

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute 1981 Volume II: An Interdisciplinary Approach to British Studies

China: Portrait of Change

Curriculum Unit 81.02.05 by Linda Maynard

Since the times when men like, Marco Polo began to record their travels, the Western World has been fascinated by China. Descriptions of gold streets, jewels as large as men's fists and strange customs gave Cathay an unknown and exotic image. While in the past China presented a mask to Western eyes, there is an openness today which permits us to witness the unfolding of a new China. The rise of China in the twentieth century is the emergence of one of the major world powers. That fact alone makes it essential for us in the West, especially in the United States, to begin to understand the realities of its' existence.

In a nation with nearly four thousand years of history behind it, change has come slowly. Just the mention of China evokes thoughts of traditions as ancient as any on this earth. While carefully preserving many of these traditions, since 1949 China has abandoned its traditional policy and has embarked on a radically different approach. The modernization of China and the evolution of China's images serve as the twin foci of this unit. As part of the ninth and tenth grade survey of World Civilization, this unit aims to summarize nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese history and to present Western, particularly American, attitudes towards, reactions to, and images of China. As China shows the potential for playing once more a major role in the making of history, O. Edmund Clubb warns in *20th Century China*, the dangers involved in being wrong about China are vastly greater today than they were at any time in the past. ¹

Because of its vastness and large population, the main problems of the Chinese people have hardly been touched by any of the governments ruling it.

An ordinary map of China is deceptive, as it shows a country of about 3.7 million square miles, which is roughly the same size as the United States. Even with an estimated one billion people (one-fourth of the world's population), the map suggests that there should be plenty of room for all. Upon closer examination, students may discover an important geographical point: most of China's land consists of mountains and deserts. In fact, three-fourths of the Chinese people live in only 15 percent of the country, mainly in the east and south in the great river valleys of the Yellow and Yangtze. ²

David Nelson Rowe, in *Modern China*, credits the very survival of China to its cultural and social inheritance from the past. Resisting political fragmentation, China has been loosely ruled by single governments through local organizations for over a thousand years. And, even though there are local variations in language, there has always been one written script, thus preserving China's cultural unity. Another characteristic feature of Chinese society aiding its survival has been the family. At the center of this large agricultural society, a surer,

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more stable entity than any one individual, the family was both a tight-knit group and and integral part of the community. ³

China's major problems of land utilization, production and distribution have always been outside the control of the central government. So have frequent natural disasters such as floods and famine, typhoons and droughts. Where China's governments have sought complete control of some areas such as production of foodstuffs, an imbalance of power between local and central governments brought on the theory of the "right to revolution" as first described in the writings of a third century Chinese philosopher, Mencius. Through this theory, Chinese peasants acted out from time to time what they considered a "Mandate from Heaven." Each disaster which temporarily reduced the food supply was a sign that the particular ruling group should be ousted; a rebellion would follow, resulting in chaos and heavy loss of life. The end result would be a reduction in population and a general balance with the existing food supply. 4

Partly because of China's geographical isolation from the West and her refusal to deal with non-Chinese on a basis of equality (all non-Chinese were viewed as barbarians, inferior and subordinate to China), her western contacts before the nineteenth century were mostly limited to commercial intercourse with the Portuguese who had captured Malacca in 1511. ⁵ Since she had no "foreign" relations, non-Chinese affairs were handled under the Manchus by either the Li Fan Yuan (court for the Governance of the Borderlands) or the Board of Rites (which prescribed the amount of tribute to be paid and the procedure for its delivery). China's only system of peacetime foreign relations was its tributary system. Furthermore, she was not interested in trade with the West because the West had nothing to match her silk, porcelain, cotton cloth or tea. Only when missionaries joined forces with traders and emphasized western learning was China somewhat receptive to opening its "Closed Door," and then under her terms: no tribute, no trade. ⁶

Between 1729 and 1839 foreign traders imported opium into China illegally. As the amounts of opium brought into China increased, the outflow of silver created a serious problem which led to the Opium War of 1839-1842. Opium was not the only cause for war, as Westerners were determined to break the Chinese policy of exclusion or isolation. The British were victorious and by the Treaty of Nan King forced 1.) the opening of five China ports to trade, 2.) an agreement to lower import tariffs and, in a later treaty, introduced the "most-favored-nation" clause by which any right granted one power would automatically by given to the British. With in two years similar treaties were signed with France and the United States. ⁷

