



# **MODERN CHINA IN PICTURES**



NEW WORLD PRESS

图说百年中国：英文 / 王煦等著. — 北京：新世  
界出版社, 2012.4  
ISBN 978-7-5104-2632-2

I. ①图… II. ①王… III. ①中国历史：近代史—图  
解—英文②中国历史：现代史—图解—英文 IV.  
①K250.8

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2012)第039772号

## Modern China in Pictures 图说百年中国(英)

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图片编辑：贺玉婷

英文审定：徐明强 Paul White Penelope Colville

图片提供：CNSPHOTO 新华社等

装帧设计：贺玉婷

版式设计：知行兆远

责任印制：李一鸣 黄厚清

出版发行：北京 新世界出版社

社 址：北京市西城区百万庄大街24号(100037)

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发行部电话：+86 10 6899 5968 68998705(传真)

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版权部电话：+86 10 6899 6306

印刷：北京画中画印刷有限公司

经销：新华书店

开本：787×1092 1/16

字数：200千字 印张：22.25

版次：2013年1月第1版 2013年1月北京第1次印刷

书号：ISBN 978-7-5104-2632-2

定价：78.00元

# Significant Changes in a Century of Vicissitudes

One hundred years went by from the 1911 Revolution to 2011. The year 2012 marks another 100 years since the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1912. This past century has been full of twists and turns. As Li Hongzhang, a Chinese general and statesman of the late Qing Empire, wrote in 1872: “This is a great change unprecedented in the 3,000 years of Chinese history.” However, it was only the beginning. The 20th century saw drastic and complete changes spread across China. Even in the 21st century we can still feel the momentum of these changes, and are spurred on by their impact.

As we look back at this volatile 100 years, we can’t help asking: What exactly were the changes? This book tries to answer that question through a palette of daily-life pictures.

On the evening of October 10, 1911, gunshots were fired in Wuchang City, and the centuries of dynastic rule quickly came to an end. China opened a brand-new chapter in its history. However, the road ahead was still full of hardships in spite of the founding of the Republic of China. The country was tortured by secession and unrest while waiting for a revolution and rebirth. The wave of “modernization” challenged every corner of old China. Men’s pigtails were cut off and the binding of girls’ feet was forbidden by law. Loose robes with wide-open sleeves and large belts swiftly dropped out of fashion. Cities with foreign-style buildings sprang up. Trains rumbled across the countryside, and steamboats chugged up and down rivers and lakes, bringing an ancient nation on to the fast track of modernization. The changes in the physical world also had an impact on the Chinese people’s mentality, as their minds opened up under the influence of Western philosophy. With educational reform, old-style private schools were abandoned, while public schools were set up to spread new thinking and concepts. Progressive thought finally triumphed in the course of the New Culture Movement, heralding a brand-new era.

In 1927 the government of the Republic of China was founded in Nanjing. However, the long-awaited stability and revitalization were yet to come. During the 22 years of rule by the Kuomintang (KMT), the country and its people still had to endure political turbulence, foreign invasion and endless wars. Yet it was also a time of vigor and changes. The Chinese people made significant achievements in this period in economic growth, culture, education, art and social progress. The

burgeoning cities became dazzling highlights against the background of backwardness, turbulence and poverty. In these sleepless cities, high-rises were built everywhere, and their wide streets were lined with neon lights. People from all walks of life pursued the modern life: gentlemen in suits, and ladies with wavy hair in cheongsam dresses were eye-catching. In just a decade, imported goods, such as matches, candles, soap and light bulbs, as well as trolleybuses and running water, became daily necessities. Moreover, the new environment also gave rise to a prosperous culture. Books and newspapers, films and theatrical performances abounded in that era, which produced noted scholars and writers. It was also an era of multiple choices and diversity. Hu Shi and Lu Xun called for “national spirit,” while Zhang Ailing and Huanzhu Louzhu touched people’s hearts with romantic novels. Film actors and actresses enjoyed popularity, while Peking Opera performers were also highly applauded by enthusiasts. The classics and modern fashions, and tradition and modernity clashed and merged with each other, and gave birth to something new. However, this new life failed to awaken China’s countryside or benefit Chinese farmers. Conflicts and difficulties were still out there. China still had a long way to go.

On October 1, 1949, the People’s Republic of China was founded. China’s history then embraced a great turn. A socialist regime was established, the country returned to peace and stability, and the economy also recovered. There were painful experiences later, such as the Great Leap Forward and “three-year famine,” and problems with the planned economy and centralized regime, but the country kept its momentum. What’s more important is that the grass-roots people won and maintained their dignity and rights. The people became the owners of their own lives, and worked with full vigor. Meanwhile, the working people had more access to department stores, cinemas, hospitals, schools and parks. Enjoyment that had once been reserved for the rich was now within the reach of everyone. During those early years, China was not prosperous, and the people led spartan lives. But they were optimistic and industrious, as they were in full control of their own lives. There was no longer the extravagance and decadence of the old era, and simplicity and friendliness became the social norms. People sang revolutionary songs and danced the *yangko* (a popular folk dance) to herald the new era and new life, displaying a vigorous People’s Republic of China with high aspirations.

