (This imagery derived some of its power from the fact that Deng, though China's paramount leader in 1989, did not hold a high formal title such as party general secretary, president, or prime minister.) In addition, the derisive term "princelings" is often used to refer to the sons of high-ranking party leaders, whom many Chinese view as enjoying unfair advantages and living privileged lives.¹⁰ Perhaps the most famous—or infamous—princeling is Bo Xilai, a charismatic politician who attracted significant popular support as the party secretary of Chongqing municipality before being purged early in 2012 amid a murder scandal and allegations of massive corruption.

This kind of imperial imagery has its value, for it underscores the fact that China is currently beset by some familiar political problems, including high-level corruption rooted in personal access to and sometimes a direct familial relationship with those in high positions. It should not, however, be pushed too far or taken too seriously. In contrast to the ROC, where Chiang Kai-shek was succeeded by his son as president of Taiwan, or for that matter the United States, where two members of the Bush family recently held the same top post in fairly rapid succession, no two top PRC leaders have been related to one another by blood. And there has always, at least since Mao's time, been an oligarchic aspect to the way the Communist Party rules, with a group of top leaders, none of whom is kin to another, sharing power in a manner that differs greatly from that of any dynasty.

More than this, imperial imagery obscures the many ways that the China of today differs from the China of the past. The PRC is changing so quickly that frameworks that suggest it is only able to replicate historical patterns generally do more harm than good.

And yet, the dynastic cycle and the Mandate of Heaven remain concepts worth keeping in mind. As we will see in later sections, some of the things that the leaders of the Communist Party worry about—from the rumblings of popular religious sects to how natural catastrophes are understood—resemble those that caused emperors to worry about how long their own mandate would last.

3

REVOLUTIONS AND REVOLUTIONARIES

Who was Sun Yat-sen?

Sun Yat-sen has been hailed as the founding father of the Republic of China (ROC) and has been likened to George Washington in more than a few Chinese textbooks over the years. Sun has the rare distinction of having been treated as a hero on both sides of the Taiwan straits. In the PRC, streets are named after him and on special occasions his portrait is placed in a prominent spot near Tiananmen Square. In the ROC, at least before the Nationalists were first forced to share power with other parties around the turn of the millennium, his image was a central feature of all major political rituals. This special status is made possible by Sun's association with the overthrow of the Qing, and by the fact that he not only founded the Nationalist Party but also brokered the first United Front (1924–1927), an alliance between the Nationalists and the Communists.

His status in revolutionary history is unique, for those the Communists hail as heroes are usually considered villains on Taiwan and vice versa. Unique, too, was the eclectic ideology he espoused, which combined intense nationalism with a cosmopolitan openness to what foreign creeds had to offer.¹

In his youth, Sun studied medicine in Hong Kong, traveled widely, and developed reform proposals that he tried, unsuccessfully, to bring to the attention of progressive-minded

And yet, the dynastic cycle and the Mandate of Heaven remain concepts worth keeping in mind. As we will see in later sections, some of the things that the leaders of the Communist Party worry about—from the rumblings of popular religious sects to how natural catastrophes are understood—resemble those that caused emperors to worry about how long their own mandate would last.

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Qing officials. His transition from reformer to revolutionary occurred in the 1890s, when he began to work with secret societies and to plan anti-Qing uprisings. In 1905, while in Japan, he founded the Revolutionary Alliance, an organization that would eventually evolve into the Nationalist Party.

Even though Sun was subsequently credited with "leading" the 1911 Revolution, the mutinies and insurrections of October of that year occurred while he was in the United States raising funds for his political ventures. Still, groups with which he was affiliated participated in the upheavals, and he soon returned to China to play a key role in the transition to republican rule.

What happened to Sun after he became president?

Sun's presidency was short-lived. Within a year, Yuan Shikai (Yüan Shih-k'ai) (1859–1916) had nudged him out of office. Yuan was a former Qing official and general who had shifted his allegiance to the Revolution in 1911, and then in 1912 insisted that he would continue to support the new order only if he was made its president. Lacking an army of his own, Sun felt he had to step aside, though he immediately set about trying to develop a power base from which to reclaim leadership of the country.

Sun never managed to regain control of China, which was run by a succession of military strongmen (sometimes called "warlords") until his death in 1925. But the Nationalist Party he founded would, under his successor, Chiang Kai-shek, end up governing China for more than two decades and Taiwan for another half century.

What was the "Warlord era"?

Yuan's assumption of power ushered in a decade-and-a-half-long period during which one or another military strongman was officially designated as China's president. Yet

in reality they shared control of the country with a number of strong regional leaders.

Each of these men had an army and, by virtue of this, effectively controlled a part of the country. Some of the warlords, including Yuan, dreamed of becoming emperors and establishing new dynasties. And even though none of these efforts to formally restore the imperial system proved successful, the period was, in political terms, a bit of a throwback to the final years of Qing rule, save for the overlay of some of the trappings of a republic in, for example, the titles held by officials.²

What was the May 4th movement?

The warlords' abandonment of the revolutionary legacy of 1911 did not go unchallenged. Sun Yat-sen set up operations in Guangzhou, at the head of a revamped Revolutionary Alliance, now rechristened as the Nationalist Party. As he dreamed of regaining control of the country, intellectuals agitated for an end to warlord rule and looked to the outside world (Japan, Russia, and the West) for ideas and strategies that could be brought to China to help get the revolutionary project back on track.

Radical teachers and students in Beijing and Shanghai were particularly active in both intellectual exploration, which took such forms as translating theoretical and literary works into Chinese and experimenting with new forms of writing, and political mobilization. Their most important collective actions involved protesting the willingness of the warlords to capitulate to demands that foreign powers (especially Japan) made to extend their territorial and economic reach within China. Most importantly, these students and young professors spearheaded an anti-warlord and anti-imperialist drive known as the May 4th movement.