Troubles soon developed with charges of unequal treatment by Western nations. Adding pressure internally was the worsening condition of the Chinese Peasants which culminated in one of the most devastating uprisings in Chinese history. Known as the T'ai P'ing Rebellion, this movements' goals were to oust the Manchu dynasty and begin land and social reforms. Lasting from 1848 to 1865, the struggle cost an estimated 20,000,000 lives. Although the Manchus remained in power with the help of Western nations, the results of this rebellion were far-reaching. 8

The T'ai P'ing Rebellion pointed out a need for change in China and resulted in two groups forming: those favoring adoption of more modern ways and those favoring traditional Chinese ways. Outside of China, reaction was mixed. Some foreign governments did not want to see a government in Peking strong enough to put down rebellions and thus able to stand up to them. The feeling of foreigners within China was one of fear, distrust, ignorance and hostility. "Westerners were few, in a land of millions." ⁹

China faced other challenges near the end of the nineteenth century that she could not handle. Other powers began to take Chinese territory: Russia expanded in the northeast, Britain took Burma in 1886, the French

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entered Indo-China in 1858 and Japan claimed the Ryukyu Island in 1881. 10

Emigration problems were among the most difficult in Chinese relations with the outside world. Although emigration has always been prohibited, by 1867 there were 50,000 Chinese in California. Ill-treatment there and in South America forced the Chinese government to demand protection for Chinese living abroad. ¹¹

The Missionary movement in China resulted in the conversion of 500 000 Chinese to Catholicism and 55,000 to the Protestant religions between 1800 and 1900. Bringing western educational systems and modern medicine with them, the missionaries were often in conflict with traditional Chinese values. ¹²

Even when China incurred one defeat after another in the late nineteenth century, she still preserved a myth of her own superiority. It took a jolt to force the Imperial Government to act. The shock came in 1895 when Japan defeated China in the First Sino-Japanese War, giving Korea its independence, Japan the island of Formosa and China an indemnity to pay.

A second jolt came when five imperialist powers demanded leaseholds in China: Russia in Manchuria, France in Southwest China, Germany in Shantung Province, Britain and Portugal in South China. ¹³ Setting up "spheres of influence" these nations delivered an ominous warning to the Imperial Government.

The response for change came in what was called the "Hundred Days of Reform," a series of decrees issued by the Emperor ordering China to become modern. Immediately, the Empress Dowager placed her nephew, the Emperor, under guard, executed some of his advisors, nullified the reforms and thus fumbled the last chance to save the dynasty by reform of the system. ¹⁴

By 1900 hatred of foreigners boiled over in another uprising known as the "Boxer Rebellion." A secret society called the "Righteous Harmony Fists" blamed China's hard times on Westerners. Mobs killed over two hundred Westerners and thousands of Chinese people associated with them. To make matters worse, the Imperial Government joined with the Boxers in an attempt to drive all foreigners from the country. Eight powers responded in putting the rebellion down. The peace terms showed China's weakness. China was finally forced to accept the European way of conducting foreign relations.

Foreign reactions were a mixture of horror at the violence, concern about preserving the "Territorial integrity" of China (John Hay's Open Door Policy), and desire to obtain a share of China. From 1900 to 1905 Japan and Russia fought a war over Manchuria and Korea which Japan won and which had profound effects on China. ¹⁵

An accidentally detonated bomb disclosed the work of a small revolutionary group in October of 1911 and began a revolution that was to change China forever. The man who came to the forefront was typical of a group of foreign-educated Chinese who has returned "infected with revolutionary ideas." ¹⁶ Dr. Sun Yat-sen, chief organizer of what eventually became the Nationalist Party (Kuomingtang), espoused three fundamentals: 1.) oust the Manchus; restore China to Chinese controls, 2.) create a republic, 3.) distribute land equally 17

By the beginning of 1912, Dr. Sun Yat-sen took over as leader of the Provisional Government and the Manchus were ousted. When a Parliament was established, Yuan Shih-Kai, a general and official, powerful in north China, was elected as president. Yuan Shih-Kai soon turned to the traditional, monarchistic way of governing China, dismissing parliament and declaring himself dictator. ¹⁸

When Yuan Shih-Kai died in 19i6, a group of generals and their armies ruled China as the "war lords."

