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## **A Beautiful China**

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#### **China's Twentieth Century**

##### **Tragic Beginnings**

In the spring of 1900, a group known as the “Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists” sprung up across northern China. Better known as the “Boxers,” this traditional fighting force was spurred on by a mixture of indigenous religious belief and sorcery. Taking up swords and spears, they burned Christian churches, murdered priests and missionaries, and destroyed railroads... For the whole of the 20th century, this ancient land of China would become a battlefield in the contest between Eastern and Western civilizations.

In August of that year, Beijing was occupied by troops from England, France, Russia, and the rest of the Eight-Nation Alliance. The Empress Dowager Cixi fled westward with the princes and ministers of the imperial court. Over the second half of the 19th century, the Great Qing Empire had been hit hard by a series of disasters, from the Opium Wars to the Taiping Rebellion to the Sino-Japanese War. Reform proposals, such as “learn from the foreigners in order to control them” or “adopt Western technologies while preserving a Chinese core,” could not save the ancient empire from its millennial decline.

In the history of human progress, this tragedy was doomed to pass.

No one can find the origins of autocracy and democracy. Each has taken root in human nature and developed according to the external environment. In harsh environments where survival is difficult, human greed and treachery have flourished and the powerful enslaved the weak under brutal and savage conditions. Where circumstances have been more favorable and food and clothing are plentiful, innate human traits of tolerance and honesty have flourished, resulting first in the paradise of Minoan Crete, then to Ancient Greece and onward to modern Western civilization.

In savage political systems, personal gain is paramount, might makes right, and power comes from the barrel of a gun. All that lies “beneath the heavens and between the seas” is the personal property of the imperial family. People, like land and livestock, are merely spoils of war, things attached to conquered lands. With public power held in private hands, passed down through generations, anyone who dares to try to take it away must be prepared to pay with his head. In the name of power, fathers and sons go to war with each other and brothers destroy one another. The victors are created nobility, while the losers are vilified as bandits.

In the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wu punished the great historian Sima Qian with castration for defending General Li Ling's decision to surrender to the Xiongnu following his defeat. Zhu Yuanzhang, who became the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, beat senior ministers in the imperial hall. As an official, one regularly faced both death and humiliation. Everyone remembers the Song Dynasty Emperor Taizu as a kind-hearted and honest ruler who forbade the killing of intellectuals. However, the Song Dynasty was so weak that it was humiliated and occupied by northern barbarians.

Deep down in the souls of Chinese people, politics is zero-sum, a dangerous reign of terror in which any and all measures are fair play. The rules of this brutal political game predetermined the tragic cycle of imperial dynasties. After a period of great unrest, the early years of a new dynasty would see a period of recovery and flourishing achievement. Yet invariably power would spread unchecked. As a dynasty reached its end, privilege and power would grow out of control and popular discontent would boil over. In times of natural disaster, desperate refugees would fan out in all directions and sow the seeds of revolution. From amidst the terror and killing, yet another dictatorship would emerge.

Since ancient times, the Chinese people would not take up arms against the government. Tyranny thus knew no bounds or bottom line. Nearly the only route to advancement for talented individuals was through study and learning, then passing the civil service exams to become an official. Almost every imperial dynasty throughout Chinese history made it state policy to control and exploit industry and commerce. Technological discoveries were treated as "strange and bewildering skills" that never entered the mainstream. From the Qin emperor's burning of books and burying of scholars followed repeated literary inquisitions that smothered thought for 2,000 years.

Autocratic rule was the norm in ancient human society. The limits on dictatorship, which arose in Western Europe and from which emerged a new modern civilization, was the exception.

In 1215, Magna Carta established a unity of purpose between England's aristocracy and monarchy. Politics would no longer be zero-sum; instead, each group would perform its own role and power was balanced. Over the next several centuries this unity of purpose was further refined. The monarch became a symbol of national stability, but rule was carried out by politicians elected by the people. Only when political elites balanced each other were the people able to have freedom.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, on the European continent it was the monarchy, the Church, and aristocracy that served to check each other's power. There emerged autonomous spaces in society, such as universities, self-ruling "free cities," and the Renaissance.

The Minoan civilization planted excellent seeds, and checks on power left autonomous spaces of activity. Modern civilization was thus born in Western Europe.

At the time when human civilization generally knew nothing of democratic politics or

a market economy, enlightened emperors were at the helm of the flourishing Tang and Song dynasties in China. However, with the advent of the modern era, Europeans were exploring new continents while the Ming Dynasty was strengthening its prohibition on seafaring. As the Industrial Revolution was flourishing, autocratic rule was at its peak in Asia. Even a line from a poem hinting at censorship could serve as evidence to put a man to death.

The larger a country's size and deeper its autocratic foundations, the more difficult it is to make the transition to democracy. This was true for the Chinese Empire.

In the summer of 1793, the Qianlong emperor received the British government's first formal diplomatic mission to China at his summer residence in Chengde, north of Beijing. Still arrogantly treating China as the center of the world, the emperor had no idea that, next to the newly rising British Empire, his Great Qing Dynasty was beyond cure.

### **Shattered Dreams in 1898**

In 1840, British gunboats arrived on the Chinese coast via the Western Pacific. The Qing Empire could not withstand even a single attack. It was forced to open its borders to trade and cede territory in compensation.

