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Topic: Chinese History & Religion

History of Chinese Dynasties:

- Shang Dynasty (1600 – 1050 BCE)
 - First historically confirmed ruling dynasty
 - Introduced the first formal system of writing – Chinese characters
- Zhou Dynasty (1046 – 256 BCE)
 - Aristocratic social and political systems
 - Power struggles between rival semi-autonomous states
 - Emergence of **Confucianism – a philosophical, ethical, and societal code of conduct based on filial piety, righteousness, mercy, and trust** – and Daoism as permeating spiritual ideologies
- Qin Dynasty (256 – 206 BCE)
 - Shi Huangdi unified China and founded China’s first imperial dynasty
 - Built the Great Wall, over 4,000 miles of roads, and the Terracotta Warriors
 - Standardized the writing system, paper money, and measurements
- Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE)
 - Established much of modern-day Chinese culture
 - Introduced civil service examinations
 - Established **Confucianism** as orthodoxy
- “Period of Disunity” (220 – 581 CE)
 - Rise of Buddhism coupled with regional fragmentation
- Sui Dynasty (581 – 618 CE)
 - Reunified the Chinese empire
- Tang Dynasty (618 – 906 CE)
 - Oversaw a rise in poetic artistry and creative innovation
 - Territorial expansion, propagation of Buddhist principles, and peaceful prosperity
 - First half of “The Golden Age” in Ancient Chinese History
- Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE)
 - Remarkable technological innovations
 - Monetized and greatly expanded the economy
 - Created China’s first navy
 - Second half of “The Golden Age” in Ancient Chinese History
- Yuan Dynasty (1279 – 1386 CE)
 - China’s first foreign led dynasty (Mongol rule led by Kublai Khan)
 - Utilized paper money as the main form of currency
 - Marco Polo introduced China to Europeans
- Ming Dynasty (1386 – 1644 CE)
 - Laid the foundation for modern-day Chinese politics with an authoritarian political culture
 - Instituted pro-peasant policies
 - Stimulated growth in the commercial sector and a vibrant literary culture
- Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912 CE)
 - Manchurian leadership isolated China from the developing international community
 - Expanded China’s borders while increasing the population

Post Dynastic Period:

- “Century of Humiliation” (1839 – 1949)
 - China fell victim to Western and Japanese imperialism, persistent interventionism, and severe political turmoil
 - Suffered multiple military defeats (i.e. 1st and 2nd Opium Wars, 1st & 2nd Sino-Japanese Wars, Sino-French War, Japanese invasion of Manchuria, etc.)
 - Coerced into granting various humiliating concessions in unequal treaties (i.e. vast sums of money in reparations, relinquish sovereign territories to foreign “spheres of influence,” forced opening of trade ports, etc.)
 - Emergence of the Kuomintang and CCP as 2 political parties vying for control
 - Outbreak of Civil War after WWII, resulting in Mao Zedong’s rise to power and declaration of The People’s Republic of China
- Great Leap Forward (1958 – 1962)
 - Implementation of Socialist policies to shift away from an agrarian society
 - Scrapped gentry-based land ownership in favor of a peasant-first approach to society
 - Rapid collectivization and industrialization of Chinese society
 - Caused the deaths of millions, marginalizing Chairman Mao within the CCP
- Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976)
 - Mao argued bourgeoisie capitalists contaminated the CCP
 - Implementation of full-scale Communism to reconsolidate power for Mao
 - Systematically purged society of ideological impurities to revive China’s revolutionary zeal by sending intellectuals to work on countryside farms, forming the Red Guard police force, and executing those who refused to conform to Maoist doctrine
- Deng Xiaoping & Reform (1978 – 1997)
 - Instituted comprehensive economic reforms aimed at transforming China from Socialism to quasi-capitalism
 - Rapid economic growth, rising standards of living, drastic expansion of personal and cultural freedoms, and growing ties to the world economy
 - Set forth the Four Modernizations to strengthen Chinese 1) agriculture 2) industry 3) defense 4) science
- Modern Era: Communism with Chinese characteristics (1998 – present)
 - Uptick in authoritarianism under Xi Jinping, China’s president for life
 - Dismantling of Deng Xiaoping’s institutions/procedures established to constrain power
 - Severe crackdown on civil and religious rights
 - Belt Road Initiative: Chinese mission to establish infrastructure developments and investments in 152 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas; likely an attempt to place China at the center of the international trade community

Religion in China:

- Introduction
 - Intensifying persecution and repression for adherents across all religious organizations
 - Article 36 of the Chinese constitution: citizens “enjoy freedom of religious *belief*”
 - No de facto guarantee of the right to practice or worship
 - Limitations on religious freedoms underpins the CCP’s goal of ideological conformity
- Differing Statistics
 - Chinese Government: identifies 100 million registered religious believers
 - Freedom House Index: estimates 350 million religious believers

- US State Department: estimates 200 million religious believers
- CCP (officially atheist) restrictions on religious rights
 - Claim religious adherents use religion “as a camouflage, deifying their leading members, recruiting and controlling their members, and deceiving people by molding and spreading superstitious ideas, and endangering society”
 - Recognizes 5 religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestantism
 - Prohibits the practicing of another faith
 - Tolerates folk religions with views in accordance with authentic, traditional Chinese beliefs – **Confucianism**
 - Vets religious leaders for political reliability
 - Outlaw text, images, audio, or video with religious messages through websites or apps
 - Religious communities must foster a positive, collaborative relationship with the CCP if they wish to evade persecution
- Persecuted religious groups
 - Tibetan Buddhists faithful to the Dalai Lama: politicized detentions, prosecution, and convictions of millions of peaceful protesters to crush political dissension
 - Christians: forced removal/demolition of hundreds of churches; imprisonment of leaders
 - Islam & Uighurs in Xinjiang: over 3 million residents sent to political and cultural reeducation camps (aka vocational training centers) designed to counter extremism
- Banned religious groups as “heterodox cults”
 - Repeated government crackdowns and repression of adherents to achieve ideological conformity
 - Most prominent: Church of the Almighty God & Falun Gong: subjected to “torture or forced indoctrination”
 - Additional banned religions: Full Scope Church, The Disciple Society, Anointed King, Children of God, Dami Mission, New Testament Church, South China Church, Zhonggong, Pure Land Learning Association, etc.

Vision for the Future

- China’s vision for the future: 30 Year plan to become the world’s preeminent superpower
 - Challenge US supremacy by reshaping the region according to China’s interests and economic development
 - Revitalize Chinese culture, oppose “erroneous” ideology, and promote religion that is “Chinese in orientation” (**Confucianism**, Buddhism, and Daoism)
 - Extend its influence over other nations to align themselves more with China than the US
- #1 priority for America: agree to terms on an equitable trade deal
 - Promotion of fair international trade to end market uncertainty
 - Eradicate intellectual property theft and currency manipulation
 - Lift tariffs to ease the burden on domestic consumers and ensure equitable market access
- Ideal vision for China from a US perspective
 - Lift restrictions on individual freedoms – speech, assembly, press, worship, etc.
 - Promote humanitarian values across China and China-controlled territories
 - Work with China to substantially reduce worldwide CO2 emissions

All statistics from:

<https://www.cfr.org/background/religion-china>

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/china-religious-freedom>

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CHINA-INCLUSIVE-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

<https://foref-europe.org/2018/10/15/chinas-blacklist-of-forbidden-religions/>