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Although many of the ideas of Dr. Sun Yat-sen became popular between 1917 and 1926 (ideas such as socialism, nationalism and a strong military unit), factions within the Nationalist Party weakened it. Chiang Kai-shek headed the anti-communist force that was constantly battling the Communists, a steadily growing group in China after the Russian Revolution of 1917. ¹⁹

The Nationalist takeover of China in 1928 did not bring unity to China. In fact, the problems inherited by the Nationalists were enormous. China's agricultural basis was again challenged by the constant increase in population. Political disruption was paralleled by disintegration of its intellectual and cultural life. There was such a diversity of viewpoints, especially of foreign-educated students, that the Chinese intellectuals were required to give up their monopoly of power and really associate with the masses. The job of educating ninety percent of the people (who were illiterate) was a problem that would require more than China's elite could handle, ²⁰

An even more important problem for the Nationalists was the civil war with the Communists. Following the Russian Revolution, a small group of Chinese organized their own Communist Party in southern China. Fighting between the two groups went on steadily between 1931 and 1937. David Nelson Rowe cites two reasons for the survival of China throughout such continuous civil wars: one being that weapons and armies were not strong enough to destroy any productive facility of any area, and the second, since China remained agricultural, economic disruption was chiefly local or regional and did not bring economic chaos. ²¹

It was pressure from outside of China, from Japan in 1937, that forced a temporary cessation of mutual attacks. In an effort to prevent Japan's takeover of the railroad in Northern China, the Chinese Communist Party worked with the Nationalist Government, thus attaining a position of influence in China it had never before occupied.

The Communists used their elevated position to their best advantages. Chou En-Lai, the leading Communist under Mao Tse-Tung, was the liaison officer with the National Government. The C.C.P. published its own daily newspaper, carried on subversive activities, infiltrating local governments, eventually causing a break with the government. To get the support of landlords and peasants, the Communists temporarily abandoned the idea of state ownership of land. ²²

In January of 1941 open war broke out between Communists and Chiang's soldiers. In the ten-year struggle, Chiang's forces had been battered by both Japanese and Communist soldiers. In contrast, the Communists had picked up a lot of strength. In 1943, after completing the "Long March" of 6000 miles from the southeastern hills of China to the northwestern hills, Communists ruled a larger area with a population of ninety million. ²³ With the combined pressure of the Japanese and the Communists to contend with, the National Government migrated to western China.

Initially the attitude of the American people toward the war in China was a mixture of apathy, neutralism on one hand, devotion to Chinese people and desire for trade profit in oil and iron to Japan on the other. After the events at Pearl Harbor, everything changed. The fact that the United States was unprepared to defend either itself or China was crucial. Only the American Fliers of the Fourteenth Air Force in China defended the Chinese from Japanese raids. ²⁴

The Chinese Nationalists were extremely disappointed at the U.S. decision to attack Hitler and Mussolini first. Japan, meanwhile, hoped to defeat China before the United Stated was free to aid China.

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A further disappointment came in the form of a United States plan for a "Coalition Government," where control of China would be divided. Chiang Kai-shek refused the United States offer to arm the Communists in an effort to defeat the Japanese. The Communists also found the plan unacceptable. ²⁵

The unrealistic American international policy for China as a "Great Power" after World War II was, perhaps, as much a cause of the Communist takeover of China as any other. Characterized by our hope for the future of China or our illusions of Chinese strength (because of their numbers), it was typical of America's Chinacentered Far East Policy. ²⁶

Disillusioned by the Yalta Agreement in which Soviets were given control of Manchuria, disappointed by the failure in American aid (the United States had instituted an embargo of \$75,000,000 worth of supplies), demoralized by the Red Blockade of key cities, the National Army under Chiang Kai-shek fled to the island of Formosa (Taiwan) in December of 1949 ²⁷

The People's Republic of China, under Mao Tse-Tung, was formally established in October of 1949. The Communist Revolution in China for years remained almost a non-event for Americans. In a study prepared by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan in the 1950's, one out of four Americans did not know that China had a communist government. Slowly this is beginning to change with concern being expressed over the danger of ignoring one fourth of the world's population. ²⁸

The events in China since 1949, along with the main personalities of the period and the unique quality of Chinese communism, are possible topics for a sequel to this unit. The next section of this essay seeks to examine briefly some of the most pressing challenges being faced by Communist China today and the unique approaches taken in efforts to modernize China.

