Before Europeans first arrived in Asia, China was one of the most advanced and powerful nations in the world. It was the most populous, was politically unified, and most importantly, it had mastered the art of agriculture. However, when Europeans first landed on Chinese shores, they found a nation that had reverted to traditional culture and warfare. Industrialization was almost non-existent.

At the beginning of the 20th century, China was divided into spheres of influence with each powerful Western nation trying to exert as much control over it as possible. The Chinese resented foreigners control and expressed this at the beginning of the 20th century with the Boxer Rebellion. At the same time, the traditional government of China began to fail in the early years. (King's College History Department website)

**BOXER REBELLION: 1900**

In 1900, the Boxer movement spread to the Beijing area, where the Boxers killed Chinese Christians and Christian missionaries and destroyed churches and railroad stations and other property. On June 20, 1900, the Boxers began a siege of Beijing's foreign legation district (where the official quarters of foreign diplomats were located.) The following day, Qing Empress Dowager Tzu'uHzi (or Cixi, 1835-1908) declared a war on all foreign nations with diplomatic ties in China.

As the Western powers and Japan organized a multinational force to crush the rebellion, the siege stretched into weeks, and the diplomats, their families and guards suffered through hunger and degrading conditions as they fought to keep the Boxers at bay. By some estimates, several hundred foreigners and several thousand Chinese Christians were killed during this time. On August 14, after fighting its way through northern China, an international force of approximately 20,000 troops from eight nations (Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) arrived to take Beijing and rescue the foreigners and Chinese Christians.

**BOXER REBELLION: AFTERMATH**

The Boxer Rebellion formally ended with the signing of the Boxer Protocol on September 7, 1901. By terms of the agreement, forts protecting Beijing were to be destroyed, Boxer and Chinese government officials involved in the uprising were to be punished, foreign legations were permitted to station troops in Beijing for their defense, China was prohibited from importing arms for two years and it agreed to pay more than $330 million in reparations to the foreign nations involved. The Qing dynasty, established in 1644, was weakened by the Boxer Rebellion. Following an uprising in 1911, the dynasty came to an end and China became a republic in 1912. The Chinese people, being resentful of foreigners and dissatisfied with inability of the present government to throw them out, initiated the Revolution of 1911, replacing the Chinese 2000 year old imperial system with the Republic of China headed by Sun Yat-sen. (history.com)
March 1912 Sun Yat-sen resigned and Yuan Shih-kai became the next ruler of China. Yuan attempted to reinstate an imperial system with himself as emperor causing Sun to start one of China's first political parties, Kuomintang or KMT. Sun fought hard to establish a democracy but was largely unsuccessful until the 1920's.

1917 China entered World War I on the side of the allies. Although China did not see any military action, it provided resources in the form of laborers that worked in allied mines and factories. The Treaty of Versailles ignored China's plea to end concessions and foreign control of China.

May 4, 1919 The May Fourth Movement took place in which students demonstrated in protest of the Treaty of Versailles. The Movement helped the Chinese by promoting science and making China adopt a new easier form of writing. Moreover, the movement was the foundation for the forming of the Communist Party of China (CCP).

The 1920's China was divided in a power struggle began between the CCP and KMT. The KMT controlled a majority of China with a strong base in urban areas while the CCP displaying smallholdings in rural communities. By 1928, the CCP was expelled and China was nationalized under the KMT. However, the Communist Party of China resurfaced on November 1, 1931 when it proclaimed the Jiangxi providence as the Chinese Soviet Republic. The army of the Republic of China, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek tried to destroy the Communist army in 1934, however, Chiang failed but did cause the CCP to flee northward in the Long March.

1931 Japan began to occupy Manchuria and established a puppet government called Manchukuo. The Japanese aggression in China became full blown on July 7, 1937, the beginning World War II. By 1939, Japan controlled most of the east coast of China, while Chiang blockaded the Communists in the northwest region.

By 1944, the United States began to help nationalist China, but the nationalist remained weak due to high inflation and economic strife.

January 1946 The two factions of China began to have another power struggle. The KMT, supplied by the United States, controlled the cities, while the CCP had a strong hold in the countryside. To make matters worse, high inflation demoralized the citizens and military. By 1948, the CCP began to wage war against the KMT, taking control of Manchuria and working its way south. On October 1, 1949, with the retreat of the KMT to Taiwan, Mao Zedong established the People’s Republic of China.
The People’s Republic of China completely changed the culture and geography of the Chinese people. It implemented **five-year plans** that consisted of land reform, social reform, cultural reform, and economic planning. The changes lead to the **Great Leap Forward and Great Proletarian Cultural Reform**. In 1949, China also implemented a 30-year alliance with Russia against Japanese and Japanese allies, although tensions strained after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1955. Relations between the two countries remained strained until 1985.

It was not until **1970’s** that most Western nations established diplomatic ties to Communist China. With the help of President Richard Nixon and his philosophy of Détente, China was incorporated into the world community. The high point of the People’s Republic of China came in **1971** when it was given Taiwan’s position on the United Nation’s Security Council.

As China was increasing its world reconciliation, the founders of the People’s Republic of China were slowly dying, including Mao Zedong. The lack of Zhou Enlai and Mao in leadership roles in 1976 caused a power struggle developed between Deng Ziaoping and Mao’s supports, headed by Jiang Qing. In the same year, students demonstrated in Tiananmen Square in honor of Zhou, causing a flaw in Jiang’s power. Seeing his opportunity, Deng seized power and brought younger men with his views to power. He developed state constitutions and brought new policies to the party in 1982. Deng’s plan was based on the four modernizations of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science/technology. In 1987, Deng retired and Zhao Ziyang became general secretary, and Li Peng became premier.

China remained quiet for some years after the power struggle following the death of Mao. However, in **1989**, China came into the world’s eyes again with the **Tiananmen Square** incident. Students demonstrating in the streets of Beijing were attacked and killed by Chinese soldiers. The event caused nations around the world to question China’s view of human rights and freedoms.

Today, China is one of the most talked about countries when it comes to the future of the world economy. It has the natural resources and manpower to build and possess the largest economy in the world. *(King's College History Department website)*

Susan Knight

July 2014