

## Lesson 2

### Time line of significant events in Modern Chinese History

#### Background Information

Portuguese and Spanish explorer and envoys began to arrive in South China via the new sea routes in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

The traders and missionaries too came to China too

Shortly, afterwards the Russians marched across Siberia and reached the Manchurian border in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century

Significance: broke China's age-old isolation and initiated the beginning of direct East-West contact (this East-West contact will grow in such great force in the 19<sup>th</sup> century)

Immanuel Hsu – "this contact will effect a head on collision between China and the West"

#### Assumption?

This development coincided with China's domestic development - the rise of the Manchus and the establishment of the Qing (Ching) dynasty

These momentous foreign and domestic developments left behind far-reaching consequences

Hsu: the inter-play of foreign and domestic elements gave rise to revolutionary change in the Chinese political system, economic institutions, social structure and intellectual attitude. Change became a key feature of the period

#### Assumption?

**The forcible injection of alien elements into Chinese life – the Westerners from without and the Manchus from within – generated a strong sense of nationalistic-racial consciousness**

#### Who are the Manchus? Why are they considered aliens?

The Manchus were a hardy stock of the nomadic Jurchen tribe, living in what is today's Manchuria where they subsisted by hunting and fishing

In Oct 1644, the Manchus seized power from the Ming dynasty and the Qing court moved from Mukden to Peking, marking the beginning of a new dynasty, which lasted till 1911

The last years of Ch'ien-lung reign were indeed shameful (**late 18<sup>th</sup> century**) and **China was experiencing the beginning of the dynastic decline – the splendour of past glory remained on the surface, but beneath it the substance of grandeur was gone**

**It was at this juncture that the Westerners began to intensify their bid to open China to trade and diplomacy and a new phase of history began**

## Map of China



## Periodization in Chinese History

Although the meeting of Western and Chinese history began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its effect did not become significant until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the intensified activities of the West led to radical changes

Thus, mostly the Western historians, western trained Chinese scholars and Marxist scholars, tend to regard the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the beginning of modern China

Chinese historians consider the Opium War of 1839-42 as the point of departure – this war was considered the beginning of foreign imperialism in China and Chinese history thereafter was largely one of imperialism in China

For the Western historians, the war signified the acceleration of foreign activities which shattered Chinese isolation and ushered in a period of revolutionary changes in China

### **What is the similarity and difference in these two perspectives?**

A second school, consisting mostly of the more traditional Chinese historians, consider the arrival of European explorers and missionaries during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for internally it was

the time of the rise of the Manchus and the establishment of the Qing dynasty, and externally it was the period when Western learning was first introduced into China

They argue that its spectacular effects the Western impact on the 19<sup>th</sup> century was only an extension and intensified of a process already set in motion two and one half centuries earlier

Reconciling the two schools of thought on defining “modern China”

1. To fully appreciate the changes in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century one has to know the institutions of the earlier period
2. In view of the crucial role that the West and Russia played in influencing the destiny of modern China, one should not lose sight of the import of the early contacts
3. The arrival of western Europeans and Russians in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries paved the way for the intensified activity of the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
4. Familiarisation of the traditional Chinese state and society (1600-1800s) is necessary as it conditioned China's reaction to the foreign challenge of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (eg. Response to Opium War)
5. The intrusion of the West can be constructed as a kind of catalyst, precipitating traditional Chinese into its modern counterpart, hence knowing about the mother institutions is important
6. **During the 1600 to 1800 will provide the background necessary for a sound understanding of modern China – during this time China's political system, social structure, economic institutions and intellectual atmosphere remained substantially what they has been during the previous 2000 years – the polity was a dynasty ruled by an imperial family, the economy was basically agrarian and self-sufficient, the society centered around the gentry and the dominant ideology was Confucianism**

**Assumption?**

**Alternative Perspective by Jack Gray**

China's economy on the eve of the Opium War was still agrarian – agriculture was by far the greatest source of wealth. Possibly, as much as 90% of the population lived on the land outside the towns

By the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the old, mainly feudal forms of tenure had given way to a free market in land. The last insignificant vestiges of tenure had given way to a free market in land. The last significant vestiges of serfdom were abolished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some land was owned by landlords who rented to cultivators, some were in the hands of owner-operators.

Most peasant families owned some land but many also rented in extra land, and a large minority depended wholly on rented land. Landlordism was not wholly the result of landless poverty; renting gave the system flexibility. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century there were very few large estates. Landlordism was never regarded as morally acceptable; the ideal was that every family should own enough land for its support and for the employment of family members and no one should own more. In spirit, if not altogether in fact, China was a land of independent peasants who owed nothing to anyone except the taxes they owed to the state

**An agrarian economy is not necessarily a subsistence economy.** So great was China's agriculture production that this small fraction created an enormous commerce. Her great climatic range, while it made possible a degree of national self-sufficiency denied even to the whole of western Europe, at the same time stimulated long-distance trade within China on a scale which made necessary, as in Europe's overseas trade, the creation of new forms of business organization.