This political struggle, which was linked to the anti-Confucian New Culture movement discussed earlier, was one of the events that truly changed China. Named for the date in 1919 when a rowdy protest was held in what would

later become Tiananmen Square, the specific trigger for it was the way that China was treated during the Paris Peace Conference after World War I.

The Allies had claimed that one outcome of the war would be that all nations would have the right to determine their own fates, and that with the defeat of Germany the age of empires would come to an end. Since China had, albeit belatedly, joined the Allies, there seemed good reason to hope that parts of China formerly under German control would return to Beijing's rule. Instead, however, the Conference planned to cede these territories, on the Shandong Peninsula, to Japan in the Treaty of Versailles—and, much to the anger of Chinese students, the warlord government seemed unwilling to fight or even challenge this decision.

On May 4, 1919, students rampaged through Beijing calling for Shandong's return to Chinese control and the dismissal from office of three officials viewed as corrupt and pro-Japanese. After destroying the house of one of these officials, some of these students were arrested and beaten up; one later died from his wounds. Due in part to the traditional high regard in which scholars were held, members of all urban social classes joined the protests.

The May 4th movement reached its peak in Shanghai in early June with a general strike that paralyzed China's main financial and commercial center. When it achieved most of its goals, it was hailed as a victorious struggle.

In the end, the Treaty of Versailles took effect unaltered. But the students arrested in the original protest were all released, the three hated officials were dismissed from office, and the Chinese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference refused to sign the Paris accord.³

Who was the most important radical writer of the May 4th era?

Many authors contributed to the intellectual ferment of the time, but the one whose literary legacy is richest and most

important is Lu Xun. He is also, arguably, the most important author of the early 1900s whose works remain little known in the West, despite the regular appearance of new translations of his stories.⁴ His importance is due partly to the range and power of his writings. He was a highly accomplished essayist and author of major short stories, such as the searing anti-Confucian parable "Diary of a Madman" (which portrays traditional Chinese values as soul-destroying) and a novella, "The Real Story of Ah Q" (which satirizes the 1911 Revolution as a struggle that claimed it could change everything, yet often seemed to do little besides alter the names of the posts held by local officials who bullied the people).

Another way in which Lu Xun is unusually significant is that his publications permanently altered the Chinese political vocabulary, infusing it with new terms such as "Ah Qism," derived from the tendency of the eponymous anti-hero of Lu Xun's novella to change failures into victories when retelling the tale of his exploits, which continue to be used.

To be ignorant of Lu Xun, therefore, can make it hard to follow some Chinese political debates. Though Lu Xun has been compared to many other Western writers over the years, from Gogol (an author who inspired him) to Nietzsche (one study of Lu Xun dubs him China's "Gentle Nietzsche"), he is China's closest counterpart to Orwell. Just as those unfamiliar with Orwell will be confused by English editorials that include casual references to "Big Brother," "Newspeak," and other terms from 1984, without knowing who Ah Q was or what the implications of describing traditional values as cannibalistic are, some of the subtleties in Chinese political debates will go over one's head.

A final reason for Lu Xun's importance is that, though for most of his life he was fiercely independent of dogmatisms of the Right and the Left, he tended to side with the Communist Party in the years immediately before his death, though he never actually joined the organization. This allowed Mao to elevate him to the status of a revolutionary saint within the

People's Republic. But, as Mao himself once admitted, had Lu Xun lived past 1949 he would likely have ended up running afoul of the new regime. By dying early, however, the way was cleared for the Communist Party to use him, and his stories became, at certain points between the 1950s and 1970s, virtually the only Chinese works of fiction from the first half of the 20th century that could be published and read freely.⁵

Here, again, an (albeit twisted) parallel with Orwell is noteworthy. Orwell, in life, was caustic about the hypocritical aspects of all isms, yet after death he was often made a one-dimensional poster boy for the anti-Communist Cold War Right.

How does the Communist Party view the May 4th era?

Lu Xun is by no means the only figure from the May 4th period celebrated in the PRC, for many future leaders of the Communist Revolution, including Mao, were linked to the struggle of 1919. In fact, once in power, the Communist Party turned the anniversary of the 1919 protests into a national holiday honoring youthful patriotism because it is seen as an event that paved the way for the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

It is certainly true that the popular ferment of 1919, which inspired many youths to think that collective action could help get the revolution back on course, was crucial to the establishment of the CCP. So, too, was the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, which was hailed as being of epochal importance in the major New Culture movement journal, *New Youth*, and fueled a dramatic rise within China in interest in Marxism, after a period when radicals had been more drawn to anarchist ideas.

There is debate now over whether the CCP was born in 1920—when important meetings of some future leaders of the organization occurred—or 1921, the date the PRC officially treats as the year of the party's birth. In either version

of the story, the central players in its early life included radical Beijing professors, such as "New Youth" founders Li Dazhao (Li Ta-chao) (1888–1927), the author of an influential essay hailing the "Victory of Bolshevism" in Russia as a great thing, and Chen Duxiu (Ch'en Tu-hsiu) (1879–1942), a mentor to Mao, who advised the students involved in the 1919 demonstrations. Other early members of the Communist Party besides Mao who were involved in May 4th protests included Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai) (1898–1976) and his wife Deng Yingchao (Teng Ying-ch'ao) (1904–1992), who was always much less famous than her husband internationally but was for decades an influential figure in the PRC.

Why was the example of the Russian Revolution so important?

The Russian Revolution's inspirational role for Chinese activists was crucial, not just because of the appeal of its ideals of social equality but also because of the fact that it occurred in a country that was a late-comer to industrialization and was seen as backward. Members of the May 4th generation were not only critical of Confucian hierarchies but also eager for their country to regain its former stature as a great power. Russia alone seemed to have found a recipe to help remake a country domestically and increase its international prestige.⁶

What was the First United Front?

