



The Historical Development of China

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- China is known to have one of the oldest and richest histories in the world.
- Historians generally accept the Yellow River Valley as the location where the first Chinese villages began to emerge (Parker, 76).
- One example is the Banpo village near Xi'an discovered in 1953 CE. The people were mostly fishermen and hunters. They also made complex art such as pottery and appeared to have a sophisticated society.



A portion of the Banpo village in its current state



An example of the pottery designs

Prehistoric China



- One of the first dynasties that originated from China is the Xia (2070-1600 BCE).
- The existence of the Xia has always been shrouded in mystery because there isn't much conclusive evidence or record of them.
- A site called the Erlitou village discovered in 1959. Archeologists believed this was probably what was referred to as the Xia dynasty.
- Many tombs, palace-like buildings and tools were discovered which suggests a society with a form of royalty (chinahighlights.com)

Early Dynasties

- The Shang Dynasty is the first part of China's history that is supported by conclusive evidence of its presence by archeologists.
- Under the Shang, Chinese culture was further developed and many Chinese citizens believe this period to be the most important. Huge cities, bronze artifacts and evidence of writing were unearthed (lumenlearning.com).
- This period made use of a class system in its society. It consisted of land-owners, soldiers, peasants and aristocrats.



The orange area indicates the extent of the Shang Dynasty's rule

Shang Dynasty

- King Wu (1046-1043 BCE) is credited as the founder of the Zhou Dynasty. The king's rule began as a rebellion of the previous King Zhou who had killed his brother.
- During this time, the idea known as the Mandate of Heaven gave Wu the opportunity to overthrow Zhou due to his unfair treatment of the people.
- The culture evolved under Wu's rule. Writing and iron artifacts became more advanced. Famous philosophers such as Confucius and Mencius all came from the Zhou Dynasty.

Bronze artifacts like this from the Zhou period can be found at the MET Museum



Zhou Dynasty



- The Han Dynasty was known as a time of great expansion and reform under its ruler, Emperor Gaozu.
- After Gaozu's death, emperor Wu took charge and was responsible for a number of innovations. Wu revived Confucianism as the nation's official philosophy. He further developed transportation industries and expanded the salt and iron economy.
- The Han's establishment of the Silk Road was a significant achievement which allowed for greater trade and cultural exchanges between the East and West (History.com).

Han Dynasty

- The Tang Dynasty is considered the golden age of Chinese culture, especially under the rule of emperor Taizong. He gained control via a coup by assassinating his father and other members of the royal household.
- Despite his actions, he ordered the construction of Buddhist temples and schools for all to attend. He also expanded his rule into Central Asia. There was much greater presence in the maritime trading industry, especially in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.
- Still, there was much uprisings; notably General An Shi's rebellion. Many people suffered during this rebellious time; close to 36 million people died. Trade suffered greatly and the economy plummeted.

Tang Dynasty

- The Qing (1644-1912) was China's last imperial dynasty. This period exhibited some of the greatest rulers the nation has ever seen.
- The previous era, Ming Dynasty, was plagued with famines, natural disasters and invasions. The people believed that the rulers could no longer function efficiently and thus, under the Mandate of Heaven, they were overthrown.
- Qing's achievements were quite substantial. Its expansion was increasing and it was eventually receiving tributes from its neighbors for protection.



The colored area shows the Qing Empire which covered areas such as Beijing

Qing Dynasty

- This period (1912-1949) is referred to as the first democratic republic after the abdication of the Qing Dynasty. It was seen as a transition from feudalism to modernization.
- The Wuchang Uprising is largely responsible for the fall of the Qing. It was the first armed revolt against a regime that was becoming more corrupt everyday.
- China realized that its ways were considered backward in the eyes of the world and desperately needed a governing system that would put them on par with other developed nations.