**Although by far the greater part of the food supply was consumed on or near the farm, the total quantity of food which moved beyond this narrow range in order to feed a city population larger than the whole contemporary population of France plus a comparable population in the smaller towns, plus another population of the same order of magnitude who planted cotton or cultivated mulberry trees instead of food crops, was certainly far greater than the total of the long-stance trade in grain in 18<sup>th</sup> century.**

**How far was pre-modern China was already showing tendencies to develop towards modern, capitalist economic forms? Why was the subsequent process of economic modernization in China apparently so halting and imperfect?**

In the 1950s a controversy arose among the historians of the Chinese People's Republic on this question. Mao Zedong had expressed the opinion that China had already been developing towards a native capitalism, when the process was frustrated by imperialist aggression. This controversy led to considerable increase on the knowledge of China's pre-modern economy. What Chinese historians looked for as signs of capitalist development included the production of goods for a market, large scale production, the existence of a free labour market, the division of labour and specialization, and increased cash-cropping of agricultural products used as industrial raw materials. **All these signs of development were certainly present in 18<sup>th</sup> century China.**

**The evaluation of economic development in China, is rightly or wrongly, measured against the history of Western industrial revolution, and in these terms China's 18<sup>th</sup> century proto-capitalist enterprises were no thinner on the ground than those of Europe at the same date.**

The capacity for large-scale production, and for distribution over long distances, with adequate credit and with large-scale mobilization of capital through stable institutions, is proved. **Hence, it can at least be concluded, that if China's later steps to economic modernization were faltering, the cause did not lie in an inability to rise above subsistence farming, individual craft production and the small family business.**

### The Shaping Forces of Modern China

During the Qing period, the overriding consideration of the dynasty was to maintain itself – to win Chinese goodwill and acceptance, it identified itself with the traditional order, kept the Ming government and social institutions, embraced Neo-Confucianism as a state philosophy, and absorbed the Chinese into its bureaucracy to work alongside the Manchus in a sort of diarchy.

Military expeditions were dispatched to the far corners of the empire to quell revolts and expand frontiers, making the dynasty the second largest in the Chinese history to ensure the permanence of the Qing rule

However, one should not ignore the role played by revolts and rebellions as shaping forces

The fact that the Qing rule was an alien dynasty continuously evoked Chinese protest in the form of secret society activities and nationalistic-racial revolt and revolution

Anti-Qing movement among secret societies like Heavn and Earth society and the White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1804), Taiping rebellion (1850-1864)

After the failure of the Taipings in 1864, the nationalistic-racial revolution again subsided into secret society activities giving inspiration to later revolutions such as Dr Sun Yat-sen. By then the scope of revolutionary aspirations had broadened to include a vendetta against foreign imperialism as well

With the downfall of the Manchu dynasty in 1912, the anti-Qing objective had been realized and the nationalistic revolution turned against foreign imperialism, with European colonial powers as the chief target in the 1910-1920s, Japan in the 1930s and first half of the 1940s and Russia in the later 1950s of both the Chinese Nationalists and Communists

**Hsu: Thus throughout the 300 odd years of modern China, the thread of nationalistic-racial protest against foreign elements in Chinese life formed a distinct theme of history – thus the history of modern China may be construed as a history of nationalistic revolution**

The third shaping force was the search for a way to survive in the new world that had been forcibly thrust upon China by the West after the mid-19th century

Hsu: Western civilization proved more destructive in its immediate confrontation with China – it precipitated the breakdown of the old order without substituting another, leaving the Chinese the difficult task of forging a new order out of the ruins of the old

**Burdened by tradition and heritage, and as yet ignorant of the nature of the Western world, the Chinese groped in the dark, looking for a way to live with the great changes that was happening in more than 3000 years of history**

**They were faced with the agonizing problem of deciding how much of Old China must be discarded and how much of the modern West must be accepted in order for China to exist and won a respectable place in the community of nations**

**\*The search for a new order involved an extremely hard struggle against the weight of pride, disdain for things foreign and the inveterate belief that the bountiful Middle Kingdom had nothing to learn from the outlandish barbarians**

However, after the China's second defeat in war with the Western powers and the Anglo-French occupation of Peking in 1860, the more progressive Mandarins (a bureaucrat/official scholar in the government of imperial China), such as Prince Kung, Tsenh Kuo-fan and Li Hung, realized **that the Western challenge was inescapable and that China must change if it was to survive**

They initiated what was known as the Self-strengthening Movement in the early – “learning the superior barbarian technique with which to repel the barbarians”

In this spirit, translation bureaus were established, and arsenals and dockyards were created after the Western models, supported by military industries

Hsu: the movement, which lasted some 35 years, was a superficial attempt at modernization – only those aspects having immediate usefulness were adopted while the more commendable parts of the Western civilization such as political systems, economic



institutions, philosophy, literature and the arts were totally ignore – the assumption? No success at all?