The Communist Party did not have much of an impact on Chinese politics until Sun Yat-sen, who was attracted by Moscow's criticism of Western imperialism and the emphasis Lenin had put on the role that a tightly disciplined vanguard party could play in moving a country forward, invited the CCP to join the Nationalists in a "united front" that would try to both unseat the warlords and fight foreign encroachments. Members of the fledgling CCP accepted the invitation readily;

some, including a young Mao, would even hold positions in both parties for a time.

The first major mass movement accompanying this United Front, which lasted from 1924 until 1927 and later became known as the "First United Front" to differentiate it from a second collaboration between the Nationalists and Communists, broke out in 1925. It was called the May 30th movement, was seen by some as picking up where the May 4th movement left off, and was triggered by the police in Shanghai's main foreign-run enclave firing into a crowd of Chinese protesters who were demonstrating against the mistreatment of Chinese workers in Japanese mills located within Shanghai.

Why was the May 30th movement important?

This anti-imperialist struggle, like its predecessor of 1919, spread from being a single-city protest to being a national one and culminated in a general strike that paralyzed Shanghai. It did not achieve as many of its stated goals as the May 4th movement; the unmet demands of May 30th protesters included that Chinese workers at foreign factories be given the right to form unions and that all foreign-run sections of treaty ports be returned to Chinese control. Nevertheless, the propaganda and mobilization work done by activists brought many new converts into both the Nationalist and Communist organizations, making the latter, for the first time, a force to be reckoned with in Chinese politics.⁷ This development paved the way for the end of warlord rule after the Northern Expedition.

What was the Northern Expedition?

The Northern Expedition was launched in 1926 from Sun's southern power base in Guangdong (Kwangtung) Province. A joint army of Nationalists and Communists, led by Chiang Kai-shek, marched northward toward Beijing and, beginning

in 1926, waged a series of battles against the armies of regional militarists in which the Nationalists were victorious.

In 1927 the Chinese-run sections of Shanghai (as with other treaty ports, only some parts of the city were under foreign control) easily fell to the Northern Expedition's troops, thanks to a series of worker uprisings led by the CCP, which prepared the groundwork for the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers.

Later that same year, Chiang, who had succeeded Sun as head of the Nationalists after Sun's death in March 1925, took the nearby city of Nanjing and proclaimed it the real capital of the republic (its name means "southern capital," and it had been a seat of government before). Then, in 1928, Chiang's forces took Beijing (whose name means "northern capital") and renamed it Beiping ("northern peace") to show that the political center remained in the south.⁸

Who was Chiang Kai-shek?

Chiang was often called simply "Generalissimo," because of his role as leader of the Northern Expedition forces and his military background and bearing. An enigmatic figure, before committing himself to the revolution he had joined a secret society, established ties with the Green Gang (a powerful organized-crime syndicate based in Shanghai), and received military training in Japan.

He developed close personal ties to Sun Yat-sen via common revolutionary activities. These took on an added dimension when Chiang married Song Meiling (Soong May-ling) (1898–2003). An American-educated Christian, Song Meiling was the sister of Sun's widow, Song Qingling (Soong Ch'ing-ling) (1893–1981), who never formally joined the Communist Party but remained on the Mainland after 1949 and served as an official.

Aside from his skills as a military strategist, the generalissimo proved very effective at forming alliances that helped him navigate the factional politics of the Nationalist Party.

These were complex because several people thought that they should succeed Sun as leader of the organization.

Whether he ever shared Sun's conviction that the cause of the Chinese Revolution was best served by an alliance with Communists is unclear, but by late 1926 Chiang felt that the United Front was a mistake. In April 1927, with help from the Green Gang, he carried out a vicious purge of Communist Party members in Shanghai, imprisoning and killing some of the very people who had helped deliver the Chinese-run parts of the city to the Northern Expedition forces.

From that point on, until his death in 1975, he treated the Communists as a great threat to China's future. For purely practical purposes, Chiang was forced to ally with the Communists again during the Second United Front (1937–1945). (He was pressured into the arrangement, after being taken hostage in Xi'an in 1936, held by a warlord who thought China's only hope for salvation lay in unity between warring factions.) But Chiang's anti-Communism was deeply felt and enduring, and he continued to argue that, as he put it, the Japanese were only a "disease of the skin," while the Communists were a "disease of the heart"—that is, ultimately the graver threat to Chinese national survival.

What was the Long March?

Chiang Kai-shek's "White Terror" purges almost succeeded in eliminating the Communist Party in 1927. The Communists, however, proved impossible to eradicate completely.

Some members of the organization avoided detection and operated underground cells within cities held by the Nationalists, while others escaped to rural Communist base areas. In the early 1930s, Jiang tried several times to encircle those base areas and destroy the main clusters of remaining Communists; to escape this fate the CCP abandoned its temporary headquarters in the southern province of Jiangxi and began a torturous trek northward that became known as the Long March.

This 1934–1935 trek ended with the Communists setting up new base areas in Shaanxi Province, the most famous in Yan'an, where they began to experiment with policies, such as bold land redistribution campaigns, that eventually won them support from many poor Chinese and also greatly impressed some Western visitors (most famously the American journalist Edgar Snow).⁹ In official PRC histories, the Long March is treated as an event of mythic significance and proportions, and it is easy to see why. The odds against a straggling band of guerrillas escaping from the much better-armed Nationalist forces while traveling over often-treacherous terrain to safety some six thousand miles from their starting point are staggering. The journey involved eighty-six thousand people, who traversed six thousand miles in just over a year, crossing eighteen mountain ranges and twenty-four rivers. In the end, only some eight thousand of those who began the trip survived.¹⁰

Had the Long March failed, the CCP would have ceased to play a role in Chinese politics and history, but the march had another significant outcome: it was during this epic exodus that Mao consolidated his position as supreme leader of the party, thanks in part to his vision of guerrilla warfare as the way to fight the Nationalists being endorsed as the best military strategy to pursue. Though he would turn against some of his comrades in arms from the Long March in "rectification campaigns" (in effect, purges) of the early to mid-1940s and break with others after the founding of the PRC, Mao's closest allies from the 1930s on tended to be fellow Long March veterans. If a Communist leader had spent the 1930s and 1940s doing underground work in a "White" city controlled by the Nationalists rather than in a "Red" area like Yan'an—and hence been further from Mao's direct influence and closer to the temptations of a mode of life he viewed as "bourgeois" and decadent—they were vulnerable after 1949 to charges of political impurity. In particular, they were more likely to be dubbed "capitalist roaders," beaten up by Red Guards fiercely

loyal to Mao, subjected to public criticism, and even tortured during the Cultural Revolution—about which more below.¹¹

What was the Rape of Nanjing?