In 1852, American warships arrived in Japan.

Though the circumstances were quite similar, China and Japan followed different paths. The Meiji emperor accommodated the course of civilization and spared no effort to push Japan along the path toward modernization. The Qing Empire, however, was unwilling to give up its vested interests and privileges. In the decades following 1840, they were only willing to "adopt Western technologies while preserving a Chinese core" and "learn from the foreigners in order to control them".

By 1894, the two countries' paths had clearly diverged. In the Sino-Japanese War, China was soundly defeated by a country it had historically looked down upon as consisting of a mere few islands. Senior Qing minister Li Hongzhang signed a deeply humiliating treaty that ceded land to Japan as compensation for the conflict.

There followed another vocal surge of reform proposals from members of the Chinese gentry. In the summer of 1898, with the assistance of a group of intellectuals, the young Guangxu emperor resolved to carry out reforms. During the 103 days from June 11 to September 21, he approved and issued more than 200 edicts that, among other things, transformed the structure of the government, reformed the budget, modernized the army, promoted modern education, and emulated international standards in the management of agriculture, industry, and commerce.

These edicts laid out a blueprint for a modern civilized state. And, inevitably, this shook the foundations of the old imperial state. The vested interest groups staged a comeback, and the Guangxu emperor was placed under house arrest in the Summer Palace. Two reform leaders went into exile abroad, and the "Six Gentlemen of the Hundred Days' Reform" were beheaded at Beijing's Vegetable Market Execution Grounds.

Think how strong China might have become if those efforts at constitutional monarchy had succeeded!

However, history has no “what ifs.” A nation has its predetermined fate; China and Japan were not the same. Following the massacres at Yangzhou and Jiading during the bloody Manchu conquest of China, there was no possibility of China becoming a constitutional monarchy.

After the failure of the 1898 reforms, a stench of hopelessness and dejection pervaded the empire. After nearly half a century of repeated defeats, hostility of a sort never seen before began to spread in the land.

A group of humiliated people went crazy and took up their swords and spears to kill the foreigners. The Boxers hated all foreign things, such as railroads or telegraph lines. The imperial rulers’ hatred ran even deeper. They had once enjoyed peace of mind and special privileges, but now all hell had broken loose. The Empress Dowager decided to use the Boxers as pretext to declare war against the foreign powers. The Qing took on nearly the entire Western world.

But the empire was so weak that a force of merely 10,000 or so troops from the Eight-Nation Alliance, thousands of miles from home, soon occupied the imperial capital and sent the Manchu court fleeing in panic. The victors exacted war reparations of 980 million taels (1.17 billion ounces) of silver.

Those who are backwards are bound to take a beating. More specifically, those with backwards systems are bound to take a beating.

### **The Constitutional Outline**

After the Boxers, revolution was in the air.

Reform is a type of change in which rulers lead a process of accommodating the tide of history. To place one’s hope in reform is to place one’s hope in the rulers. When there is no hope of reform, the only option remaining is revolution.

That was a time of enlightenment. Newspapers attacked autocratic rule, revolutionary parties and constitutionalists engaged in fierce debates, and the sparks of revolution were everywhere. The secret revolutionary party known as the Tongmenghui announced its plan: evict the Manchus, restore the Chinese nation, establish a republic, and equalize land ownership rights.

The Qing princes and elites finally understood that reform would be much better for them than revolution. The hereditary rule of their ancestors was no longer able to hold back the tide of the times.

In 1905, the Qing court sent five high officials to the West to study constitutional government. In September of the following year, the court announced a period of “preparative constitutionalism.” A period of preparation was needed, because the relevant institutions were not yet ready and the population was relatively uneducated.

More time was needed, but it was hoped in the meantime that the population would recognize their loyal rulers' patriotic intentions and patiently preserve social order.

In August 1908, the Qing court promulgated a "Constitutional Outline", modern China's first constitutional document.

China saw 12 constitutions come and go over the course of the 20th century. The first of them was by no means terrible; the last four are much worse. No matter how distant the late Qing and Republican China were from being modern, civilized countries, people in these periods were ultimately working hard to achieve democratic constitutional government. Rights were abrogated only temporarily when necessary to suppress rebellion, but the overall direction never changed. Yet with the subsequent revival of totalitarianism, things moved in the opposite direction and constitutions became a mere fig leaf for nakedly tyrannical dictatorship.

Constitutions serve as the laws of governance by scientifically both establishing and restraining power. In the 21st century, the most senior official of what calls itself the supreme organ of state power in China openly writes that he is opposed to constitutional government. A century of blood and tears has been all in vain!

The 1908 Constitutional Outline contained 14 articles regarding monarchic power. These were modeled on the Japanese constitution, but left out most of the provisions aimed at limiting the power of the Japanese emperor. Under the Constitutional Outline, the Qing emperor was given total power and responsibility to appoint officials and decide on military and foreign affairs without any interference from parliament. Officials and the public would have the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, albeit limited by law. The 1908 "Statute on Association and Assembly," for example, provided that any assembly or association relating to politics required prior official approval.

