

# Continuity and Change in

# ASIA

Join us every Wednesday for an insightful look at *Continuity and Change in Asia*, a social studies-based program exploring political and social issues shaping Asia today and designed to encourage students to better understand the various issues shaping the countries and regions of East, South and Southeast Asia. This *Newspapers In Education* program is in partnership with the Asia Outreach Centers at the University of Washington Jackson School of International Studies. Series will run through Wednesday, June 7, 2006.

## ARTICLE 1

### Legacies of Imperialism and Colonialism: A World of Change for China

By Mary Cingcade, Associate Director, East Asia Resource Center, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington

Today, headlines tout China as an economic powerhouse, estimated as the world's fourth largest economy. But less than one hundred years ago, China came to the brink of being "carved up like a melon" by foreign powers. Over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Russia and the United States claimed control over Chinese trade and territory, known as "spheres of influence." How was it that one of the world's largest civilizations was forced to sign unequal treaties? What was the impact of imperialism on China and what does it have to do with China today?

The trouble began in the 19th century while the Qing dynasty was in power. By all accounts, the Qing dynasty was a golden era until this point: the empire had expanded its borders, the arts flourished and production grew. Maritime traders of foreign empires had reached China's shores centuries earlier, eager for Chinese products. By the 19th century, trade with Britain was, perhaps, too successful. The British tea trade with China was draining the island empire of vast quantities of silver, so Britain introduced opium to China, throwing the imbalance of trade in the other direction. Frustration on both sides led to the Opium Wars of 1839-41. No match for modern British military technology, China lost this fight and its dignity.

In battle after battle with foreign powers, China's traditional military cost it dearly. The Qing reacted with self-strengthening modernization programs to no avail. In the late 1900s, China lost Hong Kong in a 99-year lease to Britain – as well as Taiwan, southern Manchuria and its tributary state of Korea to Japan in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 – 1895. China was forced to enter into unequal treaties with several powers, until China was practically "carved up like a melon."

These humiliating defeats ignited strong nationalistic sentiments among many Chinese who called for a stop to foreign incursions into Chinese territory and markets. They demanded sweeping changes and many felt that China's existence, not just its sovereignty, was at stake. The dynasty eventually fell in 1911 and the republic was established, but troubles did not end there. A weak government failed to take control of China's immense territory and stop foreign influences. Japan's Twenty-One Demands, accepted by China in 1915, gave a foreign power unprecedented control. On May 4, 1919, Chinese citizens, enraged by the Twenty-One Demands and the Treaty of Versailles, took to the streets in one of the most significant demonstrations of anti-imperialism in Chinese history. Before this painful period came to a close, China fought its most brutal war with Japan on Chinese ground, ending only with Japan's defeat in WWII. Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that took over China in 1949, declared that China had "stood up."

Today, as China's economic power soars, the imprint of imperialism is still evident. Two themes at the heart of politics in the early 20th century continue to shape the country's priorities: China's defense of its sovereignty and its desire for rapid modernization.

Expressions of popular nationalism still flare when China's sovereignty is contradicted. Harsh feelings are easily tapped with incidents such as the 1999 accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, or Japan's failure to adequately acknowledge its wartime atrocities. Tensions with Taiwan brew as China refuses to recognize independence of its "renegade province." Other incidents fuel national pride. The 1997 handover of Hong Kong was a momentous event that affirmed China's sovereignty with the slogan: "One country, two systems." And in 2001, Beijing winning the 2008 Olympic bid signaled that China had regained its place on the world stage.

However, perhaps no goal has shaped contemporary China more keenly than the country's desire for rapid modernization. Over the past 27 years, economic policies dubbed "socialism with Chinese characteristics" have brought about radical change. The Chinese economy grows at a noteworthy 7 – 10% per year. In every corner of the country, economic development has produced higher standards of living, increased literacy, industrial and agricultural development and social reforms. China still faces the challenge of modernizing its vast countryside – possibly the biggest hurdle yet. No matter what the future brings, China's interpretation of its past is likely to play a role.

#### Questions for discussion:

1. Describe China's experience of imperialism. What were the lasting effects of imperialism for China?
2. How does China's interpretation of its past affect the country today?

## Activities

- 1: In The Seattle Times, locate an article that mentions China. Write a one-page summary of this article and share your summaries aloud in class.
- 2: Create a **KWL** chart, illustrating what you **Know** about China, what you **Want** to know and, finally, what you have **Learned** about China. Update your chart as you continue to learn more throughout this series.

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