The period of the Japanese occupation, which began with Japan taking over parts of Manchuria in 1931, remains a bitterly remembered one in China. A particularly significant event in this regard was the Rape of Nanjing, which unfolded in late 1937 and early 1938. According to one recent US survey of Chinese history, during a short horrific period in Nanjing, “an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Chinese were killed” and “an estimated 20,000 women were raped” by Japanese soldiers.¹²

The Japanese invasion in general (there were atrocities committed in many parts of the country) and the Rape of Nanjing in particular continue to bedevil Sino-Japanese relations. This is in part because some textbooks approved for use in Japan downplay the extent of the atrocities, and Tokyo, though officially expressing regret for the invasions of the 1930s and 1940s, has stopped short of carrying out a thoroughgoing repudiation of all aspects of its World War II behavior such as Germany undertook.

How did the Communists beat the Nationalists?

Many factors contributed to Mao's defeat of Chiang. For example, the way that World War II played out fostered an image of the Communists as devoted patriots. The Nationalists and the Communists had allied to fight Japan from 1937 on, but many Chinese were left feeling that the latter organization was more wholeheartedly committed to fighting imperialism than was the former, which had trouble shaking its reputation for being corrupt and led by a man obsessed with the idea that Communism was as big a threat as foreign invaders.

When the Japanese finally surrendered, many hoped a period of peace and stability would begin. This was not to be.

The rapprochement between the Nationalists and Communists, which had long been strained, collapsed completely within months of Japan's mid-1945 surrender. A civil war broke out almost immediately, lasting until 1949, when Mao's Red Army, known as the People's Liberation Army (PLA), took control of several key cities. These included Shanghai and Beiping, whose name the Communists changed back to Beijing, signaling that it was once again China's capital.

Throughout the Civil War, pitched battles were fought in the countryside, and more symbolic struggles, via propaganda and demonstrations, were waged in the cities. The Communists promised that if they won they would redistribute land, and this gained them support in many villages, especially since word had circulated that bold land reform programs (in which landlords were stripped of their holdings and sometimes beaten and even killed) had been occurring for years in areas under the Communist Party's control. Meanwhile, disgust with official corruption, Nationalist infighting, government censorship drives, crackdowns on urban demonstrations, and a sense that the generalissimo was too beholden to the United States alienated many intellectuals in the cities.

The United States backed the Nationalists (with some reservations), while the Soviet Union backed the Communists (likewise with ambivalence), as was expected as the Cold War got under way. Chiang later insisted that the key to Mao's victory was Moscow's backing, but equally or more important was Chiang's failure to run the country effectively in the late 1940s, most evident in runaway inflation of such staggering proportions that city dwellers sometimes needed wheelbarrows full of nearly worthless currency to buy rice.¹³

Given how disliked by intellectuals the Nationalists had become by the late 1940s, the reputation that the Communists had earned among workers and farmers as an organization that championed the interests of the common people, and the desire of Chinese of all classes for a time of peace, it is no wonder that the end of the Civil War was seen by many as a

very welcome development. The year 1949 was hailed in the Communist Party press at the time as a moment of "liberation," a term that continues to be used to this day in the PRC as a shorthand for that year. This is surely what it felt like to many people at that point, though landlords were bound to see it as a fearful rather than welcome thing that the Communist Party had taken control of the country. And though other groups would also soon have misgivings about the turn the nation had taken, in the early 1950s, with the country at peace and living standards rising, many continued to feel that China was moving in a positive direction.

What role have mass campaigns played in the People's Republic of China?

Throughout the first decades of Communist Party rule in China, mass campaigns were an important feature of daily life. These drives, which were used to publicize and ensure compliance with new policies, would remain important as well during the two years immediately following Mao's death, when Hua Guofeng (1921–2008) held power. After Hua was demoted and Deng took charge in 1978, campaigns became less common, but they have sometimes played a significant role, even in the Reform era (1978–).

The content of these campaigns has varied greatly. Their formats, however, have been similar. High officials give speeches and leading newspapers publish editorials spelling out the goals of the drive; city streets are covered with banners containing key slogans, as are public buildings in urban and rural settings; party representatives, the heads of neighborhood associations (important grassroots-level authority figures during the early decades of the PRC in particular), and leaders of the individual *danwei* (work units) that structure so much of social life in China (many people live in housing, for example, that these *danwei* provide) take charge of getting their subordinates to participate in rallies and other activities.

And sometimes individuals or activities representing ideas or practices the campaign is meant to counteract are singled out for criticism. According to a top party official, early campaigns were an effort, above all, to ensure that the goals of the party were internalized, to get the people to "emancipate themselves step by step, instead of [the government] imposing revolution on the masses or bestowing victory on the masses as a favor."⁴ Among important early mass campaigns was the Land Reform drive, which extended to new areas the redistribution of landlords' holdings and included verbal and physical assaults on anyone viewed as belonging to the vilified landlord class. This campaign had begun in Yan'an and other areas under Communist Party control before 1949. But the first PRC nationwide movement was the one designed to publicize and gain compliance with the New Marriage Law of 1950 (about which more below).