Provincial and national "advisory councils" were part of this constitutional system. Provincial advisory councils were the equivalent of provincial assemblies and would be responsible for matters such as discussion of provincial budgets, taxes, and public debts; legislation of standalone statutes and regulations; and election of representatives to the national advisory council. The national advisory council was the equivalent of a national assembly or parliament and was to be made up of 200 elected representatives. Half of these representatives were to be imperial nominees, to be filled by members of the imperial nobility, government officials, and other notables. The other half were to be elected by each of the provincial advisory councils and subject to approval by the respective provincial governors.

The original plan was for a preparatory period of nine years. This period was reduced to five years under pressure after numerous petitions from constitutionalists and broad and powerful public opinion.

The Guangxu emperor and Empress Dowager Cixi died in close succession in 1908. The 26-year-old regent, Zaifeng, Prince Chun, was extremely unconfident in his authority. He strengthened control over the military, replaced all the most senior officers in the army and navy, significantly increased military pay, replaced local officials, and ostracized senior Han ministers. In March 1911, he decreed the

establishment of a responsible cabinet system and placed crucial institutions of power in the hands of Manchus. He believed that doing so would stabilize the Qing Empire.

## **A New Heavenly Mandate in 1911**

On October 10, 1911, a revolt suddenly erupted in Wuhan on October 10, 1911. No one could have predicted that the time that this spark would light the flame that toppled the imperial autocracy.

Prince Chun ordered the National Advisory Council to draft a constitution quickly, lifted the ban on political parties, and declared an amnesty for all political prisoners since the 1898 Reforms. In just three days, the “Nineteen Major Articles of Good Faith on the Constitution” were enacted. The Nineteen Articles reduced the power of the emperor and expanded the power of the national assembly. This was the first document that looked like a real constitution.

But it was too late.

The blaze of revolution quickly spread throughout the land. Province after province declared independence. Local powers gathered troops and reorganized, sowing the seeds of war in the process.

On January 1, 1912, Asia’s first republic was proclaimed in the ancient East.

Sun Ya-tsen served as the provisional president of the Republic of China. As he traveled from Shanghai to Nanjing, site of the new provisional government, people from all rungs of society spontaneously gathered in huge crowds to escort him, with shouts of “Long live the Republic” heard for miles. The president made this solemn declaration: “Overthrow the Manchu autocratic government, consolidate the Republic of China, and provide for the people's welfare: this is the general will of the citizenry and I will duly obey out of loyalty to the nation and service to the public. When the autocratic government is toppled, there is no domestic turmoil, and the Republic has stood up and received the recognition of the world's nations, I shall at that time relinquish the office of provisional president. These are the pledges I make to the citizenry.”

A republican government: the fervent dream of the Chinese people in the 20th century!

Over the course of 32 days, the Provisional National Assembly drafted and enacted the Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China.

The Provisional Constitution established the territory of the Republic of China as 22 provinces, Inner and Outer Mongolia, Tibet, and Qinghai. The inclusion of border regions like Outer Mongolia and Tibet were a consequence of historical disputes and internal disorder and external aggression. The map of the Republic of China was shaped like a beautifully cut crabapple leaf.

The organs of the state were divided between three branches. The National Assembly exercised legislative power. The Provisional President exercised executive power with

the assistance of the Minister of State and other senior government ministers. Judicial power would be exercised by the courts, with judges appointed for lifelong terms and adjudicating independently. Citizens would enjoy freedoms and rights to life, housing, movement, expression, and religious belief.

The Nanjing Provisional Government promulgated a series of laws as emanations of the Provisional Constitution. These were announced to the military and people everywhere so that the freedoms and rights of citizens were known to all. Human trafficking was prohibited, as was the use of salutations such as “your honor” or “your lordship.” The establishment of industry was encouraged, as was the protection of private enterprise. There was an effort to promote education, including encouragement of education for girls and the establishment of private educational institutions. By replacing the old with the new, an ancient people would realize its dream of modern civilization.

### **The Man Who Would Reverse History**

On February 12, 1912, the Qing emperor announced his abdication. China’s last autocratic dynasty had formally become history.

However, there was no way the specter of two millennia of autocratic rule could exit the stage of history so peacefully.

There is no smooth way to travel along the path of civilization. Once the Qing had been toppled, the old officials in the Revolutionary Party tried to take advantage of the political vacuum to seize their opportunity.

There were endless debates over whether to establish a cabinet system or a presidential system. Fearing that Yuan Shikai would become a dictator, the Provisional Constitution provided for a responsible cabinet system. In the final analysis, there was a lack of fundamental consensus. Without such a consensus on baselines, even the most perfect system only looks good on the outside.

On one side were those around Sun Yat-sen, democratic constitutionalists with backing from the coastal cities, where there had been early stages of a flourishing market economy. On the other side were those around Yuan Shikai, a group of former imperial officials and military figures backed by the vast Chinese hinterland and its millions and millions of small farmers who had long stood by passively while emperors came and went.

Dictatorship was making quite a stir at that point in history. During World War I, no one could say who was right and who was wrong. This is unlike the 21st century, when democracy and freedom have become universal trends.

As political parties formed in the early Republic, democratic politics took its first steps in China. Having run a successful campaign in the National Assembly elections, Kuomintang leader Song Jiaoren was actively preparing to form a cabinet when his young life was unexpectedly ended by an assassin’s bullets. That was truly a heinous crime!

The bullets that killed Song Jiaoren also shattered China's 20th-century dream of a republican government.

