Introduction

Chinese society is changing at a breathtaking rate. At the same time as it undergoes what sociologists consider to be classic modernization, including industrialization and urbanization, it is globalizing and embracing new communication technologies. Few western theorists have dared to wrestle with the implications of these complex processes for Chinese society as a whole. Such analysis requires an engagement with the social and institutional legacies of China's revolutionary and pre-revolutionary, imperial past, as well as the momentous forces shaping the present. In this book, three social scientists come together to provide an analysis of Chinese society and social change, informed by anthropological and sociological theory.

The book has three parts. Part 1 examines the most fundamental institutions and forms of organization that shape the everyday lives and social relations of Chinese citizens. Part 2 focuses on the array of cultures and cultural life that may be found across China, and on the socialization and identity formation of young Chinese citizens. Finally, Part 3 discusses various kinds of inequality, division and contention in the Chinese population, and looks at collective actions directed at overcoming perceived social injustices.

Three core themes run through the whole book. The first theme is *multiplicity, diversity and stratification*. In contrast to the common image of Chinese society as homogeneous, and of "Chineseness" as a singular identity, we highlight the enormous diversity of Chinese identities, cultures and experiences, and differences and inequalities between groups and individuals across the country. Although this book includes brief references to other Chinese societies, especially Taiwan, it is primarily concerned with society and social change in today's People's Republic of China (PRC). This can hardly be considered a narrow focus; the PRC covers a vast area, encompassing a wide range of different regional topographies, languages, cultures, economies and ways of life.

Some of these differences indicate divisions between ethnic groups. The Chinese population is categorized between the majority Han Chinese and 55 other minority ethnic groups, and we discuss this in depth in

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Chapter 7. Differences between ethnic groups' family institutions and religion are further examined in chapters 1 and 6, respectively. We also consider the ethnic dimensions of inequality in education in Chapter 8 and of regional inequalities in Chapter 11.

Differentiated by ethnicity, Chinese society is also characterized by major variations between regions, rural and urban populations, social classes, and women and men. These axes of difference and inequality arise in several chapters and are the primary focus of chapters 3, 4, 10, 11 and 12, which deal respectively with household registration, community and citizenship; class and stratification; regional, rural–urban and within-community inequalities; and gender inequalities.

The second theme of the book is *historical and comparative perspectives*. We ask about the extent and direction of change over time in different aspects of Chinese society, and explore the most appropriate historical and comparative frameworks for understanding contemporary society. Although some see a sharp disjuncture between a static past and present, we emphasize both ongoing change and the presence of the past in Chinese society today. Our main focus is on society and social change in contemporary China, that is, what is commonly known as the "post-Mao period", which is conventionally understood as having begun with the 13th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1978, following the death in 1976 of the founding leader of the PRC, Mao Zedong. However, we believe that Chinese society and the way in which it has changed during this period cannot be fully understood without a broader historical perspective.

The breadth of our historical perspective varies depending on the topic of each chapter. In most, we discuss the social changes that have resulted from the shift between the Maoist and post-Mao periods, as well as changes that have occurred during the post-Mao period. Many chapters also look much further back, referring to some of the main social institutions of imperial China, and to the momentous political, social, cultural and economic changes that began in the 19th century, a tumultuous period now understood as the beginning of "modern" China. Chapter 1, on families, kinship and relatedness, focuses strongly on historic institutions; in contrast, Chapter 2, on marriage, intimacy and sex, looks at the contemporary situation and the changes that have taken place over the past few decades. Other chapters give more or less weight to the social changes that have happened both between the Maoist and post-Mao periods and since the death of Mao.

We bring comparative perspectives to bear on contemporary Chinese society, examining the extent to which it shares features with other societies in East Asia, and asking, "Is it useful to group China with other (post)socialist societies, such as Vietnam and Russia, or does it

make more sense, in the 21st century, to compare China with avowedly capitalist societies such as the United States?" Again, a framework is more or less useful depending on the particular aspect of society one examines. A dichotomy between eastern and western societies underpins some sociological and anthropological scholarship on China. A depiction of Chinese society as centered on the family and "collectively oriented", in contrast to the "individualist" west, is particularly prevalent. In this book we have largely sidestepped the east–west contrast because it is one of the least helpful frameworks for understanding Chinese society, understating as it does variations among Asian societies (and among western societies) and similarities between east and west. In Chapter 1, for example, rather than claiming a special status for the family in Chinese society, we begin by observing that the family is a basic institution and unit of human organization around the world. This chapter includes a brief discussion of the distinction (made in the 1930s by China's most famous sociologist and anthropologist, Fei Xiaotong) between Chinese and western societies, one characterized by overlapping family and social networks and *guanxi* (connections) and the other by individuals and the separate social groups into which they are organized. We also note, however, that many scholars today claim that Fei's 1930s formulation exaggerated differences between the east and west, and that it has become less valid as a result of rapid social changes in China and the rest of the world since then.