What was the Resist America, Support Korea campaign?

The goal of the Resist America, Support Korea campaign was to solidify the reputation of the party as a patriotic organization determined to ensure that China would never again be pushed around by foreign powers. It began as soon as the Korean War (1950–1953) started.

This first "hot war" of the Cold War era, which pitted allies of the Soviet Union against allies of the United States, ended in a stalemate, creating the division between Communist North Korea and non-Communist South Korea that continues to this day. Mao claimed, however, that the war represented a great victory for China. The PRC contributed the largest number of troops to the North Korean cause, and more Chinese died during the struggle than members of any other foreign population, with Mao's own son among the casualties. Propaganda posters, films, and stories celebrated the heroics of Chinese soldiers, while those on the home front attended

rallies against American imperialism and donated money to support the war effort. At the same time, the CCP government embarked upon an intense effort to root out alleged spies, targeting those with connections to foreign governments, businesses, churches, and schools, as well as Chiang's Nationalists.

The "victory," according to Mao, lay in the Communist forces' ability to prevent the Americans and their allies from taking control of the entire Korean peninsula. This proved that China could hold its own against apparently superior powers. But another sort of "victory" was that enjoyed by the CCP, which had used the campaign to consolidate its control over both businesses and people throughout the country.¹⁵

What was the Hundred Flowers campaign?

The Hungarian Uprising of 1956, which was suppressed only with Moscow's help, sent shock waves throughout the Communist world. This revolt exposed as a myth the idea that the Communist leaderships of all countries linked to the Soviet Union—a category that included China at that point, since aid and advisers from Moscow were playing important roles in the nation—enjoyed broad popular support. It also exposed as illusory the notion that the state socialist lands of Central and Eastern Europe were allies as opposed to merely satellites of the Soviet Union.

The Chinese response to this included Mao's call for a loosening of the taboo on pointing out mistakes made by the party and any problems with its official ideology, the idea being that the regime could be strengthened through constructive criticism. The slogan used for this 1957 initiative was "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom and a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend," an allusion to the distant Warring States period, when proponents of Confucian, Daoist, Legalist, and many other visions of morality and statecraft had competed for the attention and patronage of local rulers. Soon professors and

students around the country were writing memorials and putting up wall posters calling for change.

The Hundred Flowers campaign has been interpreted as a cynical effort by Mao to smoke out all intellectuals with dangerous ideas. A competing interpretation holds that it was meant to demonstrate that the party was popular enough and firmly enough in control that it could benefit from advice, and by doing this further increase its support among intellectuals, who would feel better about aiding a regime that allowed more freedom of speech. In this view, the crackdown on critics that soon came was a response to the unexpectedly harsh nature of the commentary unleashed.

In either case, the end result was that a brief flourishing of open discussion was followed by a series of purges. These purges were known as the Anti-Rightist campaign.

What happened during the Anti-Rightist campaign?

The Anti-Rightist campaign was a drive used to inculcate intellectual orthodoxy. Anyone who expressed or was simply accused of harboring unorthodox views risked being designated a "counterrevolutionary" and "enemy of the people," subjected to public criticism, and sent to a prison camp. Once incarcerated, these "Rightists" would experience a period of either "reform through labor" or "reeducation" that, if successful, would allow them to reenter society. They would never be able to fully shake the stigma of having once been labeled a Rightist, since a file was kept on every citizen of the PRC, which included notes on the individual's political history—a dossier system that has still not been completely abandoned.

In addition to those who actually expressed criticism of the new regime, some people suffered during the Anti-Rightist campaign for quite different reasons. Some were labeled Rightists because individuals who held grudges against them or wanted to burnish their own reputations for political rectitude concocted tales of the targeted person's failings. Others

were singled out because the central authorities told local officials to fulfill specific quotas of Rightists because Mao had made statements that a certain percentage of the population was composed of enemies of the revolution trying to hide their beliefs.

How did women fare during the first decade of the PRC?

It is telling that one of the first pieces of the new regime's legislation was the New Marriage Law of 1950, given the central role of family relations in Confucian thought and the bias against women within late imperial society. This bias had been expressed through everything from demands for widows to remain chaste, to girls being pressured to bind their feet (in a painful process that among other things limited their physical mobility), to only men being able to take official examinations. It is true that some noteworthy moves were made during the Republican period (1912–1949) to remake gender and family relations. Most notably, women were granted the right to vote in 1947—admittedly something of a Pyrrhic victory, given that in the Civil War era elections had so little value—and foot binding (never a universal practice and something that varied widely between regions and across class and ethnic lines) became much less common and increasingly frowned upon by the state. But once Chiang Kai-shek took power, the celebration of Confucianism, interpreted in very traditional ways, put a check on moves toward greater equality between the sexes.

Introducing a new marriage system, in which family elders were not the key determinants of who would marry whom and men and women would be treated equally, was seen by the Communists as a powerful way to change social and political relations within villages, and it signaled that a truly new order had begun—that this revolution would lead to much more than simply changing what local bullies were called.¹⁶

The Marriage Law campaign championed the idea that betrothals should be between freely consenting individuals, rather than arranged by family elders, and that, once married, husbands and wives would be treated the same under the law (even having equal ability to seek divorce, something that under the old system had been much easier for a man than for a woman to do). Though the New Marriage Law did not officially require this, one symbolically significant shift that accompanied its implementation was the substitution of the party for the husband's family in ritual aspects of weddings, represented by the fact that in post-1949 marriages, a portrait of Mao was often placed where images of lineage ancestors had been in pre-1949 weddings, with new couples bowing before it as they had once bowed before the husband's parents.