In May 1914, Yuan Shikai enacted the Constitution of the Republic of China, which changed the responsible cabinet system to a presidential system. At the end of that year, a Revised Presidential Election Law set the presidential term at 10 years with no limits on re-election. In 1915, Yuan even realized the dream of reviving the monarchy. On December 12, "in compliance with public opinion", he issued an edict abolishing the Republic and styling himself the "Hongxian emperor."

In so doing, Yuan really overestimated his own position!

After he tried to reverse history, Yuan Shikai's loyal subordinates began to defect overnight. A tangle of interests never coalesced into belief in a new system. What seemed like unparalleled power soon went up in smoke. On March 22, 1916, Yuan Shikai was forced to abandon the imperial monarchy and restore the presidency.

The kind of ultra-autocratic power to change the course of history often grows out of large-scale war. Yuan Shikai relied on winning over military officers and soldiers with favors. At the critical moment along this great path, those favors turned out to be negligible. Yuan Shikai's seemingly powerful and strong edifice collapsed overnight.

In the course of history, who was more powerful and successful: the "unworldly" Sun Yat-sen or the cunning and crafty Yuan Shikai? History provided Yuan with ability and opportunity, but his lack of foresight and organization ultimately made him a laughingstock and a premature victim of the Republic.

Yuan Shikai's career had been built on being able to get the job done. He came to prominence after the Gapsin Coup in Korea in 1884, when Chinese garrison troops routed the Japanese soldiers backing the coup. His command of China's New Army, creation of China's first new-style police force, and support for new policies allied him with the Manchu ruling group. He was an important senior official and pillar of the monarchy until the end of the Qing. But even Yuan Shikai, known as the "Ambitious and Ruthless Man of Xiangcheng", was unable to turn back the course of history. How can you latter-day mediocre totalitarian bureaucrats hope to defy the way of the world?

### **Internal Disorder and Foreign Aggression**

The Great War erupted in July 1914. Resources, power, reputation ... humans are emotional animals. Cast aside the rational outer layer and at any given moment they are ready to snarl and pounce.

China's divided northern and southern governments both joined the war on the side of the victorious Allies. But in an era of jungle politics, strength is the key to gaining respect. After Germany declared war, the Japanese occupied the German concession at Qingdao. At the Paris Peace Conference, the Allies ignored the Chinese delegation's call to abolish the Allies' extraterritorial privileges in China and decided to grant Japan the former German concessions in Shandong. This led to heated patriotic opposition in China.



On May 4, 1919, university students took to the streets, chanting: “Retake our sovereignty from the foreigners! Punish traitors at home!” Seemingly all at once, this land that had for so long been barren and spiritless was now reinvigorated. Each fresh face was stirred with emotion. It was even rarer in the 20th century for a student movement to obtain victory.

Sun Yat-sen died in early spring 1925, sending the whole nation into grief. Sun had been due to go to Nanjing to discuss national affairs with representatives of the Communist Party. Unfortunately, this great man of the nation left the world too soon. He was a true idealist, but that was not a time in which idealism could bear fruit.

At the end of Chiang Kai-shek’s Northern Expedition 1928, China was finally basically united. But beneath this surface unity were a bunch of private armies of all sizes. Warlords like Li Zongren, Feng Yuxiang, and Yan Xishan opposed the Nanjing government in one act of rebellion after another. Though the situation calmed a bit in 1930, conflict between Chiang and the warlords soon erupted into the Central Plains War, which lasted until Chiang had defeated each of the warlord armies.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party had been founded in 1921. This branch of the Communist International was extremely well adapted to grow in a soil that had been poisoned by autocracy. With support and leadership from the Soviet Union, the party grew quickly. At first, it developed within the Nationalist Kuomintang. In 1927, there was a split between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. The Communist Party’s urban uprisings failed, and it took refuge in the remote countryside of the Hunan-Jiangxi border region.

The Nationalist government conducted a series of five “extermination campaigns” against the Communists. In 1933, the Communists were finally forced out of their base area. The government sent troops in pursuit but they dithered and there was a lack of unity among the military commanders. Chiang also wanted to take advantage of the pursuit to absorb territory that remained under warlord control and unify the nation. So, the CCP again was able to set down roots in the barren area of northern Shaanxi Province.

On September 18, 1931, Japan’s Kwantung Army devised an incident as part of a plot to occupy China’s northeast. Zhang Xueliang ordered his forces to retreat, and Manchuria fell to the Japanese. There was an appeal for international intervention, but the League of Nations issued only verbal condemnation of Japan’s actions.

Japan began swallowing up China bit by bit. A decisive battle was inevitable, but at that moment China was weak and beset by internal disorder.

Chiang Kai-shek’s strategic vision was to unify the nation first and then concentrate the nation’s military forces against Japan. So, he intensified the military campaigns against the Communists and made efforts to develop the economy, train the military, and build up defensive fortifications.

“Flowers in May, spreading across the plains . . .” After the September 18 Incident, China was shrouded in misery [as reflected in this melancholy song.]. Many Chinese

could not understand the policy of “internal pacification before expelling the foreigners.” Zhang Xueliang, criticized as the “general who would not resist,” could not take the pressure of public opinion and decided to “force” Chiang to resist the Japanese.