The most pressing economic realities on Communist China today need little dramatization. One quarter of the world's population lives on seven percent of the world's available land, consumes four percent of the world's output and has a per capita income of less than seventy-five dollars per month. ²⁹

China's rate of population growth is her most important economic problem. At roughly one billion now, predictions are that by the year 2,000, it could double. Chinese Communists appreciate the benefits to be derived from reducing birth rates, but their campaign to do so in 1956 failed as it encountered traditional peasant attitudes. ³⁰ The family is the security of a peasant culture, as it satisfies practical and social needs. An increase in population thus fits in with Chinese ideology that a greater population means more work done means greater prosperity. ³¹

The second major economic problem in China is the shortage of available land. With only fifteen percent of the total land area cultivated, and with ninety percent of the Chinese crowded into the fertile river valleys, the results are a high yield per unit of land but a low yield per worker. ³²

From among the options for increased agricultural production available to the Communists, the government chose the least expensive method: a reorganization of land. In 1949, they instituted a land reform program which distributed land formerly owned by landlords to peasants. Organizing lower-form cooperatives, called "collectives," the peasants pooled animals, land and their labor. While the Communists were successful in gaining control over the peasant and his output, they had little success in achieving increases in yield. 33

Even though their moat urgent problem in 1949 was to raise agricultural production to improve the standard

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of living for the rural population, the Communists' desire for reduced dependence on foreign imports and the desire to change China from an agricultural to an industrial nation drove them to invest heavily in industry (85%) in their first Five Year Plan (1953-1957). Industries developed were the military, chemical fertilizers, transportation, equipment and supplies. ³⁴

Greater attention and energy was placed into agricultural efforts in the second Five Year Plan (1958-1962). Called the "Great Leap Forward," the transformation of the collectives into communes also ended in failure as the Communists overestimated the available surplus workers. The Great Leap Forward took China back two steps and forced a reassessment of policy.

More recent Communist efforts to develop agriculturally have emphasized land reclamation projects, increased use of chemical fertilizers and increased mechanization of agriculture. Maintaining a high level of savings and accumulation of capital (over 30%), elevating the level of technical ability, and importing foreign loans and aid (mainly from the Soviet Union and Canada) have enabled China to move closer to her ultimate goal of building a heavily industrial and modern military establishment. ³⁵

In the areas of science and education, the Communist record is excellent. With ninety percent of the people having at least four years of education, with one-fourth of the population enrolled in some type of educational program, and with one out of every four degrees granted in engineering, the Chinese Communists have more than eliminated one of their enemies. an illiterate population. This is especially important to a system which heavily depends upon education to win support. A massive re-writing of history to emphasize Marxist-Leninist theories has begun to remold the minds, hearts and behavior of a new generation of Chinese Communists.

The new generation or first generation of Chinese Communists is expressing itself differently in China since Mao. Images of an enslaved peasantry behind barbed wire and great walls are giving way to a bustling mix of "cowboys, bathing beaches, modern city-scapers, practicing Muslims, legal abortions, billboards advertising Lucky Cola and girls with permanent waves." ³⁶ Chinese young people think of their country as a major world power striding toward a modern industrial future. The Chinese government and the people are united on two supreme priorities: modernization and anti-imperialism. As China continues its struggle to join the world community, it plays an influential role with which China is not quite comfortable. The stakes are high, for China counts today. If China fails what will happen to the billion Chinese? If China succeeds, what about the rest of the world?

STRATEGIES and LESSON PLANS

This unit seeks to supplement a survey of world history which includes studies of five ancient civilizations (Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Greece and Rome) and Europe during the Middle Ages. The material in this essay accounts for about two or three weeks of a six week unit on China.