Mao and the CCP proclaimed that “women hold up half the sky,” promising the dawn of a new era in gender relations. In some respects, life for Chinese women did improve during the early PRC years. Many assumed positions of responsibility in their local party units, while others found themselves lauded as “model workers” for their labor productivity. A campaign promoting safe childbirth also yielded dramatic improvements in maternal and infant mortality. Yet, while many women joined the labor force and began working in offices, in factories, or, toward the end of the 1950s, on collective farms, they remained the primary caregivers for their families, often working a “second shift” to complete their household's cooking, cleaning, washing, sewing, and childrearing. As a result, Chinese women might remember the first decade of the PRC as a time of progress, but also as one of exhaustion.¹⁷

What sort of people were Mao and his main allies?

Mao was born into a middling sort of rural family (his father had enough money to employ a laborer and to educate his sons), and in his youth he gravitated toward radical politics.

He did this first within his native Hunan Province and later in Beijing, where he worked as a librarian and was influenced greatly by progressive teachers, especially Chen Duxiu, who had begun to promote anarchist and Marxist ideas. His most significant early writings included a report on the Hunan peasant movement, in which he stressed the party's need to learn from the actions of rural activists (rather than assume, in a more orthodox Marxist fashion, that farmers were an inherently backward group who needed guidance from urbanites); claimed that extreme tactics and great violence were often a necessary part of revolutionary settings (this is where his famous statement that "revolution is not a dinner party" appears); and noted that women were uniquely oppressed in China (not only suffering from class injustices but also having power wielded over them by male relatives).

Mao rose to power within the party during the Long March, as already noted, and when the PRC was founded, his supremacy was symbolized by the fact that it was he who stood atop Tiananmen (the Gate of Heavenly Peace) and proclaimed the establishment of the new country. The giant portrait of his face, which still hangs near that spot, is a reminder of his role as the first paramount leader of the PRC. Mao insisted that he did not want to be the subject of a "personality cult," and even prohibited celebrations of his birthday, and yet he was elevated to a godlike status within the PRC during his lifetime. Since the official version of Communist Party history promoted from 1949 until 1976 cast him as the central player in each and every defining moment of the revolution from the early 1920s on, unfairly downplaying the contributions of many others, celebrations of holidays such as those marking the anniversaries of the founding of the party (July 1), the founding of the Red Army (August 1), and even the founding of the country (October 1) became, in effect, as much celebrations of Mao as an individual as of the collectivities they ostensibly honored.

Mao's closest associates, as mentioned earlier, were mostly other Long March veterans. These included Zhou Enlai, who

was known for his diplomatic skills, and Zhu De (Chu Te) (1886–1976), the second-most-important PLA leader. These were all people who had worked most closely with Mao in Yan'an, where the policies that would guide the early years of the PRC were first developed and tested, a village that became a pilgrimage site for those who viewed these leaders as sacred figures.

Like Mao, many of his allies had first become politically active during or just before the New Culture movement and had been involved in anti-imperialist and anti-warlord protests of the 1910s. Some had studied abroad in their youths (Zhou spent time in France, as had Deng Xiaoping, also a Long March veteran), while others, including Mao, did not leave the country for the first time until much later in life (in his case not until going to Moscow after 1949)—if they ever left it at all. In addition to the Long March veterans, there were some high officials, such as Liu Shaoqi (Liu Shao-ch'i) (1898–1969), Mao's heir apparent in the 1950s and early 1960s, who spent the 1930s and 1940s in urban centers controlled by the Nationalists, where they sought to organize workers and carry out underground propaganda efforts on behalf of the Communist cause.

How were Mao's writings viewed?

Mao's speeches and essays were initially treated simply as the products of the most influential Chinese interpreter of Marxism. Soon, however, they began to take on the function of Holy Scripture, becoming texts that were studied compulsively, memorized, and used as the final arbiters of morality and immorality.

This contributed to and was an expression of Mao's general elevation to godlike status, which was visually represented in the many statues, giant portraits, and innumerable posters that celebrated his accomplishments and treated him as the embodiment of the revolution and indeed of the New

China—a term constantly used to refer to the nation established in 1949.

His writings covered a wide spectrum of issues, as he crafted theoretical texts that endorsed his modification of Marxism relating to the revolutionary potential of peasants, wrote poems in classical style, and stressed the importance of guerrilla warfare as a method for numerically and militarily weaker groups to attain power. Always a critic of Western imperialism, from the late 1950s on he also devoted much of his writing to denouncing the Soviet Union (a split between Moscow and Beijing, tied to disputed borders and to different views of the international Communist movement, had opened up by then) for shifting from revolutionary to revisionist positions. China's version of Communism, not the Soviet Union's, he insisted, provided the best model for revolutionaries in developing countries to follow because it emphasized the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and stressed anti-imperialist action.

What was the Great Leap Forward?

By the late 1950s, Mao had become impatient. He wanted China to move more rapidly toward achieving the egalitarian utopia of true Communism—and to show the world that his country was more than just one of many junior partners in the global Communist movement led by the Soviet Union.

This prompted him to push for a bold new project, which was designed to convince his followers at home and foreign observers that China was capable of excelling in certain areas and not just following along behind the Soviets; moreover, he wanted to demonstrate that it could even become equal to or surpass the strongest countries of the West. He called for abandoning go-slow policies, based on step-by-step moves toward higher levels of collectivization, and pursuing instead a "Great Leap Forward," which would be achieved through

rapid collectivization and bold campaigns to increase crop yields and raise steel production, all intended to help China achieve full-blown Communism before the Soviet Union and gain economic parity with the West.

The initial results of the program seemed impressive, as enormously high crop yields were reported. And reports filled the newspapers of the "happier collective life" that peasants were enjoying as they made the most of the new group "dining rooms, kindergartens, nurseries, sewing groups, barber shops, public baths, happy homes for the aged," and so forth provided by communes.¹⁸ Beneath the surface, however, the fault lines of an impending disaster were forming. Fearing that the central authorities would punish them for being insufficiently supportive of Mao's directives if they failed to report exciting results, local officials grossly overstated the size of crop yields. And in order to boost steel production figures, useful farm implements were melted down to create useless (except for bragging purposes) hunks of metal. In addition, some pseudoscientific innovations endorsed by Mao, such as planting crops closer together to boost harvest levels, were dismal failures.