The Xi’an Incident occurred in December 1936, just as the Nationalist government was beginning to mobilize its troops for a final extermination campaign against the Communists in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia border region. Zhang Xueliang requested that Chiang fly to Xi’an to boost the troops’ morale, then held Chiang under house arrest until he agreed to stop fighting the Communists and form a united front to resist the Japanese.

The Xi’an Incident rescued the Communist Party from extermination and determined China’s future fate. In his later years, Zhang Xueliang would come to regret this outcome.

The Qing had been overthrown and was replaced by a newly risen Republic, but China remained in a state of upheaval. The old order had collapsed, but a new one had yet to be established. The weak, newborn forces of democratic constitutionalism fought over and over against the forces of autocratic conservatism, and then there was invasion by a foreign enemy. There was no end to internal disorder and foreign aggression.

But there was also flourishing and progress during this time. In the just over 20 years preceding the outbreak of war with Japan, the Republic of China had set down a comprehensive legal system. It had established the basic framework of a market economy. There was freedom in society, and education was respected. The economy developed rapidly, and China’s industry and commerce achieved unprecedented levels, resulting in a “Golden Decade.” Finance and trade turned Shanghai into the first great city of the Far East.

China’s universities brimmed with talent. Professors ran the schools, and there was academic freedom. Different currents in social thought contended, with newspapers and magazines sprouting everywhere like shoots following a rain. Thinkers, artists, and writers of all persuasions shone brightly.

If there was ever a time in the 20th century that Chinese culture possessed self-confidence, it was during the Republican period.

What China lacked was not talent, but freedom. In a democratic and free China, 1.3 billion people would certainly be capable of creating the most brilliant civilization!

### **Glory and Pride**

The Chinese people’s suffering and glory during the 20th century is something that no one can fail to remember.

On July 7, 1937, the Japanese army shelled the walled city of Wanping, outside Beijing. Chinese garrison troops stationed at the Marco Polo Bridge rose up in resistance. War between China and Japan had begun.

On July 17, Chiang Kai-shek gave a speech at the “summer capital” at Lushan. China had endured repeated humiliations, and now the nation had reached a critical juncture. The only choice was to sacrifice all and resist to the end.

The Chinese Communist Party announced that it would obey the Three People’s Principles. Its troops joined the National Revolutionary Army as the Eighth Route Army and the newly created New Fourth Army. The nation was united against the foreign aggressors, at least in form.

On August 13, the National Army made a strategic strike against the Japanese Army at Shanghai. The Japanese counterattacked. The Battle of Shanghai was more brutal than anything China had seen before. The Nationalist Government mobilized more than 700,000 troops in total, wiping out more than 60,000 Japanese soldiers. This effectively delayed the Japanese Army’s strategic plan to quickly occupy China.

The Nationalist government knew that it would be a long war. Its basic strategy was to stop the Japanese attack at every step and trade space for time. As Japanese troops made their way south into the heart of China, Chinese troops rose up to resist at every battle along the way.

Patriotic soldiers shed their blood on the battlefield. Young students joined the national salvation effort. The Women’s Association cared for displaced children. Each political party and organization spoke with a single voice: Resist aggression on behalf of the motherland. This was an era of greatness. After being bullied for nearly a century, the Chinese people finally let out a roar that shook the heavens!

For eight years, Chinese heroes spilled their glorious blood upon the battlefield.

At the Battle of Shanghai in August 1937, Lieutenant Colonel Xie Jinyuan led his “Eight Hundred Heroes” in defense of the Sihang Warehouse for more than a month, providing cover for Chinese forces to retreat. How many Chinese sons and daughters were inspired to see that beautiful national flag continuing to wave over the unoccupied parts of Shanghai!

In October 1937, the entire 458th Regiment became martyrs when they fought to the death to hold the garrison at Dezhou. That same month at the Battle of Xinkou, General Hao Menglin (who had come out of retirement to go from Guizhou to fight in North China) told his troops: “We shall not return until the Japanese are defeated!” He was killed in action at the front at the age of 39.

In March 1938, as commandos charged forward at the fight to defend Teng County during the Battle of Taierzhuang, garrison commander Wang Mingzhang issued a final telegram saying: “I will fight to the death to serve my country!” He was martyred in street fighting after the fortifications had been breached.

In May 1940, at the Battle of Zaoyang-Yichang, General Zhang Zizhong, commander-in-chief of the 33rd Army Group, died while leading his troops into battle. Zhang had suffered in silence and felt in low spirits as rumors spread about. After a determined attack at the Battle of Xuzhou, he ultimately gave his life for his country during a last-

ditch effort to defend Huangchuan during the Battle of Wuhan. When the remains of this talented general passed through Yichang, funeral altars were set out on both sides of the road, and citizens in perfect order conveyed his coffin forward amid the din of firecrackers.

In the spring of 1942, Chinese expeditionary forces responding to Allied strategic arrangements managed to cross the Salween River, where, squad after squad, they carried out suicide charges on enemy bunkers.

At the end of 1943, there were days of grueling street fighting during the Battle of Changde, the “Stalingrad of the East.” Three National Army division commanders and more than 15,000 soldiers lost their lives. On December 7, when the national flag once again flew from the Bank of China building, the remaining 300 or so soldiers emerged from the rubble choking with tears.