A statue of Sun Yat-Sen who led the first uprising

The Republican Era

- The first provisional president, Sun Yat-Sen, was elected by the now independent provinces. He announced the official flag of China and decided on the Solar calendar to be the working calendar.
- However, Yat-Sen's rule was short lived and he eventually handed the reigns to Yuan Shikai, the powerful founder of the Beiyang armies which was the main force of the Qing government (chinaknowledge.eu).
- After Shikai became president, he used his power to essentially destroy the newly formed constitution and create a dictatorship. This obviously created great animosity towards Shikai by the people because he was trying to return the country to the old ways of monarchism.
- There was some hope in the formation of the National People's Party (KMT) lead by one of Sun's associates. The Party was able to win majority seats, however, Shikai had the Party's leader and other pro-revolutionists assassinated (chaos.umd.edu).
- Eventually, Shikai dissolved the KMT and removed its members. He then suspended parliament and made it so a new constitution could not be formed, making him president for life. He also proclaimed himself a new emperor, however, this led to massive rebellions by the people.

Rise of Yuan Shikai



- Yuan died in 1916, leaving behind a broken country without strong leadership. Many warlords would often fight for regional control and government control shifted hands very often.
- When Sun died in 1925, his successor, Chiang Kai-Shek, led the KMT to regain control of China by force. He allied himself with some of the warlords and one by one, took back the cities.
- Mao Zedong, the leader of the communist party, had to retreat from the KMT in what was known as the Long March which lasted about a year
- Eventually, Kai-Shek and his party set up a base in Nanjing and China was unified temporarily. Nanjing quickly became known as the only legitimate government of China by the end of 1928.

Dark Ages – Warlord Period

- Pressure from Japan's inevitable invasion resulted in a coup d'état on Kai-Shek by generals of the communist party. Kai-Shek was imprisoned and he eventually decided to work with Mao Zedong to repel Japanese forces.
- Japan's invasion began in 1937 in Beijing. The united Chinese forces fought back bravely but suffered huge losses due to Japan's overwhelming military strength.
- Japan captured many important cities in China and unleashed devastating atrocities on its people. The worse one being the Nanjing Massacre of 1937.

Japanese soldiers using a Chinese man as a slave



Japan Invades



- In 1945, Japan lost World War II and since China was on the side of the allies at the time, they were able to celebrate in the win. However, this victory was short-lived because the KMT and CPC resumed their rivalry.
- Chiang has major support from America, however, the CPC gained large funds from the Soviet Union and gained much support from the people.
- The CPC launched many attacks in major cities and the Soviet Union often supported them by providing leftover firearms from Japanese soldiers. The United States tried on numerous occasions to formulate peace but neither would admit defeat (ducksters.com).

The Civil War Continues

- By 1948, was gaining great success as they continued to capture more cities. Their military forces were improved by Soviet support.
- In 1949, the CPC was finally able to capture Beijing and they declared victory over the KMT. The country was now under the rule of the People's Republic of China
- The nationalist party fled to Taiwan where they established a government in Taipei. To this day, it is the hope of the KMT to one day regain control of mainland China.
- Under Zedong's rule, advancements in agriculture, called "The Great Leap Forward" through industrialization was a major event. However, due to natural disasters and lack of Soviet support, millions of people starved.
- Over several decades, China suffered many reforms in its economy and government but after a slow recovery, it is now considered one of the world's greatest superpowers.

Communist Era

- Perhaps one of the most recent movements is the protest currently going on in Hong Kong against a legislative bill which essentially chips away at the rights of citizens in the city.
- The Extradition Bill would essentially allow any criminals or detainees in Hong Kong to be sent to China to stand trial. This would include protestors and since Chinese judges must follow the Communist party's laws, these criminals would have basic rights taken away.
- Hong Kong and China's relationship has always been complicated. The city used to be under British rule but after being freed, it gained certain privileges that China does not offer such as free speech.
- President Xi Jinping ultimately wants to fully take over Hong Kong especially since it is a strong democratic location.
- As of now, the Bill is suspended but since Beijing holds most of the seats in Hong Kong's legislature, it will most likely be passed. A debate will also be held eventually to determine future steps (nytimes.com).

Movements of the 21st Century

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