When these problems were compounded by bad weather, the result was the most lethal famine in world history: lasting until 1961, it claimed at least 20 million lives, perhaps closer to 30 million. It hit the young unusually hard: the median age of those dying in China plunged from a 1957 level of 17.6 years to a 1963 level of 9.7 (i.e., half of the dead that year were younger than 10). As historian Jonathan Spence put it, "the Great Leap Forward, launched in the name of strengthening the nation by summoning all the people's energies, had turned back on itself and ended by devouring its young."¹⁹

What was the Cultural Revolution?

After the Great Leap disaster, Mao temporarily lost his position as China's paramount leader. Though Mao was still officially

venerated as the nation's greatest thinker, the actual running of the country was taken over by Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and other party leaders thought of as more pragmatic, less utopian. The Cultural Revolution, which remains one of the least fully understood events in modern Chinese history, both within and outside of China, was largely an effort by Mao to reclaim a position of centrality by going around the bureaucracy of the party and leading a mass movement.

The struggle began with Mao (who worried that the Revolution was ossifying) issuing militant statements and then presiding over massive rallies by passionate loyalist youths known as "Red Guards," who verbally—and sometimes physically—attacked anyone they viewed as insufficiently devoted to their hero, sometimes literally beating these "enemies of the people" to death. Mostly high school and college students, the Red Guards often targeted teachers and school administrators they accused of being too conservative or not respectful enough of Mao's teachings.

The years that followed were marked by back-to-back political campaigns, in which many high-ranking leaders became targets of angry crowds. It was a time of chaotic purges and counterpurges (when the victims of one wave could become the bullies of the next). Liu Shaoqi went from being Mao's chosen successor to the target of a mass campaign, a fate that eventually also befell his replacement, Lin Biao (1907–1971). During this period, campuses were closed and intellectuals sent to the countryside to purify themselves by working the land.

The Cultural Revolution was a time of street clashes and rural violence, in which many innocent people suffered, whether from having their reputations damaged or being harassed so intensely that they killed themselves. It was a time of utopian hopes that turned into dark nightmares, an era when children turned on their parents and friends betrayed friends, swept up in the ideological fervor of a particular campaign or simply a desire for self-preservation; in this setting the safest thing to do was often to find others to denounce to

prove one's own virtue. The campaign had many of the same characteristics as a fundamentalist religious movement, with Mao in the role of prophet and his works becoming the sole text allowed to define moral purity. It was also, in part, an effort by youths who had grown up surrounded by films and posters that told them the only way to live a meaningful life was to take part in epic acts of upheaval to create new equivalents to the Long March and Yan'an period—and this element of reenactment manifested itself in Red Guard travels around China (framed as efforts to spread Mao's teachings and "share revolutionary experiences" with one another), sometimes by train and sometimes on foot (e.g., walking through terrain that Mao had traversed three or four decades earlier).

What was the Gang of Four?

The Gang of Four was a term used for Mao's wife, and later widow, Jiang Qing (1914–1991), and three of her allies. Jiang and Mao had been married since the Yan'an years, but until the mid-1960s, she remained mostly absent from elite politics. This changed, though, when she began promoting radical literature and performing arts at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. Exerting a great deal of power near the end of the Cultural Revolution, she and the other Gang of Four members became targets of mass campaigns and were imprisoned soon after Mao's death in 1976.

The Gang of Four was scapegoated for the mistakes of the Cultural Revolution in a manner that partially mitigated Mao's responsibility for the *luan* (turmoil) of the era. They are presented in official histories as scheming, unprincipled opportunists who took advantage of their connections to Mao to carry out a nefarious plot to destroy the country and assume absolute power. Their method was to label as "Rightists" anyone they disliked or felt was a competitor (e.g., Deng Xiaoping), while embracing an exaggerated form of "leftism" that claimed to be ultra-revolutionary but that in

fact endangered the revolution. Jiang, who committed suicide in prison in 1991, is now mostly remembered in China as a villainous woman whose self-interested schemes could have toppled the state, demonized as a "dragon lady" in the style of imperial wives during China's dynastic past.²⁰

Why hasn't Mao been repudiated by China's current leaders?

Varying assessments of Mao have always existed, and still do exist, of course, outside of China; there are even places (such as Nepal) where Maoist guerrillas treat his writings as gospel. Still, of late it has become very common outside of China to refer to Mao as a counterpart to Hitler, largely because of the damage his policies did to the country during the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution.

The Hitler analogy is a misleading one in many ways, but it must be understood before its flaws can be explained. It is an important issue to address because if Mao is thought of simply as a Hitler with Chinese characteristics, then it is bound to seem bizarre and disturbing, to say the least, that his face appears on PRC banknotes, his body lies preserved in Tiananmen Square, and references to carrying forward "Mao Zedong Thought" (along with "Deng Xiaoping Theory," the oddly titled "Three Represents" concept of Jiang Zemin, and the "Harmonious Society" ideas of Hu Jintao) still show up in National Day slogans.

The best place to begin our examination of the popular (in the West and Taiwan) but misleadingly one-dimensional image of China's former leader as an embodiment of evil, pure and simple, is with Jung Chang and Jon Halliday's best-selling biography, *Mao: The Unknown Story*.²¹ Published in 2005, it has become the most famous biography of Mao. Prior to its appearance, some Westerners already thought it odd that Mao had not been more thoroughly repudiated in the PRC, especially since the current CCP leaders had gone so far to distance themselves from some of his policies and from his fiercely anti-capitalist

and pro-class struggle rhetoric. Since the book's publication and the flurry of media attention that accompanied it, though, this sense of bewilderment has increased dramatically.

