

East Asia Geography: Contemporary Issues in China and Japan

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China: Unnatural selection

Resource (Al Jazeera): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8MVc2yCJUM>

What was China's one-child policy?

How was it enforced?

What were exceptions to the policy?

What were its intended and unintended consequences?

What could have been a better alternative population policy for the country?

Read: <https://www.economist.com/china/2018/07/26/chinas-two-child-policy-is-having-unintended-consequences>

What is the current status of China's population policy? Is this new policy working? Why or why not?

In groups: draw a political cartoon from the perspective of one of the Chinese village residents from the video articulating an opinion towards the one child policy.

Big data meets Big Brother as China moves to rate its citizens

Resource: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/chinese-government-social-credit-score-privacy-invasion>

Resource (HBO): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dkw15LkZ_Kw

1. “It’s Amazon’s consumer tracking with an Orwellian political twist”. Explain what this means:

2. What types of companies would be most useful in providing relevant data on an individual’s social behavior?

3. Besides those mentioned in the article, what are some types of activities that you could imagine raising or decreasing an individual’s social credit score?

4. How does the social credit system precisely work? What mechanisms steer behavior?

5. What are some of the changes that could be expected to be observed under the social credit system:

6. What are arguments in favor of the system? Are they persuasive? How might you refute them?

7. How is this system similar to/different from forms of credit that exist in your own country?

Minority Oppression

Xinjiang Region and Uyghurs: Security State and Reeducation Camps

WSJ: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ5LnY21Hgc>

BBC: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wmld2ZP3h0c>

Atlantic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtYyAP67k60>

What's the geographical importance of the Xinjiang province?

Examples of the draconian nature of the security system:

Observations of the re-education camps (sometimes also referred to as internment camps):

Who gets sent to the re-education camps?

Experiences of Uighurs living in the US:

Why did Tahir Imin flee?

Discussion Questions

Is this genocide/ethnic cleansing that is taking place? How are the re-education camps similar to/different from other initiatives throughout history?

In light of the oppression taking place, should countries indeed take the route of punishing China through economic and/or political sanctions? What are pros and cons to such moves? And to doing nothing?

Is it legitimate for minority groups within a country to articulate their own national identity?

'The Night Is Thick': Uyghur Poets Respond To The Disappearance Of Their Relatives

Resource: <https://supchina.com/2019/03/06/uyghur-poets-respond-to-the-disappearance-of-their-relatives/>

Which of the poems/poets do you empathize most with? Why?

What do the poems have in common?

Discussion Questions

In groups: create a storyboard depicting the plight of the Uyghurs.

The Dalai Lama and Tibet

Resource (HBO Last Week Tonight): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLY45o6rHm0>

Who is the Dalai Lama?

And the Panchen Lama?

Why might the current Dalai Lama be the final one?

In groups: create a meme from the perspective of the Dalai Lama towards the Chinese government.

What is China's Belt and Road Initiative?

1. What does the Belt and Road Initiative consist of? What is its purpose?
2. Potential benefits of the New Silk Road:
3. What are criticisms of the New Silk Road and why are some analysts calling it imperial?
4. What does debt-trap diplomacy refer to?
5. Why do you suspect countries are turning to China for loans to support infrastructure and not to other options?
6. In addition to those mentioned in the article, what are some other concessions that could be made to China in the case of loan default?
7. In what ways does the BRI correspond to or differ from other practices you've heard of in China?

China's massive Belt and Road initiative builds global infrastructure -- and influence

Resource (PBS Newshour): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xl_kw3mNazY

What project is being developed in Indonesia as part of the BRI?

How does the Indonesian government justify the project?

Examples of BRI supporting China's development:

A.

B.

C.

What projects were being developed in Malaysia and why did Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad stop them?

What are examples of loss of control in other countries from the projects?

Resource (VICE News): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0gk_m0gZ0A&t=93s

A tale of two political systems

https://www.ted.com/talks/eric_x_li_a_tale_of_two_political_systems?language=en

What are three assumptions often made about the Chinese political system and what does Li say about them?

What characteristics define the Chinese system according to Li? What's his evidence for these different claims?

What are Li's predictions?

In groups: If you were a journalist, what question would you ask Eric Li?

Why democracy still wins

Read the following commentary in response to the Ted Talk and answer the questions that follow:

<https://blog.ted.com/why-democracy-still-wins-a-critique-of-eric-x-lis-a-tale-of-two-political-systems/>

1. How does Yasheng Huang respond to Eric Li's arguments in the following areas:

Wealth –

Corruption –

Approval ratings/opinion polling –

The ability of an authoritarian regime to self-correct -

Dysfunctional nature of democracies -

Cultural argument against democracy (i.e. democracy is a foreign concept) –

2. "Treating the entrenched corruption with its underlying cause is analogous to saying that a cancer patient got his cancer after he was admitted for chemotherapy." What is he suggesting about democracies here?

