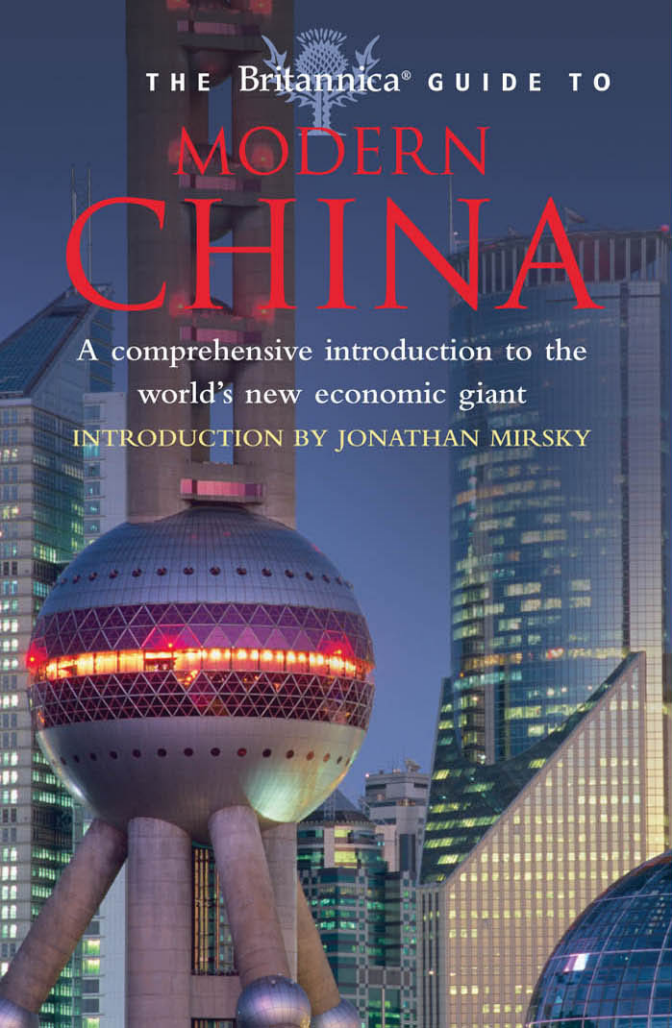


THE Britannica® GUIDE TO

# MODERN CHINA

A comprehensive introduction to the  
world's new economic giant

INTRODUCTION BY JONATHAN MIRSKY



## **An unbiased and lively overview of China's people, its culture, and recent history**

Drawing together the most up-to-date material, *The Britannica Guide to Modern China* is the perfect companion for travelers who wish to know the country beyond the tourist trail, for students and business people who need an overview of the culture and society, and for the general reader who wants to understand China's remarkable legacy and potent future.

The guide explains the differences between the Long March, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the Four Modernizations. It looks at the key personalities who transformed China into a modern state with the world's fastest-growing economy, which is predicted to eclipse the US market within 10 years. With an introduction by leading commentator Jonathan Mirsky, this Britannica Guide provides a detailed, accurate introduction to the diverse society that comprises modern China.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The Central Country** **Jonathan Mirsky**

Zhonghuo. The name says it all: China, the “Central Country”. Nowadays, China may be central only in name, but its claim to be first, most, and largest arouse expectations, fears, and hopes that it will make the twenty first century its own.

For what other country and head of state could London literally be turned red? That is what happened during a recent exhibition of Chinese art from the imperial collection at the Royal Academy. On the night of the opening, central London was illuminated from the Thames to the West End by red floodlights. When China’s President Hu Jintao and Queen Elizabeth visited the show to view the Manchu emperor’s favourite objects the building was closed all day to the public; Mr Hu and his royal host had the place to themselves for 50 minutes.

And why not? What country, after all, could have given the world such engineering marvels as the Great Wall or the world’s

highest railway (to Tibet) or is said to have invented the compass, gunpowder, block- and movable-type printing, paper, porcelain, and silk weaving—all inventions, one might say, that should be known by every school-child. And how about winnowing machines, wheelbarrows, non-choking harnesses for draught animals, the crossbow, the kite, the suspension bridge, watertight compartments in ships, fore and aft sails, canal lock gates, and deep borehole drilling? All these, too, the Chinese assert they invented, and their claims are echoed in many quarters.