For eight years, more than 3 million Chinese soldiers became casualties for the independence, freedom, and dignity of the nation. A total of 271 generals died in battle, and there were 30 million civilian casualties. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese died in Nanjing alone.

Standing up proudly in the midst of all that suffering, the Chinese nation won the world’s widespread sympathy and respect.

After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, President Franklin Roosevelt gave a speech calling for concerted efforts by peace-loving nations to oppose treaty violations and disregard for humanity. The United States refused to export aircraft to the Japanese invaders. This was the beginning of the “Moral Embargo.”

On November 30, 1940, the Japanese and Wang Jingwei signed a Treaty Concerning Basic Relations and issued the Japan-Manchukuo-China Joint Declaration, establishing a puppet Chinese government in Nanjing. On that very same day, President Roosevelt rushed to announce financial aid to China in order to encourage the struggling country in its resistance efforts.

The American embargo against Japan gradually expanded to a total embargo and freezing of Japanese assets in the United States.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese carried out a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The United States became fully committed in the European and Pacific theaters of the war. China and the United States fought side by side as two great nations for the freedom of humanity.

The United States sent an air group to support China directly. For three years and one month, 1579 American soldiers slept on Chinese soil as they flew resupply missions over the “Hump.”

On October 27, 1942, Madame Chiang Kai-shek traveled to the United States. She said: “I have come seeking friendship between China and the United States. I believe that God will not allow the people of these two great nations to become estranged.” In a speech before the United States Congress, she said: “Let us not forget that during

the first four and a half years of total aggression, China has borne Japan's sadistic fury unaided and alone.”

In October 1942, the United States announced it would relinquish all extraterritorial rights in China. In January 1943, China, the United States, and Great Britain signed treaties abolishing all past unequal treaties signed with China. In October of that year, in the face of opposition from the Soviet Union, Roosevelt insisted that China be a signatory of the Four Power Declaration. Through adoption of the Cairo and Potsdam declarations, China was recognized as one of the four great powers of the world.

As a sponsor of the United Nations at its establishment in 1945, China of course became one of the five permanent members of the Security Council. Today's China continues to enjoy this inheritance from the Republic of China.

On August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was one of the landmarks of 20th century technological progress, but it also filled humankind with a deep fear that would have considerable impact on the political landscape in the second half of the 20th century.

On August 15, Japan announced its unconditional surrender. Victory! On that day, the national flag flew from new heights at Shanghai's Park Hotel. The sound of fireworks could be heard throughout the mountain city of Chongqing, which had served as China's wartime capital. People flooded the streets of Chengdu, and the square beneath Xi'an's Bell Tower erupted in a sea of joy. A day of national rejoicing – the Chinese people once enjoyed a moment like this!

In his last letter to his wife, 38-year-old General Dai Anlan wrote: “I will sacrifice everything to repay the nation for nourishing me. Dying for one's country is the ultimate honor.”

My eyes brim with tears as I read the general's letter. We should never forget the confidence our nation felt or the glory and pride of 20th century China!

We are at a similar moment now. Creating a new civilization is the struggle and responsibility of our generation of Chinese people.

## **The Tragic Civil War**

The joy of victory was but a fleeting moment. The shadow of war would again soon envelop China.

The Communist Party's army expanded rapidly during the war. China was split between two major military groups, the Nationalists and the Communists. Backing each side were the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively.

In 1946, the Cold War and the Iron Curtain slowly unfolded. In the 20th century, totalitarian dictatorship had its final dying flash of activity. In Russia, it manifested itself as communism. In Germany and Japan, it took the form of fascism. Liberal democracy joined with communism to eliminate fascism. Soon after, the two ideologies of liberal democracy and communism would find themselves once again

on the verge of war.

China, too, was at a historical crossroads. Hopes for negotiation between the two sides were doomed to be short-lived. Civil war was unavoidable.

The semi-modern Nationalist government had a market economy and considerable freedom of expression and territorial autonomy. But it was also a one-party dictatorship plagued by corruption. Rather than being a national leader, Chiang Kai-shek was more like the head of an alliance of military factions. There was ideological confusion and disorganization.

This period of wartime chaos was a society governed by the law of the jungle. Chiang was constrained by traditional morality and liberal democracy. Democracy offers limitless prospects; dictatorship is a dead end. He was destined to fail in a competition with naked, unrestrained barbarity.

In their backing of the Republic, the United States and the free world were irresolute and hesitant and failed to provide effective support at the critical moments.

Like the Taliban and Islamic State, the CCP was a formidable fighting force. It railed against dictatorship and authoritarian rule, called for democracy and freedom, and attracted talented young people to seek shelter in its base at Yan'an. The cruel experience of underground struggle resulted in a strict system of internal ideological control and organizational discipline. Nearly all ideological differences were ruthlessly eliminated in one political campaign after another, resulting in party members' quasi-religious loyalty to the leader, as well as elimination of nearly all potential spies sent by the other side. This was a cohesive and powerful faction.

Backing the CCP was a powerful authoritarian force – the vigorous support of the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Army withdrew from China, it transferred a large quantity of military armaments to the Communist Party. This determined its military strategy of “expansion to the north and defense to the south,” as well as ensuring that the ultimate battle between the two sides would begin in the Northeast.

After more than two years of civil war, the Communist Party achieved decisive victory in the Northeast.