3. Yasheng Huang highlights research demonstrating democracies to be better at providing public services (e.g. health and education) than non-democracies. Why do you think democracies would be better at this?

4. Explain this analogy with respect to democracies/non-democracies:

A 15-year-old boy is probably more likely to go to see a movie or hang out with his friends on his own than a 10-year-old because he is older and more mature. It is also likely that he will not grow as fast as a 10-year-old because he is nearer to the plateau of human height. It would be foolish to claim, as Li's logic basically did, that the 15-year-old is growing more slowly because he is going to movies on his own."

5. Why do democracies tend to be less violent as a whole compared to non-democracies?

6. Now take on this role of journalist. What question would you ask Yasheng Huang? This should be a well-reasoned question demonstrating your ability to challenge and/or elicit useful information from an expert.

7. In class, we evaluated the arguments of Eric Li, including both valid points and criticisms of his line of reasoning. How might Eric Li respond to Huang's points? Are there any weak points?

How 156 years of British rule shaped Hong Kong

Resource (Vox): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StW7oGSR_Mg&t=9s

1. At least five examples of British cultural influence shown:
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
 - E.
2. When and in what form did British-Chinese relations initially develop?
3. What caused the Opium Wars and what were its consequences?

China is erasing its border with Hong Kong

Resource (Vox): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQyxG4vTyZ8>

1. Were the conditions of the 1997 agreement between China and the UK?
2. The model is called: _____
3. In 1993, Hong Kong's economy was more than a _____ the size of China's entire economy. Today it is just _____ of China's economy.
4. The 2014 protest movement in Hong Kong was known as the _____.
5. Hong Kong identify in recent years has been declining. True or false.

How feng shui shaped Hong Kong's skyline

Resource (Vox): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIDBgOkxgS8>

What is feng shui?

How has feng shui become entangled with the cityscape of Hong Kong? Examples?

How was feng shui protected despite the Cultural Revolution in China?

The decline of Hong Kong's neon glow

Resource (Vox): <https://youtube.com/watch?v=DdpEYzvi8pl>

What are neon lights? How do they work?

How are neon lights culturally significant for Hong Kong?

Why are neon lights disappearing?

The Rise of Trap in Southwest China – Chengdu

Resource (Vice Asia): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zs2zUv98IG4>

Based on the video, what is your understanding of what Trap means? What is its significance to the music artists we see in the documentary?

One of the music artists mentions that it is not his responsibility if listeners “misinterpret” his song and engage in behavior that the song is actually discouraging. Do you agree with him?

Why do you think this type of subculture has emerged in China? Is it correct to call it a “foreign” subculture?

What types of subcultures initially adopted from abroad have emerged in your country? In what ways have they been altered from their place of origin?

China's global propaganda campaign

Resource: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping>

1. Explain the following:

Defensive media strategy -

Assertive media strategy –

2. A former journalist at Xinhua commented that “You’re combining journalism with a kind of creative writing.” What precisely does this mean?

3. Why do you think Chinese billionaires are involved in the endeavors to buy out foreign news institutions and cover the costs of journalist visits to China?

4. There are several elements of China's global media approach discussed in the article. Distill the information from the article into three distinct elements and then mention specific examples from the article that illustrate each of these general concepts. Make sure you distinguish between the general categories – you may need to be creative and invent your own term for a category - and concrete examples.

A.

B.

C.

5. What is your own reaction to the situation presented in the article? You may wish to connect it to something else you've read or your own observations of the media (e.g. in your own country) in general.

Class Debate: divide into groups (pro and against).

Resolved: Your country should create its own global media network to spread information.

Rap/Music as Propaganda in China

Read (and watch the “Two Sessions” propaganda rap video):

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/06/time-for-the-chinese-miracle-beijings-new-english-language-propaganda-push>

In groups: write a rap articulating an opinion against one of the Chinese policies previously explored in this unit.

Environmental Issues

How China Is Scrambling for Clean Air

Resource (Bloomberg): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-GoO6Y9hHA>

In 2013, air quality in Beijing was rated unhealthy hazardous for over _____ the year. Air pollution peaked at _____ times the WHO recommended limit. In 2019, after some reduction efforts, pollution was down to _____ times the WHO limit.

China's economic boom was made possible by:

The tax on this economic boom has been:

Over 100 million people watched Under the Dome before it was _____ from video sharing websites.

In recent years, China has been shifting homes from energy produced by coal to _____.

Other recent initiatives:

Three Gorges Dam

Resource (Half as Interesting): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvU3hUSime8>

Why was it controversial?

Fun fact: how/why did it impact the rotation of the Earth?

This Ingenious System Brings Water to the Chinese Desert

Resource (Smithsonian): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rQAXaaU1v8>

How does the Karez work? Why is it important to the region?