Size matters. Within its borders China embraces the world's largest population. More striking still, there have always been more Chinese, including non-Hans (ethnic minorities), than any other people—already fifty million in the first century after the birth of Christ. Today, China's army is the world's largest, as is its civil service, and there are more cities in China with populations of a million or more than in any other country. And if surviving after birth and leading a long life are signs of a successful society, Chinese live-birth rates and longevity now exceed those in most developing countries and are nearly the equal of developed countries.

China is usually described as the world's oldest continuous civilization; unlike Egypt and Greece, many of the basic elements of Chinese culture, especially the written language and the habits and manners of its people, remain intact today. These characteristics have survived not only the invasions of non-Chinese peoples, notably the Mongols and Manchus, but during those long occupations the conquerors themselves adopted many Chinese habits and institutions. Nor, despite the humiliations of the unequal treaties of the nineteenth century, has China proper—excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan—ever been colonized. Some Western influences have in their time been harsh, but somehow, what may be called the “China magic” has succeeded in turning much Western influence to China's advantage, while many traditional values have been retained, especially in the countryside. Starbucks and Vuitton may be objects of desire but many up-to-date Chinese prefer traditional remedies to foreign drugs.

Such cultural continuities and adaptations have always marked the Chinese and their rulers, especially the government formed after the communist triumph in 1949. Communism, a Western notion, was transfigured in China; and while it is nowadays a cliché to say that the country is no longer communist (in the Cold War sense of the term), its basic political organization and authority can still be recognized, to use the Chinese term, as “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.

Indeed, two things are made plain in the education of the youngest Chinese school child—that the Communist Party saved China and there can be no other leading group, and that Chinese civilization is the oldest and finest. As for the non-Han Chinese living within China’s borders, some 55 identified ethnic minorities, it is emphasized that their best hopes for the future lie in the adoption of Han culture.

While there is considerable disagreement about the extent, and cost, of the transformation, China’s economic rise since 1980 has been breathtaking. As this book shows, the standard of living in the largest cities has risen significantly, foreign businesses have flooded into the country, and, more recently, China’s investment in foreign banks and other institutions has been unrivalled by any other developing country. Many urban Chinese now dress, read, travel internally and abroad, pray, and employ themselves in ways unthinkable 20 years ago.

Beijing has broken out of its previous stand-alone foreign policy and now participates in a myriad of international organizations and activities. It has been a major player during international crises such as North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons and the crackdown on internal opposition in Myanmar (Burma). After the re-absorption of Hong Kong in 1997, Beijing kept its word to guarantee the policy of “One China Two Systems”—political dissent and the opposition press have not been erased and when Hong Kong people resisted the imposition of a new sedition law with enormous demonstrations, Beijing withdrew the proposed legislation. Despite China’s threats to

invade Taiwan (long considered to be part of China), Beijing fulminated but stayed its hand when Taiwan's leaders proposed formal independence from the mainland.

It is undeniable, therefore, that China, poor and undeveloped in 1949 despite its historic cultural achievements, has transformed itself into an economic and military near-superpower, tourist destination, and seat-holder at the top level of international discourse and diplomacy. Yet this does not present the full complexity of a country in transition.

The astonishing speed at which this transformation has taken place has given rise to a new theory of development that accords with China's self-image of a country that can become modern and internationally significant, meet the needs and desires of its people, and define human rights and democracy in its own way. Although Beijing has signed most international treaties on human rights, it defines these rights, in its own words, as the guarantee of stability, food, clothing, and shelter to its vast population. Chinese democracy, the party insists, is not based on the "Westminster model", but on the gradual introduction of elections at the village, and eventually, town and county levels and on the government's constant "consultation" with many interest groups about the direction of policies that the regime determines are in the national interest. Thus, the Chinese government considers advice from foreigners on expanding rights to be an "affront to Chinese sovereignty".