In 1966 the Cultural Revolution broke out. This “extreme-Leftist” movement, led by the Party and central leaders, brought about disastrous turmoil and internal frictions. The Cultural Revolution also dealt a heavy blow to Chinese culture. During that time, fanaticism, over-excitement, blind faith and other absurdities were prevalent. Meanwhile, the people struggled through this “revolutionary” period. They kept their pace of life by working to pay for basic daily necessities, and their pursuit of beauty and a free life never ended. Although people dressed almost the same and lived similarly across the country, colored clothes and long plaits would occasionally sneak in. Festivals were still

celebrated with fireworks and dumplings, as well as with the occasional small parties. The general public hung on to their lives, which brought humanity to those chaotic years.

In 1978 the convening of the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th National Congress of the CPC Central Committee opened another new chapter in China's history, with the country's opening to the outside world. The Chinese government faced up to its backwardness, and led the Chinese people to boldly and resolutely set out on the grand course of reform and opening-up, with full emancipation of the mind. From then on, China strove to integrate itself into the rest of the world and catch up with the global trend. This was a significant change for the country and the nation, and touched every aspect of life. Along with rapid economic development, people had access to more wealth. As the people's income increased, delicacies, fashionable garments and luxurious houses became available. Health, culture and enjoyment were the next topics on the list. A new sense of individuality enriched people's lives. The resumption of the university entrance examination brought with it an enthusiasm for studying, and rebuilt faith in "knowledge is power." The opening of China's first stock market stimulated everyone to speculate and invest. The Chinese people are fully aware of these changes.

Entering the new century, China's development is an irrefutable fact, and the "Chinese miracle" will continue unabated. In line with the basic national policy of reform and opening-up, the national power is being enhanced, the economy is becoming more and more prosperous, and the people's lives are improving by the day. The enhanced economic strength and abundant merchandise give rise to multiple and diversified selection and taste, as well as a colorful social life. It is impossible to describe China and the Chinese people in one word. The only thing we can be sure of is that, as the Chinese people more and more have their basic needs satisfied, they are beginning to focus more on moral cultivation. They are becoming more interested in social causes and charity work to fulfill self-achievement and share their benefits with others. It can be clearly seen that a vigorous and optimistic society is coming into being. Currently, China is on the fast track of modernization, and the century-long dream of our ancestors is about to become true. Certainly, as a developing country, China still has a long way to go. In particular, after 30 years of reform and opening-up, some deep-rooted conflicts and problems have become prominent in the course of pursuing the grand objective of seeking development and wealth. Hope for the future and potential risks coexist. People are calling for equality, justice and harmony. This is our era. This is the finishing line of an old century, yet it is also the starting point of a new century. At this moment, let's take a look back to trace this colorful and complex progress of change. Together, let's relive the life of the people and experience the events in that era of change.

Wang Xu  
June, 2012

First Edition 2013

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Revised by Paul White and Penelope Colville

Photos edited by He Yuting

Cover design by He Yuting

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ISBN 978-7-5104-2632-2

*Published by*

NEW WORLD PRESS

24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China

*Distributed by*

NEW WORLD PRESS

24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China

Tel: 86-10-68995968

Fax: 86-10-68998705

Website: [www.newworld-press.com](http://www.newworld-press.com)

E-mail: [frank@nwp.com.cn](mailto:frank@nwp.com.cn)

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

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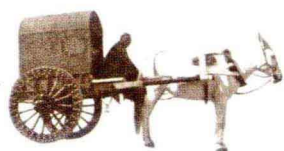
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Chapter 1

# A Difficult Start

(1911-1927)



# A Difficult Start



## The Imperial Palace

Also known as the Forbidden City, this was the residence of the emperors of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. It is the largest integrated ancient building compound in the world. The edifices are of brick and wood. The design of the Imperial Palace reflects the autocratic nature of China's ancient dynastic regimes. The magnificent architecture and luxurious decorations also showcase the extravagant lifestyle of the imperial family and nobility. The Imperial Palace was out of bounds to the general public, hence the appellation Forbidden City. After the Qing regime collapsed in 1912, the Forbidden City was turned into a museum in 1914. In 1925 it became the Palace Museum.