Urbanization

The Civilized City

Resource: <https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2013/chapter-5-building-civilised-cities/>

Take the position of a Chinese citizen and stake out a position in favor, against, or in qualification of the Chinese civilized city model.

In your essay, include information regarding/respond to the following:

What is the “Civilized City” concept conceived by the Chinese government? What are some factors that sparked the creation of this initiative? What are some of the different categories and criteria for becoming a civilized city? What types of behavior and achievements are assessed? Discuss some of the examples of projects (e.g. civilized toilets, inappropriate conduct laws) that cities have carried out to fulfill the criteria? What are criticisms of the civilized city model?

Datong

Watch the film “Datong/The Chinese Mayor”: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4056808/>

Read: Jinze Cui’s article *Heritage Visions of Mayor Geng Yanbo Re-creating the City of Datong* (pp. 223-244)

Respond to two of the following four essay questions.

- What are the goals of Mayor Geng with respect to the cultural restoration projects in Datong? Is it cultural preservation for the sake of cultural preservation or something else? What are some of the underlying political, economic, and societal processes that might be driving these developments? Use terminology that you have learned throughout the year.
- Consider what it means to be a “cultural city.” What is Mayor Geng’s vision for Datong? How does Mayor Geng’s vision cohere or not with the “civilized city” concept that you previously examined? How does his vision in the film compare to the vision presented in the reading “Heritage visions of mayor Geng Yanbo: Re-creating the city of Datong”?
- Considering specifically the impact on people and the economy, how does the demolition witnessed in Datong compare/contrast with other urban development projects we’ve engaged with in the course? Refer to concrete examples.
- Mayor Geng explicitly discusses his ambition to make Datong a center of tourism. Consider the steps that were involved to make this a possibility in the first place in Datong. How does it compare/contrast with the impact of tourism on places that are *currently* tourist draws? Refer to specific examples we’ve examined in the course.

Ageing Japan

The burden of a graying planet

Resource (Al Jazeera): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8wdLWUEnzI>

What are the lives like for old age Japanese? What issues are they facing?

What problems is Japan facing as a whole due to its ageing population?

What types of measures have the Japanese government, business community, and society taken to address these problems?

To what extent have the measures been successful or how likely are they to work? What obstacles are there?

Resource: <https://www.vox.com/2014/10/9/6946577/japan-fertility-sexism-demographic-babies>

- ### 3. What are a couple options for solving Japan's ageing situation?

Japan is finally starting to admit more foreign workers

Resource: <https://www.economist.com/asia/2018/07/05/japan-is-finally-starting-to-admit-more-foreign-workers>

1. How would you characterize/sum up the immigrant situation in Japan?

The Worst Internship Ever: Japan's Labor Pains

Resource (VICE News): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wt_IHCuH5g

Why are some calling the traineeship program a form of human trafficking?

In theory, how was the traineeship program supposed to work?

How do the different cases of individuals discussed in the video help illustrate the problems of the traineeship program?

Tokyo

Read the following three articles and respond to the questions

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/jun/13/a-city-built-on-water-the-hidden-rivers-under-tokyos-concrete-and-neon>

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/jun/14/has-tokyo-reached-peak-city>

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/jun/11/how-tokyo-suburban-housing-blocks-became-ghettoes-for-the-old>

What is the geographical situation of Tokyo with respect to water and how has this situation changed over time?

Why is Tokyo argued to be a “peak city”? How is the city similar to and different from other megacities?

What issues is suburban housing facing in Tokyo and why? And what is being done to resolve the problems emerging from suburban housing situation?

Fukushima nuclear meltdown

Resource (PBS): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fTB-q7RsEc

What are some of the issues being faced in the “clean-up” process and what is being done about them?

What was the fallout from Fukushima?

Resource: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/03/was-fallout-from-fukushima-exaggerated>

Would it be correct to say that Fukushima was only a natural disaster? Explain.

What is radiophobia?

Returning to Fukushima

Resource (National Geographic): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFv5yY7pMgQ>

What's going on in the previously evacuated towns now? Why aren't people moving back?

What actions is the Japanese government taking to try to get people to move back?

The fight to rethink (and reinvent) nuclear power

Resource (Vox): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poPLSgbSO6k>

What's the relevance of nuclear power in terms of energy production?

What problems exist with nuclear power?

What's changing with advanced nuclear reactors?

Why hasn't nuclear power emerged as a larger part of the global energy package in recent years?

Nuclear Waste Repository Warning System

In groups: Design a warning system to prepare future generations (10,000 years) from now about toxic nuclear waste. Think about the challenges that might exist in terms of people in the distant future understanding what you are trying to communicate.

After finishing the activity (Vox): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lOEqzt36JEM>

How did your design compare to some of the templates developed by government agencies?