For some China-watchers, these innovations in governing should be praised rather than condemned. Some foreign experts go further, contending that if outsiders criticize how China is ruled and organized, it will only make China's rulers defensive and regard themselves as besieged in a hostile environment. (This picture of China, including its cultural accomplishments and political achievements, is amply outlined in the following chapters.) What is equally plain is that in some negative aspects, China is also "biggest", "first" and "most". These aspects, too, have

their impact on the Chinese people and on China's relations with the rest of the world.

China's population today exceeds 1.3 billion and, by necessity, its growth is now limited. But the costs of such limitations have been high. The One-Child family policy, implemented in 1980, was the most unpopular of any program since 1949. Ruthlessly enforced, the policy repudiated not only the fundamental cultural preference for male heirs but also the practical fact that retired rural Chinese, with no means of support, expected their married sons to care for them—while their married daughters devoted themselves to their husbands' families. Where there was only a single married male child, one of the pairs of in-laws, it was feared, would languish without support. After the promulgation of the policy, desperate couples either killed newborn girls, placed them for adoption, or, as scans of fetuses became widely available, opted to abort unborn females. The result has been a widening gap in the gender ratios. In some parts of China as many as 118 male babies now survive for every 100 females.

Another aspect of the modern face of the Chinese government is the continued suppression of dissent. The harsh treatment of dissidents, while moderated in recent years, continues. The protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989 and similar manifestations in dozens of other Chinese cities were merely the most dramatic example of the regime's attitude to opposition—many activists from that event still remain in prison. Chinese critics of the regime once deemed "counter-revolutionary" are now termed "criminal" and remain subject to detention. A new form of surveillance is scanning the Internet, in which Chinese security officials can search for suspect words such as "democracy" in emails and blogs.

The Chinese economic miracle, made possible by a policy of unbridled industrial growth, has had its consequences. The Chinese environment is now among the most polluted in the world, and China may have overtaken the United States into first place for emission of dangerous hydrocarbons. Some half dozen

of the world's most polluted rivers are Chinese and more than a dozen Chinese cities are at the top of the world's pollution black list. There are reports that tens of thousands of Chinese children die each year from breathing poisonous air and drinking poisonous water.

In international developments, as noted above, China has played a positive role in attempting to persuade its neighbour, North Korea, to abandon that country's development of nuclear weapons. It is suggested, without substantial evidence, that in 2007 Beijing also advised the authorities in Myanmar to heed international calls to cease the oppression of the Buddhist clergy there. Elsewhere, China has continued to insist that urging countries such as Zimbabwe to adhere to international standards of human rights is to infringe their sovereignty. Indeed, in its accelerating search for sources of oil, China has struck deals with authoritarian regimes in Africa and the Middle East while remaining silent on the treatment of their citizens. In this regard, China also has been a leading international supplier of weapons to oppressive regimes, with China's riposte that developed countries such as the United States, Britain, and France have been far from innocent in this regard.

In international commerce, China is now a major exporter of manufactured goods, the low prices of which attract consumers around the world. However, two dark clouds hover over this picture. First, conditions in Chinese factories (as well as in many other industrial enterprises in the country, notably coal mines) are considered by many to be unsatisfactory, with complaints that workers live in substandard accommodations and are badly paid. The other blight is the periodic breakdown of quality control that can lead to the use of faulty components or deadly ingredients. Such occurrences have precipitated massive recalls of such products as toys, pet food, and cosmetics.

In sum, China is now on a path in which, within an orderly but admittedly corrupt society, market reforms are aimed at satisfying popular demands for economic progress. So far, this has been

largely successful, despite the growing disparity between the urban relatively affluent and the rural poor who have gained little from the reforms. But in the face of tens of thousands of annual demonstrations reported in the official press, both by underpaid and endangered industrial workers and by peasants oppressed by local officials, the regime has avoided further scenes comparable to the events of 1989 or even large-scale police suppression of local outbursts.