We do perceive some cultural affinities and social similarities between China and other societies in East Asia. In Chapter 8, for example, we draw attention to the similarities between China, Japan and other East Asian societies, in terms of the importance they attach to education and the intense competitiveness of their educational systems. This shared emphasis may be connected to Confucianism's emphasis on the link between education and social status (for men), but it might also indicate the value of education in the highly competitive job markets in these societies. In Chapter 9, we note that globalization has enabled the recent emergence of a youth identity and culture that is neither specific to China nor global but, rather, regional – that is, East Asian – in scope. This is evident in the popularity of East Asian, and especially Korean, popular culture in China. In Chapter 5, however, we show that, in the course of China's globalization, the conditions of Chinese workers have not kept pace with those of workers in other East Asian economies, and in Chapter 11, we point out that inequalities in China are noticeably greater than in Japan and Vietnam.

Aside from the east–west dichotomy, many studies of contemporary China are framed by a contrast between socialist and capitalist states and by the use of "postsocialist" China as a case study of the nature of the transition from socialism to capitalism. Each of the three parts

of this book includes one or more chapters that discuss the influence of Marxism and the Soviet Union's model of socialist development on the formation of modern Chinese social institutions, organizations and patterns of social relations. Most chapters also explicitly discuss how market reforms and global capitalism have altered Chinese society. However, the complexity and interactive nature of changes in Chinese society, as well as in other postsocialist states over the past few decades, make it very hard to generalize about the social consequences of a transition from socialism to capitalism. Chapter 12, on gender inequalities, provides an illustration of the difficulties and limitations of a framework comparing socialism and capitalism.

Our third theme is *drivers of social change*. To what extent has change in different aspects of society resulted from direct or indirect state intervention or despite of, or in reaction to, state policy? How have the activities of non-state actors contributed to social change, if at all? And how far can social change in contemporary China be attributed to global trends characteristic of modernity and modernization, rather than to forces specific to China? These questions are addressed in various ways throughout this book. Chapter 3, for example, is primarily concerned with the changing impact of a state-imposed institution – household registration – on citizenship and inequality. However, this chapter also suggests that, in recent years, household registration has become less salient to the reproduction of social inequalities. Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 9 and 10 also refer to state policies, but focus more on literature concerning the relationship between changes in family forms and communities, work, and trends in youth identities, class and popular cultures on the one hand, and modernity and modernization on the other. Chapter 11 examines policies that have contributed to spatial inequalities. Chapter 13 looks at the potential for social change despite, or in reaction to, the state, this time focusing on the efforts of non-social actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and those involved in a variety of forms of collective protest, to resist the state and achieve social change.

The second part of this introduction provides background information about geography and modern history. First, though, we explain our usage of some key social science terminology in the text box below.

KEY TERMS

Social institution

The term "social institutions" is frequently used, and often contested, in the social sciences. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, we employ

a broad sociological definition, understanding social institutions as the laws, rules, customs and norms that influence social roles and interactions. Examples include political and educational institutions and the institution of the family.

Discourse

Our understanding of the term "discourse" derives from the work of Michel Foucault. Discourses involve social institutions and bodies of knowledge, and the language that frames and communicates them. "Dominant discourses" are those that strongly influence social relations. An example of a dominant discourse discussed in this book is that of *suzhi* (quality), which has powerfully affected many aspects of social relations in contemporary China.

Ideology

We use the term "ideology" to refer to sets of beliefs, attitudes, opinions and practices that are represented rhetorically as coherent. Compared to the term "dominant discourse", "ideology" is more often used in a pejorative sense, to describe official propaganda. Reference to concepts or statements as "ideological" suggests that they are employed instrumentally, and casts doubt over their claims to truthfulness. In this book, we sometimes refer to Confucian, Maoist and post-Mao state ideologies.