LESSON ONE

The first major concept to explore with students is the idea that geography has had an influence on Chinese history and civilization. Most of the students in my classes have studied Chinese culture in a middle school course on World Area Studies. A review of geography, then, should be a good place to start as students will be somewhat familiar with China's location.

Handout a map of the world and using a transparency of the same map have students fill in the names of the seven continents and four oceans. Ask students to name the continent on which China is located (do the same

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for the United States and other countries). Ask students to label China on the map. Ask students to name the area of the world China is located in. Ask if anyone knows why China is in the area known as the Far East. Is China really east of the United States? If it is not, why do we continue to use outdated terminology? Point out the relationship of the Far East with the Middle East and with England. If students want to pursue this topic ask them to suppose China (rather than England) had established world directions. Where would the Far East be? the Middle East?

Using the map of China included in this unit, prepare blank maps for students to fill in together. Ask students how China compares with America in terms of size (roughly the same . . . 3.7 million square miles). Fill in the following on the map:

- 1. the three major rivers, sources and courses: the Hwang Ho or Yellow River, the Yangtze River and the Si Kiang or West River.
- 2. the four major land areas: North, Central, South China and the Western Lands, including Tibet and the great desert basins.
- 3. five major Chinese cities with a population of over 1,000,000 (there are at least ten): Sian, Lanchow, Peking, Canton, Shanghai, Chungking, Nanking, Tienstin, Darien and Wuhan, Ask if anyone knows which city is the largest (Shanghai)? How many are on water? (all but Peking).
- 4. a. the name and location of China's highest mountains:
 - the Himalayas, the Pamirs and the Tien Shan.
 - b. the location of the Great Wall of China.
- 5. the approximate location of the Gobi Desert (in Mongolia, it covers almost 500,000 square miles).
- 6. China's coastline: compare latitudes, length of coast with United States (over 3,000 miles long).
- 7. the seas and the ocean touching China: Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea, Pacific Ocean.
- 8. ten countries bordering China (see map). Which one has the longest border in common with China? (Russia)

The overall question students should be able to discuss after this lesson is: How has geography affected China in its relations with the rest of the world?

Any one of the three following books is good for student information on the influence of geography on China's

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history. All three are available in New Haven schools.

The Third World: East Asia, by Anthony Sariti, Pendulum Press, Inc., Today's World in Focus: China, by Earl Swisher, Ginn and Company, China-Japan-Korea, History, Culture, People, by Rudolph Schwartz, Ed. D. and Harold E. Hammond, Cambridge Book Co., Inc.

LESSON TWO

The second major concept to explore with students is the nature of the traditional Chinese family and its role in society. Pa Chin's *The Family*, Tsao Hsuch-Chin's

Dream of the Red Chamber and almost any of Pearl Buck's novels contain vivid portrayals of family life in traditional China. Choose one to read together as a class or possibly one section of a novel in which Confucian ideals are evident. After reading a section organize a debate or discussion around one of the following topics:

- a. The role of women in Old China.
- b. Ancestor Worship and Respect for the Aged (extended families).
- c. Family Customs and Traditions.
- a. The role of women in Old China.

Students usually love the opportunity to discuss the role of women in any society. The subject of one about which they have strong opinions. Try to channel the discussion by choosing specific scenes from whatever they have read. Possible questions to discuss are:

- 1. Should wives obey husbands without question?
- 2. If a wife had no children, should she be sent back to her family?
- 3. Living with the in-laws, the wife was not a member until she had a son. Agree or disagree.
- 4. The wicked mother-in-law, the tom enter.
- 5. Wife-beating.
- 6. No divorce!
- b. Ancestor Worship and Respect for the Aged.

Living with an extended family is the exception rather than the rule in America. Even though we find many Senior Citizen organizations and services in this country today, there is nothing close to the kind of respect shown to Chinese elderly. Possible questions to explore under this heading are:

- 1. Why did several families live under one roof in China?
- 2. Would you like to live with your grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins? Why? Why not?
- 3. Give examples which show that the Chinese elders commanded a lot of respect.
- 4. What practices or traditions were special for Chinese elders?
- 5. Do older children in American families have special privileges or status? Should they? Why? Why not?
- c. Family Customs and Traditions.