The Self-strengthening Movement was proved totally inadequate by the defeat in the Japanese war in 1895 (can this be the only criteria for measuring effectiveness of SSM?)

Realizing the limited scope of their movement, Chinese scholars and officials determined that they must broaden the modernization program to include political reform as well

Hsu: Kang Yuwei and his student Liang Chi Ch'ao urged the emperor to make institutional reform but even at this late stage reformers did not advocate complete Westernization but rather the creation of a hybrid polity containing Chinese and Western elements – “Chinese learning for fundamentals, Western learning for practical application” – Hundred Day Reform of 1898 – ended abruptly in failure (Assumption?)

Meanwhile, secret revolutionary activities were initiated by Dr Sun Yat-sen, a western trained physician, who believed that China's problems could not be remedied by a partial institutional reform but only by a complete revolution

Carrying the torch of nationalistic revolution, he advocated the overthrow of the Manchu rule

Operating on the fringes of society, he won support from the secret societies, the lower classes and the overseas Chinese (Sun Yat-sen Museum in Singapore), but not from the scholars and the gentry, who generally followed K'ang and Liang

But after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, which severely discredited the dynasty, an increasing number of educated people joined Dr Sun's cause and his earlier image of disloyal rebel transformed into that of patriotic revolutionary – the success of the revolution of 1911 was followed by the establishment of a Western-style republic in 1912, and the imperial dynasty was abolished for the first time in 4000 years

Although a break was made with the outdated political system, the hand of the past continued to weigh heavily in social habits and intellectual life – the government has had a face-lifting but its spirit remained the same – corruption, warlordism, attempts at reviving monarchism and disorder were rife (Assumption)

The institution of the Republic was not accompanied by the expected peace and order and Chinese intellectuals became convinced that without a thorough thought reform no good government and no social improvement were possible

Those who had studied in Japan, Europe and the United States such as Chen Tu-hsiu, Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei and Hu Shih – returned home in the second half of the 1910s to promote a New Cultural Movement and an intellectual revolution, culminating in the May Fourth Movement of 1919

The spirit of the age opposed tradition and Confucianism and advocated complete Westernization, science and democracy

One of the philosophy that emerged during this ideological ferment was the Marxist revolutionary approach propagated by Ch'en Tu-Shih and Li Ta-Chao under the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution

**The dominant theme of Contemporary China has been the struggle between the Nationalists and the Communists for the supreme power of the state**

The Chinese Communist Party was founded in 1921 amidst the intellectual revolution surrounding the May Fourth Movement

1923 – Collaboration between the Nationalists and the Communist

1925 – Alliance doomed with the death of Dr Sun Yat-sen

1927 – open split

1928 – Chiang Kai-shek the Nationalist military leader emerged as the new strong man, with a Nationalist government in Nanking in 1928

After the split, Mao Tze tung and Chu The formed their own Soviets in Kiangsi, virtually independent of the underground central party organisation in Shanghai

Chiang launched 5 campaigns against them, routing them from southeastern China late in 1934 – the Communist embarked upon the epic Long March of 6000 miles to the Northwest, where they re-established themselves

But hardly had the communist problem been solved when the Japanese struck in 1937

Facing a common enemy, the Nationalist and the Communist formed a United Front, though neither trusted each other

No sooner had the Japanese war had ended in 1945 than civil strife erupted

Depleted by the long foreign war, threatened by runaway inflation, burdened by age-old problem of landlordism and weary of fratricide fighting, the Nationalist despite their apparent military superiority and American aid, lost the mainland and took refuge on Taiwan

Mao established the Chinese Republic in 1949

Several important stages of development of modern China:

1. Rejection of the West in the pre-Opium War period
2. SSM of 1861-1895
3. Political Reform and Revolution of 1898-1912
4. Intellectual Revolution 1917-1923
5. Rise of Chinese Communism

Not simple linear movement but general pattern of development and guideposts in evolving a conceptual framework

Accompanying the great political changes was also fundamental changes in the economy and society

**Hsu: the dynamics of changes suggests that modern Chinese history is characterized by a passive response to the West, but by an active struggle for the Chinese to meet the foreign and domestic challenge in an effort to regenerate and transform their country from an outdated Confucian universal empire to a modern national state – avoid the pitfall of “foreign causation” in the interpretation of Chinese history and the implication that China merely reacted**

China's response VS Chinese just reacted