Modernity and modernization

Like other social sciences scholars, we use the terms "modernity" and "modernization" as a shorthand way of referring to a raft of processes, including urbanization, industrialization, increasing mass education, commercialization and advances in technology that enable goods, values and people to travel further and more quickly. In line with conventional histories, we locate the start of the modern era in China in the 19th century. However, we note both that there were signs of modernization well before this and that the process has greatly accelerated since the late 20th century. We use the term "modernization" rather differently than Chinese state leaders, for whom the "four modernizations" (of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defence) are a core component of the post-Mao goals of China's economic development and strengthened status as a nation.

People and places: population, administration, geography and regional diversity

China is the most populous nation on earth (although India is fast catching up): the 2010 population census recorded more than 1.33 billion people living on the mainland, and in the Special Autonomous Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, a further 7 million and approximately 500 000 people, respectively. Of the total Chinese population living on the mainland, about 92 percent are of Han ethnicity; just under 50 percent are women; and around 50 percent have a rural household registration (*hukou*).[1]

Administratively, as Map 0.1 shows, the PRC is divided into 22 provinces (not including Taiwan); five provincial-level "autonomous regions" (Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia Hui and Guangxi Zhuang); and four municipalities, which have a political status equal to that of a province (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing). The two Special Autonomous Regions (Hong Kong and Macau) have much greater independence than provinces, but their foreign-policy and military affairs are under the control of the central government of the PRC.

Below the provincial level, the country is further divided into an administrative hierarchy. Branches of the ruling CCP and organs of government are located at the levels of province (*sheng*), city (*shi*) and county (*xian*) and, below these, in towns (*xiang*) and townships (*zhen*) and urban streets or wards (*jiedao*). At the grassroots level, villages (*cun*) and, in urban areas, residential communities (*shequ*), also have CCP branches and serve administrative functions, although they are not formal levels of state government.

THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY (CCP)

Although China has nine political parties, it is often referred to as a "single-party authoritarian state". Why? It is authoritarian because political power in China is highly concentrated in the CCP and challenges to that concentration of power are prohibited and repressed. The CCP's power in both the state and society rests on the following pillars:

First, it directly controls the military and internal security apparatus. The 2.3 million strong People's Liberation Army (PLA) is headed by the top-ranked CCP leader, the Party General Secretary, not the President or the leader of China's legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC).

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[1] Population Census Office 2012.

Second, the CCP maintains ideological control. The preamble to China's Constitution repeatedly affirms that the CCP led the Chinese nation in overthrowing imperialism and feudalism in the 20th century and will continue to lead the Chinese nation in the future. The eight other political parties in China must accept the leadership of the CCP; they play a consultative, not an oppositional, role. By the same token, although citizens may criticize policies, or the decisions or actions of particular individuals or agencies, they must not challenge CCP leadership. The CCP also rules on the content of national media, the arts and educational curricula.

Third, the CCP exercises organizational control. This is particularly evident in the relationship between the CCP and two other major state agencies, the government and NPC. At every level of the state hierarchy, there is a parallel Party committee, and the Party secretary at each level has the final say on major policy and budgetary decisions. For example, at the provincial level, decision-making power rests with the provincial Party secretary, not the provincial governor. Moreover, through the same type of *nomenklatura* system as that established by the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, China's CCP controls all appointments to senior positions in government, the judiciary and police force, and large organizations such as state-owned banks and enterprises, hospitals, universities, "civic" associations and the media. In this way, it acts as a gatekeeper to the most prominent positions in society. So, while the CCP is not the only political party in China, it is the only one that really counts.

Within the CCP, too, power is highly concentrated. In 2011, the CCP had more than 80 million members. Each Party member belongs to a branch or unit of the Party. Every five years, a few thousand branch delegates to the National Party Congress formally "elect" a new Party Central Committee, which in turn "elects" the Politburo. In practice, though, the outgoing Politburo approves a list of nominees for positions on the new Central Committee, the Politburo and the Standing Committee of the Politburo. Ultimate power rests in the hands of the seven or nine top-ranked CCP leaders who make up the Standing Committee of the Politburo. Although each of these leaders is responsible for a major portfolio, together they constitute a collective leadership that is intended to balance the interests and influence of contending party factions and constituencies.