The following winter, the war spread to North China and the plains of the Yellow and Huai rivers.

On April 23, 1949, Communist soldiers swarmed into the Nanjing Presidential Palace and tore down the national flag, marking the end of the Republic of China and its period of “internal disorder and external aggression.”

Looking back into the depths of history, the outcome was predetermined.

The 20th century witnessed a large-scale resurgence of totalitarian dictatorship. Countries such as Russia, China, Germany, and Japan all had long traditions of dictatorship and short-lived experiments with initial modernization.

Just over a century had passed from 1840, when China was forced into modernization, and 1949. Prosperity and affluence were limited to the immediate coastal areas, democracy and freedom were left scattered in the writings of intellectuals. The vast interior of China, especially the countryside, remained a small peasant economy and politics continued the pattern of the imperial cycle and “to the victor go the spoils.”

In the ancient land of China, the war between the Nationalist and Communist parties was a battle between a weak and fragile modern civilization on the one hand and the forces of traditional dictatorship on the other. The modernizing trend provoked the forces of tradition to react and revolt. With such powerful dictatorial forces latent in the vast Chinese interior, aided by the dictatorships of the Japanese and the Soviet Union, a century of democracy, rule of law, and market economy all got swept away from the Chinese mainland in the name of communism.

### **Autocratic Resurgence**

On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. War was over, at long last. The Chinese people had a reason to be overjoyed and looked forward to a new era of democracy, freedom, and well-being.

However, the plague of 20th century totalitarianism would return. The civil war birthed a party that transcended the state and a leader wielding absolute power. The fate of the nation would be determined by whether a single person was good or evil. For how many centuries had China already followed this very same path!

Mao Zedong completely aligned the PRC with the Soviet Union’s “socialist camp.” Internally, he ordered national media to oppose the United States and turn it into an enemy. In the blink of an eye, the United States, the ally that during World War II gave China the most aid, became China’s irreconcilable enemy. Talk about a betrayal of goodwill! Speaking some words of conscience, I wonder if there would even be a China today without the United States?

In December 1949, Mao Zedong traveled to the Soviet Union to sign a new Sino-Soviet treaty. For the first time, a Chinese government clearly acknowledged the independence of Outer Mongolia. The *People’s Daily* criticized the Nationalist government for having refused to acknowledge Outer Mongolia’s independence, calling it “Great Han chauvinism” and arguing that China must acknowledge Mongolia’s independence on the basis of class struggle.

On June 25, 1950, Kim Il Sung ordered troops to cross the 38th parallel, launching the Korean War. The United Nations issued a resolution sending troops to turn back the North Korean invasion. China sent troops to support the Kim dynasty and oppose the UN forces made up of 16 countries.

Amid the clamor of war, the CCP launched a campaign to suppress counterrevolution and carry out public executions in proportion to the population. They clearly knew that terror is the foundation of dictatorship. This ultra-rational evil made blood and terror the foundation of its totalitarian rule.

In a party state, the party encompasses the state and society, assuming leadership over

everything. The democratic political parties and independent intellectuals who had once been active during the Republican period had to submit obediently if they wanted to stay alive.

Socialist transformation meant expropriating the hard-earned fortunes of countless people. Farmland was collectivized. Public ownership and state planning placed all social resources and economic activity under the control of those in power. Under the policies that segregated urban from rural areas and enforcement of the *hukou* household registration system, farmers became serfs bound to their land.

In 1958, China raced toward communism with the “Great Leap Forward.” Thousands of kilograms of grain were reputedly produced on a single acre of land. Small furnaces were set up everywhere that would turn all pots and pans into steel. These lies were concocted and accepted in a China ruled by terror.

At the Lushan Plenum in 1959, General Peng Dehuai made a gentle admonition criticizing errors of the Great Leap Forward and was turned into an anti-party element for undermining Mao’s reputation. Ultra-leftist policies spread even further.

That winter, untold numbers of rural people in Henan, Anhui, and Sichuan began dropping one after another after consuming all the leaves and bark, weeds, and anything else they could find that might fill their stomachs. This led to the unprecedented Great Famine in which tens of millions starved to death, a period that is now so carefully referred to as the “three years of natural disaster.”

## **One Last Gasp**

After the Great Famine, those with conscience inside the Party reflected on the event soberly. But the leader worried that his power was shifting to others.

On May 16, 1966, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issued a circular calling for a new soul-stirring revolution to be carried out in all areas of society.

Revolutions were common in the 20th century. But what sort of “Great Cultural Revolution” was being launched by China’s leaders?

Some say it was about idealism. But what were the ideals? Was there a vision for a prosperous and happy society? The idea of communism and “people’s communes” had been put to use, but ideologically China was stuck in the era of the Qin and Han empires, with everything aimed at amassing and maintaining power. Destroy the bureaucratic system — the supreme instructions could not be compromised one bit. Smash the legal system to bits — the lackeys of the Cultural Revolution did as they pleased.

As the saying went: “There is but one sun in Heaven.” State Chairman Liu Shaoqi despairingly tried to point to the Chinese constitution, but it was only a scrap of paper. Attacked as a “capitalist roader inside the Party,” he was detained in a basement in Kaifeng, Henan Province. By the time of his cruel death in captivity, he had been reduced to a mere skeleton with white hair flowing over a foot long.