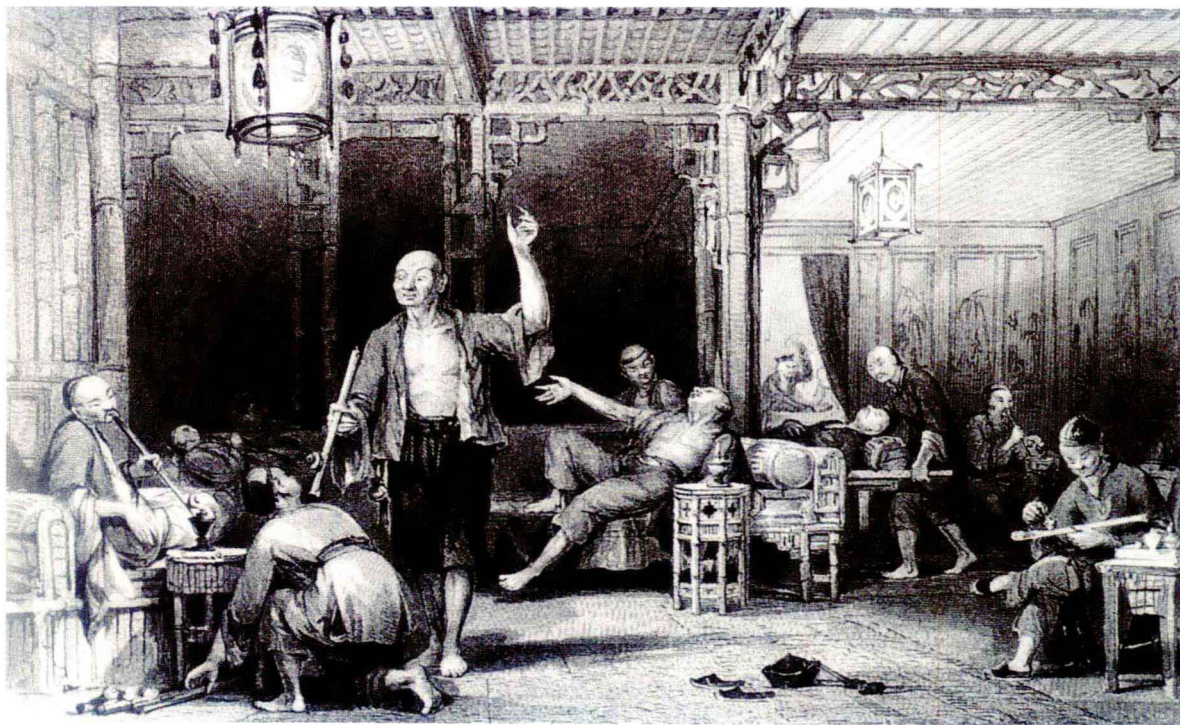


The last emperor of the Qing Dynasty – Aisin-Gioro Puyi (1906-1967)

The 15-year-old Prince Puyi at his home in Beijing, photographed in 1921. In 1908 Puyi became the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty at the age of 3, with the reign title of “Xuantong.” Three years later, the 1911 Revolution against the dynasty was led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. This was followed by uprisings in a number of China’s southern provinces. On February 12, 1912, the Qing regime released the Imperial Edict of Abdication, declaring the end of the dynasty and the termination of the feudal monarchy which had ruled China for over 2,000 years.

### Opium Den

In the 19th century British merchants smuggled large quantities of opium from India to China trying to make up for Britain’s trade deficit with the latter. This led to the First Opium War in 1840. The corrupt Qing regime was defeated and was forced to allow more opium to be imported, worsening China’s trade deficit and severely injuring the health of many Chinese people.





Aristocratic women of the late Qing with bound feet – three-inch “golden lotuses”

In Chinese feudal society women of the Han ethnic group (not the ruling Manchu ethnic group), whether rich or poor, considered bound feet an asset to beauty. In the late Qing Dynasty, foot binding and opium consumption were vehemently criticized as public nuisances detrimental to health and humiliating to national dignity. The Republic of China (1912-1949) government discouraged foot binding and opium. Foot binding, however, lingered on in the rural areas. This undesirable custom, as well as that of opium smoking, disappeared after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.



An illustration of the late Qing Dynasty, showing a mother binding the feet of her small daughter





A geometry teacher using his pigtail as compasses for drawing a circle, late Qing Dynasty

In the Qing Dynasty, at the order of the Manchu ruling caste, Chinese men had to shave their foreheads and wear their hair in a pigtail at the back. In the late Qing Dynasty, some leading personages influenced by Western culture, campaigned against this fashion. The picture shows a clash between Eastern and Western culture at that time.



A soldier cutting off a farmer's pigtail which was once a symbol of the Qing Dynasty rule

In 1911 the Qing government began to allow people to cut off their pigtails if they so wished. During the Republic of China period (1912-1949) the government actually banned the pigtail. Even policemen and soldiers were mobilized to cut off the pigtails of passers-by. However, it was not until the 1930s that the pigtail finally disappeared.



# Changes in Clothing Fashions



Late Qing officials in casual wear

Officials of the Qing Dynasty wore long gowns and thick-soled boots. The man in the middle is also wearing a jacket.

Manchu noblewomen,  
late Qing Dynasty



Wealthy Han women  
in everyday dress, late  
Qing Dynasty



During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) male dress featured a long gown with a round collar and wide sleeves, over which a jacket was sometimes worn. Female dress for Manchu women featured a gown with a round collar and narrow sleeves, and a wide lower hem, with a jacket. They had distinctive headgear, and wore embroidered shoes with high soles. People of the Han ethnic group generally wore the fashions of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

In the late Qing Dynasty traditional women's garments also changed subtly, with a preference for short, slim and comfortable wear. It was at this time that the *cheongsam* made its appearance as a typical Chinese female garment.





Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) in ceremonial dress as the president of the Republic of China

In the early years of the Republic of China, the Clothing Code stipulated a long gown or Western-style suit as ceremonial dress for officials.