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UNIT 1 - INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

ABOUT THIS UNIT

This unit provides an overview of the course structure and a brief outline of what to expect throughout the course.

Introduction

To many of us, the thought of China may conjure up such images as Kublai Khan and Marco Polo, the Great Wall, Xian's Entombed Warriors, Chairman Mao and his *Little Red Book*, Tiananmen Square, and perhaps Pu Yi for those who saw Bertolucci's epic film *The Last Emperor*.

But when we consider the vast history behind China, one of the world's oldest civilisations, which has left such a diverse legacy in the fields of art, religion, philosophy, architecture, science, archeology and naval exploration, many of us become keen to look at its past, and indeed its present, in much more detail.

In this course, we will follow China's gradual transformation from a reclusive feudal country steeped in ancient tradition to its position today as an integral part of the global trading, economic, and political community and examine some of the main reasons behind this transition.

The starting point for this change can arguably be set at the time of the formal declaration of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by Mao Zedong on 1 October 1949. However, it is important to realise that it took many long years of arduous struggle by Mao and his Chinese Communist Party (CCP) movement before that point was reached.

To set the scene, we will first explore some of the events at the end of the 19th century that led to the gradual transition from such a long-standing imperial system to the establishment of a communist republic.

If you click on the **Topics** page, you will see that **Unit 2** provides an overview of the period covering the fall of the last Qing (Manchu) dynasty, ending the 2,000-year-old imperial system; the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 under Sun Yat-sen; and the student May Fourth Movement in 1919, which saw the beginnings of the fledgling Chinese Communist Party.

Unit 3 traces the rather dramatic events of the next three decades, culminating in Mao's rise to

power in 1949 with the title of Chairman of the People's Republic of China.

Units 4 and 5 cover Chairman Mao's economic reform initiatives and his ambitious attempts at social engineering on a large scale until his death in 1976, the succession struggles during the post-Mao period, and the pragmatic Four Modernisations program of Deng Xiaoping.

Unit 6 looks at the lives of three women of destiny and their impact on events during the 20th century in China.

Unit 7 presents a description of the country's vastness and geography, as well as a broad overview of the current social conditions and life of the people.

Unit 8 follows some of the main developments in China during the past decade or so, such as rapid economic and industrial expansion. In this unit, we will take a closer look at some of the more important emerging issues, both external and domestic, that could significantly affect China's status as a responsible member of the international community.

In the final unit of the course, we ask you to provide an evaluation to help us at U3A Online to improve this and future courses.

Chinese names can be rather confusing and are often subject to transliteration. For example, Mao Zedong is also referred to as Mao Tse-tung or Beijing as Peking. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, we will use the spellings most commonly recognised today in the Western world.

The course necessarily covers a lot of ground in a short time, which reminds me of that wonderful Chinese saying: "contemplating orchids from a galloping horse". Nevertheless, I do hope you will enjoy this exploratory journey through China's history and culture, which I have entitled "China in Transition - Mao to Now".

Perhaps it will encourage you to visit this ancient land and view the ever-changing scene through your own eyes.

Activity 1 - Chronology and Timelines

1. Click on [View Table 1](#): Peruse the Chronology - Historical Chart and familiarise yourself with the timeframe and broad events we will be exploring throughout this course.
2. Click on [View Table 2](#): You will see a timeline of Chinese dynasties. Although our course does not cover these areas, you may find the information to be of general historical interest.

*If you wish to download the tables in a Portable Document Format (pdf), click on **Table 1** (file size 61 KBs) and **Table 2** (file size 56 KBs) which will enable you to print them out or store them on your computer.*

3. The links below will enable you to do some preliminary reading for the next Unit:
 - **The Boxer Rebellion**
 - **The Dowager Empress Cixi**

- *Child Emperor Pu Yi*
- *Sun Yat-sen*

Next - The last dynasty and the first republic

In Unit 2 we will look at events towards the end of the 19th century that resulted in the collapse of the Qing dynasty and set the scene for China's eventual transition into the very different communist political system under Mao Zedong.

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