The strength and survival of China have depended upon the family rather than one individual

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as the unit in society responsible for the future. There are many examples of this in novels about Chinese Families. Topics to explore with students include:

- 1. Arranged marriages for the good of the family—agree or disagree?
- 2. Children, especially males, are a blessing; what about overpopulation?
- 3. What do the Chinese mean by "Living the good life?" What is meant by "good life" in America?
- 4. What examples show that concern for the family was greater than concern for the individual?

An overall question for students to consider is: How is the traditional Chinese family similar to and different from its' American counterpart?

LESSON THREE

A third concept to probe with students is the idea of nationalism. In China nationalism developed as an outgrowth of anti-foreignism or anti-imperialism.

After students have read about the events leading to the Chinese Civil War in the Cambridge Series *China-Japan-Korea*, *History*, *Culture*, *People*, begin the discussion with a definition of nationalism. Ask students to

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explain nationalism in their own words. (Simply put, it can be summarized as strong feelings of patriotism for and pride in one's country.)

Ask them to explain the reasons for the emergence or re-emergence of this feeling in the 1920's and 1930's. Discuss the forms nationalism took in China during this period. The Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) vs. the Chinese Communist Party. Go over the differences in philosophy between the two groups. Ask students to account for the success of the Communist Party in the takeover of mainland China and the ousting of the Nationalists.

Ask students if they think it is possible for Americans to experience nationalism. Possibly someone may bring up the hostages in Iran as an example of a force unifying Americans.

Discuss the risks and benefits nationalism presents.

Ask for examples of nationalistic behavior (saluting Flag, Singing national anthem, joining military, celebrating July 4th, etc.)

Ask students if they have ever felt pride in their country. If yes, why?

The overall question to be addressed by students is: in what sense did foreigners contribute to the formation of the Chinese Communist Party?

Notes

- 1. O. Edmund Clubb, 20th Century China (New York: 1963), p. viii.
- 2. Harry Schwartz, Communist China, (New York: 1965), p.7.
- 3. David Nelson Rowe, Modern China, A Brief History, (New York: 1959), pp. 10-11.
- 4. Rowe, Modern China, pp. 15-16.
- 5. Donald F. Lach, China in the Eyes of Europe, (Chicago: 1968), pp. 730-731.
- 6. Rowe, p. 17.
- 7. Clubb, 20th Century China, p. 12.
- 8. Rowe, p. 21.
- 9. Rowe, p. 23
- 10. Rowe, p. 23
- 11. Rowe, p. 23
- 12. Rowe, p, 24.
- 13. Ethel E. Ewing, East Asian Culture, (Chicago: 1969), p. 65.
- 14. Clubb, p. 14.
- 15. Clubb, pp. 27-28.
- 16. Rowe, p. 37.
- 17. Rowe, p. 36.
- 18. Rowe, p. 37.
- 19. Rowe, pp. 42-43.

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- 20. Rowe, pp. 47-48.
- 21. Rowe, p, 45.
- 22. Rowe, pp. 57-58.
- 23. Ewing, East Asian Culture, pp. 73-80.
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- 25. Rowe, p. 65.
- 26. Rowe, p. 68.
- 27. Clubb, p. 297.
- 28. Ruth Adams, Contemporary China, (New York: 1966), p. viii.
- 29. "China: Portrait of Change," Life Magazine, October, 1980, p. 109.
- 30. Robert Dernberger, "Economic Realities," Contemporary China, (New York: 1966), p. 12
- 31. Joan Myrdal, "The Reshaping of Chinese Society," *Contemporary China*, (New York: 1966), p. 73-74.
- 32. Joan Robinson, "Organization of Agriculture," *Contemporary China*, (New York:1966), pp. 221-22.
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- 34. Dernberger, p. 131.
- 35. Dernberger, pp. 133-37.

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There are many articles in newspapers and magazines which students can easily read. Filmstrips on China at Winchester Audio-Visual Center deal with the history and major personalities of China.

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Other Resources

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