This reaction is because, among its distinctions, this book is the English-language biography of Mao that provides the most negative view of him. Not content to locate Mao within a triumvirate of evil that includes Hitler and Stalin (as writers before them had done), Chang and Halliday go further, presenting him as in some ways the vilest of the three. The book includes a controversial claim that is now routinely repeated as a simple statement of fact: Mao was responsible for 70 million peacetime deaths, more than any other leader in history.

This figure is based on a questionable chain of arguments that claims he "killed" everyone who died during the Great Leap famine, instead of simply implementing misguided policies that precipitated a catastrophic event. Furthermore, every victim of the purges and mass campaigns from the 1950s through the mid-1970s who died in prison or committed suicide, in addition to those slain during the civil war-like Cultural Revolution clashes, represents a "peacetime" death to be laid at his door.

The number itself is impossible to verify, partly because it is difficult to separate starvation from other causes of death in famine years. It is also impossible to neatly separate mortality resulting from political violence from death caused by old age or illness during times of civil strife. In addition, a focus solely on catastrophe leaves out of the picture completely the achievements of the first decades of the PRC: the fact remains that, despite all of the horrors of the Great Leap Forward, Mao's time in power saw life expectancy within China jump from roughly thirty-five years to seventy, while illiteracy declined even more sharply (from approximately 80 percent to under 10 percent).

The book, which is packed with detailed descriptions of acts of violence and a great deal of lurid prose, portrays Mao as behaving, from youth onward, as a heartless Machiavellian

figure. He never even truly believed in Marxism, the authors claim, but embraced the creed simply as a way to gain power. Moreover, they assert that, late in life, Mao became a blood-thirsty and sexually depraved tyrant who interacted only with sycophants.

Overall, their book presents Mao as more demonic than human. He was someone who, the authors insist, had no capacity for love and never felt a single twinge of remorse for his actions—though how exactly this can be “proven” without the magical ability to peer into a subject’s soul, or at least interview him, as they could not, is left unexplained.

What is the alternative to viewing Mao as a monster?

There are many alternatives to thinking of Mao as a fiend who was China’s Hitler. One useful way to think of current assessments of Mao is a bit like American views of Andrew Jackson. Though admittedly far from perfect, the comparison is based on the fact that Jackson is remembered both as someone who played a significant role in the development of a political organization (the Democratic Party) that still has many partisans and as someone responsible for brutal policies toward Native Americans that are now often referred to as genocidal.

Both men are thought of as having done terrible things, yet this does not necessarily prevent them from being used as positive symbols. And Jackson still appears on \$20 bills, even though Americans now tend to view as heinous the institution of slavery, of which he was a passionate defender, and the early 19th-century military campaigns against Native Americans, in which he took part.

At times Jackson, for all his flaws, is invoked as representing an egalitarian strain within the American democratic tradition, a self-made man of the people who rose to power via straight talk and was not allied with moneyed elitists. Mao stands for something roughly similar. Workers in state-owned industries who in recent years have been laid off

understandably associate Mao with a time when laborers got more respect, and he is remembered by some as a Communist leader who, for all his mistakes, never forgot his roots in the countryside and never viewed himself as belonging to a caste that was superior to ordinary folk.

Is Mao seen in China as someone who made errors?

The Chinese population has not been brainwashed into thinking that the Communist Party and its leaders are infallible, and while some people in China still revere Mao as a godlike figure, most do not. There is a widespread acceptance of the fact that Mao made major mistakes. The official verdict, first put forward in the early 1980s, holds that he was 70 percent right and 30 percent wrong. Some Chinese think this too harsh a report card for the leader who made China fully independent of foreign powers for the first time in a century, but others think it far too generous an assessment of him.

Just what his mistakes were is not spelled out in the official account of his legacy. There is a widespread acknowledgement, though, that his biggest missteps came late in life and that, had he died earlier, he might have been seen as right more than 70 percent of the time. It is understood that his most egregious errors included the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution; with the latter, he is blamed for spurring the Red Guards on to militancy in 1966 and facilitating or at least doing too little to stop the Gang of Four a decade later. When people in China treat him with reverence now, the Mao they have in mind is often the leader of the time before the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution.

How do ordinary Chinese feel about Mao?

The feelings of ordinary Chinese toward Mao run the gamut from nostalgia to fury, admiration to disdain. There continue to be long lines to view his body, which remains on display in

the lavish mausoleum in the center of Tiananmen Square that was built soon after his death. But not everyone who goes to look at him does so in a spirit of reverence (it has long been said that there are those who go just to make sure that the tyrant they feared is really dead, and there are many who go simply as tourists), though some definitely do go to pay homage to a man they still think of as a kind of deity. Most, no doubt, have a mindset not unlike that which citizens of today's France might have when visiting Napoleon's tomb, considering Mao a person of undeniable importance in their country's past, who had his dark side and also made significant contributions to the nation, without which it would not be what it is now.

There are also specific moments when expressing admiration for Mao in contemporary China can serve as a means of criticizing things that have happened since his death. For example, early in the 21st century, angry workers in northern Chinese rust-belt cities who had been laid off from state-run enterprise jobs that Mao had told them would be theirs for life sometimes carried his portrait during their demonstrations as a way of signaling displeasure with economic reforms that were leaving them behind. Mao portraits made another appearance in anti-Japanese protests that took place in the fall of 2012, with commentators suggesting that carrying the likeness of China's former leader served as a way for protestors to express discontent with the direction in which the current leadership was taking the country. China, the presence of the portraits suggested, once again needed a "Great Helmsman" (as Mao had been known) to stand up to the Japanese and settle a territorial dispute between the two countries, as well as steer China back on course more generally.²²

In addition, there are Chinese who lived through and suffered during the Cultural Revolution who refer to specific things about it—and, by extension, Mao—in a positive way. If annoyed with the self-centeredness and materialism of contemporary youths, they may say that, as bad as the Cultural