After the disorders of the Mao years, especially the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, the Chinese Communist Party appears, for the moment at least, to have convinced many Chinese that the alternative to party rule is *luan*, or chaos. Beijing has also persuaded many in the international community that, despite developments in Taiwan and Hong Kong, “Chinese don’t want democracy”. In 1919, during the May Fourth Movement, patriotic Chinese came to believe that China could be saved by “Mr Science” and “Mr Democracy”. ‘Mr Science’ has long since entered the scene. But some years ago, Roderick MacFarquhar, a professor of government at Harvard University, warned the Communist Party School in Beijing that Mr Democracy “still waits at the door. Until he is invited in, Chinese will be subjects not citizens”.

If these tactics and strategy succeed, if widespread corruption remains within some sort of bounds, and if no riot or demonstration suddenly spills into the kind of national uprising that overthrew the Manchus in 1911, Beijing will have formed a new kind of society. The international community watched the televised events of 1989 in horror, and Beijing was forced to ride out a period of foreign condemnation. The great powers, however, want a stable China, an economically successful state, and a regime in Beijing that will play by the pragmatic rules that govern the international scene. As an American policy-maker recently remarked “We like to know and trust the guy at the other end of the phone when we call Beijing”.



For the moment, then, China's leaders fear their people's capacity for uprisings and disorder but believe with some reason that "stability" can be sustained with a regular diet of material goods. Still, these leaders, who are Mao Zedong's heirs, also have their eyes on history. Lucian Pye, a long-time professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and one of the shrewdest observers of the Chinese scene, has observed that historians write relatively little about economic reformers: "The big chapters are reserved for those leaders who brought political freedom and security to their people".

## The Perils of China's Explosive Growth Dorothy-Grace Guerrero

China in the early twenty first century is a far cry from the country that in the 1950s Swedish Nobel Prize-winning economist Gunnar Myrdal predicted would remain mired in poverty. In anticipation of the 2008 Olympic Summer Games, Beijing has undergone a massive makeover that showed how fast change can happen in a country of some 1.3 billion people. New subway lines were constructed, and the fast-disappearing *hutongs* ("residential alleyways") gave way to still more skyscrapers. China is now the world's fourth-largest economy and third-largest trading country. It accounts for approximately 5 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP) and has recently graduated in status to a middle-income country. Beijing has also emerged as a key global aid donor. In terms of production, China supplies more than one-third of the world's steel, half of its cement, and about a third of its aluminium.

China's achievements in poverty reduction from the post-Mao Zedong era, in terms of both scope and speed, have been impressive: about 400 million people have been lifted from poverty. The standard of living for many Chinese is improving, and this has sparked widespread optimism that the government's

goal of achieving an overall well-off, or *xiaokang*, society is possible in the near future.

The figures that illustrate China's remarkable economic achievements, however, conceal huge and outstanding challenges that, if neglected, could jeopardize these very gains. Many local and foreign-development analysts agree that China's unsustainable and reckless approach to growth has put the country, and the world, on the brink of environmental catastrophe. China is already coping with limited natural resources that are fast disappearing. In addition, not everyone is sharing in the benefits of such growth—about 135 million people, or one-tenth of the population, still live below the international absolute poverty line. There is a huge inequality between the urban and rural population, as well as between the poor and the rich. The increasing number of protests (termed “mass incidents” in China) is attributed to both environmental causes and experiences of injustice. If these social problems remain, it could imperil the “harmonious development”, or *hexie fazhan*, project of the government and eventually erode the Chinese Communist Party's continued monopoly of political power.

### The Challenge of Environmental Sustainability

China consumes more coal than the United States, Europe, and Japan combined and is about to surpass, or has already surpassed, the United States as the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases. Beijing is also the biggest emitter of sulfur dioxide, which contributes to acid rain. Chinese scholars blame the increase in emissions on rapid economic growth and the fact that China relies on coal for 70 per cent of its energy needs. More than 300,000 premature deaths annually are attributed to airborne pollution. The changing lifestyle of the increasing number of middle-class families also contributes to the problem. In Beijing alone, 1,000 new cars are added to the roads every day. Seven of the ten most polluted cities in the world are located in China.