The “Model teacher of every age,” even the gentle, kind, and temperate Confucius was also seen as an obstacle to power. As it was triumphantly reported in November 1966: “Red Guards and poor and lower-middle peasants formed a commando unit and went to the Confucius Cemetery full of profound hatred. Swinging their hoes and shovels, they unearthed the graves of Old Kong and his “bastard spawn.” After a fierce battle lasting two days, Old Kong’s grave was razed to the ground. . . . Under the shining glow of Mao Zedong Thought, the Confucius Cemetery has been given new life!”

No matter how brutal their initial attacks, even the Mongol and Manchu invaders who came to rule China all still came to respect and venerate Confucius. In the 20th century, under the specter of Western materialist thought, our Chinese civilization was destroyed with such tragic violence!

Chinese autocratic rule had always been Legalist within and Confucian without. Each emperor had a bit of the first Qin emperor in his heart, giving him the power over life and death and to do as he pleased. Yet, the emperors had always cloaked themselves in the Confucian virtues of compassion, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom and Confucian morality and ethics.

Die-hard materialists smashed everything to pieces. With one person holding absolute freedom of action, a billion people prostrated themselves as slaves.

This new emperor rebelled and tore off the cloak of Confucianism. The Legalist revolt against the Confucians was complete. The naked jungle beast revealed its most hideous face.

In the 20th century, the path toward modern civilization was one of progress and setbacks. Yuan Shikai ruled as the Hongxian emperor for 83 days. General Zhang Xun proclaimed the restoration of the last Qing emperor for 12 days. In the name of communism, Mao Zedong realized his own dream of becoming an emperor.

The fate of a nation. Two millennia of dictatorship. How can a character that appeared again and again for 2,000 years leave the stage of history so quietly?

As brief as it was, this last resurgent moment was enough to torment the Chinese people for another 10 years.

## **A New Start**

God has always given humankind hope for progress. The despot will die, and an era of turmoil and cruelty will come to a shuddering end.

After having gone through one political campaign after another, China was left an ugly mess in the late 1970s.

Following World War II, the global economy experienced 30 years of rapid growth. Western Europe and Japan underwent miraculous recovery. But China remained on the verge of subsistence from start to finish, and tens of millions of people starved

during that time.

The entire Chinese legal system had been completely destroyed. Under the clamor of class struggle, the Ministry of Public Security had come to rule China through each successive campaign, resulting in a true police state.

The moral character associated with traditional society had undergone thorough criticism, even as far as basic respect for elders, love of children, and politeness. The best and brightest elite of the nation had been eliminated. All virtues such as honesty, kindness, loyalty, and tolerance had been ridiculed, disparaged, and trampled upon.

Authoritarianism and terror were deep in people's bones. When 18 desperate farmers from Xiaogang Village in Anhui broke with state policy and secretly agreed to divide up commune-owned land into individual units to be contracted for farming by single households, they made a pledge of life and death: If one of them were killed or imprisoned, the others would raise their children for them.

The period of reform and opening was launched in 1978. After the last three decades of totalitarian resurgence, China was once more pursuing the path of modernization that had begun with the "Foreign Affairs Movement" of the mid-19th century.

This represented no new innovation, just the gradual ebbing of total power. Laws that had been abolished were restored bit by bit. Intellectual currents that had come under attack slowly regained relevance. The freedom that had been suppressed was gradually liberated.

The "single-minded approach" to agricultural production that had ruled the 1960s came under pressure. By the late 1970s, household farming quotas showed strong growth. From hunger to subsistence, material shortage to market prosperity, the Chinese economy launched a new wave from its rural villages.

In 1984, China underwent industrial and urban reform. Gradually, the ideology of the planned economy faded away, shifting first to a "planned commodity economy" and then to a "socialist market economy."

Countless numbers of rural Chinese overcame the barriers imposed by the household registration system and flooded into the cities. Thus recommenced a process of urbanization that had been delayed for three decades.

There was a gradual thaw, but China remained a spiritual wilderness. The 1980s were a period of intellectual enlightenment. The yearning for democracy and freedom were reignited. People looked outward to the world and began to see the light.

On April 15, 1989, Hu Yaobang died. The death of this figure who to many represented the hope of reform and was seen as a man of conscience within the Party triggered sorrows that had accumulated over a long period. University students demonstrated in the streets to oppose corruption and bureaucratic profiteering and to support democracy. Beginning on the night of June 3, the Party's army staged a bloody crackdown, leaving China with the lasting wounds of 1989.

On the day that troops occupied Tiananmen Square, Solidarity triumphed in the Polish parliamentary elections. At the end of the 20th century, Soviet rule over Eastern Europe collapsed. The tide of democratic constitutionalism surged forth.

But China, which had been home to the first republic in Asia, continued to hesitate and struggle.

Reform and Opening enabled China to step toward a market economy with one leg, but China stayed put with its other leg as far as progress toward democracy and rule of law was concerned. China has always been unwilling to cross that threshold into modern civilization. We find ourselves again facing the cyclical curse of the past century — “adopt Western technologies while preserving the Chinese core.”

That was China’s 20th century, the story of an ancient civilization seeking rebirth. Staggering, it fell into the abyss. Reawakened, it once again thirsts for the light of civilization. How much farther must we still go?