The UN's 2006 Human Development Report cited China's worsening water pollution and its failure to restrict heavy polluters. At that time more than 300 million people lacked access to clean drinking water. About 60 per cent of the water in China's seven major river systems was classified as being unsuitable for human contact, and more than one-third of industrial wastewater and two-thirds of municipal wastewater were released into waterways without any treatment. China had about 7 per cent of the world's water resources and roughly 20 per cent of its population. In addition, this supply is severely regionally imbalanced—about four-fifths of China's water is situated in the southern part of the country.

The Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta, two regions well developed owing to recent export-oriented growth, suffer from extensive contamination from heavy-metal and persistent organic pollutants. The pollutants emanate from industries outsourced from the developed countries and electronic wastes that are illegally imported from the United States. According to an investigation of official records conducted by the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE), a domestic environmental non-governmental organization, more than 30 multinational corporations (MNCs) with operations in China have violated water-pollution-control guidelines. These MNCs included PepsiCo Inc., Panasonic Battery Co., and Foster's Group Ltd. The IPE's data was based on reports by government bodies at local and national levels.

China is beginning to realize, however, that its growth path is not cost-free. According to the State Environmental Protection Administration and the World Bank, air and water pollution is costing China 5.8 per cent of its GDP. Though the Chinese government carries the responsibility for fixing the overwhelming environmental consequences of the country's breakneck growth, help, if offered, from the transnational companies and consumers from industrialized countries that benefit greatly from China's cheap labour and polluting

industries could also be utilized in the challenging clean-up task.

When the Chinese government began setting targets for reducing energy use and cutting emissions in 2004, the idea of adopting a slower growth model and the predictions about the looming environmental disaster were not, at first, received with enthusiasm. By 2007, however, targets had been established for shifting to renewable energy, for employing energy conservation, and for embracing emission-control schemes. The target was to produce 16 per cent of energy needs from alternative sources (hydroelectricity and other renewable sources) by 2020.

## The Social Justice Challenge

Inside China, people are more concerned about issues related to widespread inequality than about opportunities to showcase their country to the world. The Gini coefficient (which indicates how inequality has grown in relation to economic growth) has increased in China by 50 per cent since the late 1970s. Less than 1 per cent of Chinese households control more than 60 per cent of the country's wealth. This inequality is more pronounced when seen in urban versus rural per capita income. In the countryside, life generally is harsh, and most people are poor. The ratio of urban versus rural per capita income grew from 1.8:1 in the early 1980s to 3.23:1 in 2003. (The world average was between 1.5:1 and 2:1.) Added to the problem of low income, Chinese rural residents also shoulder disproportionate tax burdens while having less access to public services, such as education and health care. Recently, the government has abolished a number of taxes to help address poverty in the countryside.

The temporary migration from rural areas to the cities of some 100 million to 150 million Chinese peasants is not an easy transition. The rural migrant workers keeping factories and construction sites running have been denied access to urban housing and to urban schooling for their children. Women

migrant workers face triple discrimination for being poor unskilled labour, female, and rural in origin. The anger and bitterness behind the riots and protests in the countryside (there are reportedly tens of thousands of these each year) are not so much about poverty as they are about fairness. Agricultural land in China is communally owned. (In theory, each village owns the land around it, and each family holds a small tract of land on a long-term lease.) Since the mid-1980s, however, urbanization has claimed some 25,000 square miles (65,000 square km) of farmland; people have seen their land taken from them and then turned into homes bought for large sums by the new rich, and they have witnessed local officials lining their own pockets. Meanwhile, they have received little compensation in return and have spent years away from home living tenuous hand-to-mouth existences as factory or construction workers. Many are cheated of their wages by unscrupulous bosses. Given the reports of mass public protests, it is evident that many in China are clamouring for a more equitable distribution of China's bounty from its more than two decades of growth.

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PART I

CONTEXT

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## CHINA—FACTS AND FIGURES

**Official name:** Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo (People's Republic of China).

**Form of government:** single-party people's republic with one legislative house (National People's Congress).

**Chief of state:** President.

**Head of government:** Premier.

**Capital:** Beijing (Peking).

**Official language:** Mandarin Chinese.

**Official religion:** none.

**Monetary unit:** 1 renminbi (yuan).



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