China has a total area of 9 598 094 square kilometers, slightly less than that of the continental United States (including Alaska and excluding Hawaii). It is located in East Asia, with the Pacific Ocean to the east. It
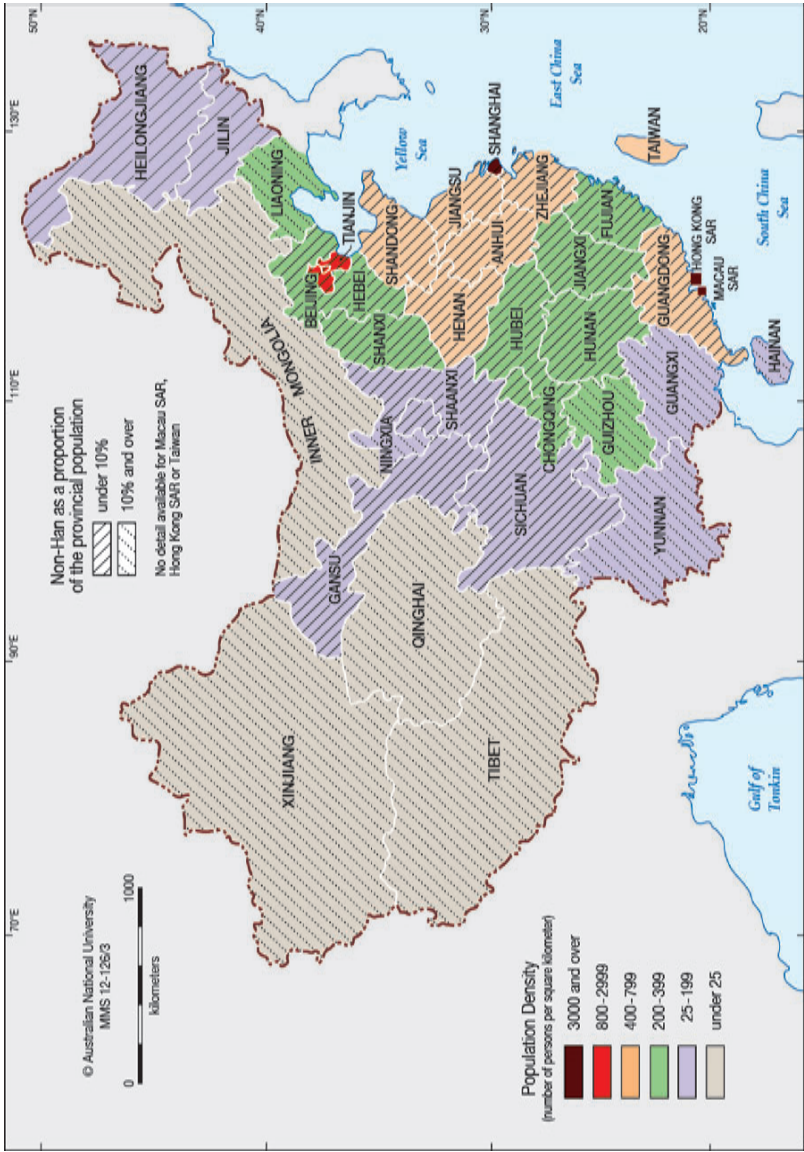
Map 0.2 Population density and ethnic composition by province.
Source: Australian National University (ANU) Cartography 2012. Data from Population Census Office 2012, p. 35.

has land borders with 14 countries: North Korea, Russia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan to the northeast and northwest; Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the west; and India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam to the south. Historically, the Han Chinese population, who speak Mandarin (*putonghua*) or a related dialect, have been concentrated in the east of the country and have had closest cultural contact with Japan and Korea. China's other ethnic groups are now concentrated mostly in border regions, and many share languages, cultures and kinship ties with peoples in North, Central and Southeast Asia.

China's vast area is characterized by huge regional variations in topography, natural resources and climate, which in turn have contributed to marked variations in economies, cultures and lifestyles between different parts of the country. Geographically speaking, the territory of the PRC can be roughly divided between the eastern and western regions. Very high-altitude mountain ranges, plateaus, grasslands and deserts dominate the western two-thirds of the country. Those high altitudes, combined with inaccessibility, harsh terrain and low rainfalls, make much of this region less hospitable to human settlement and less suited to crop agriculture than the lower-lying eastern part of the country; all of these factors have contributed to patterns of cultural, social and economic development quite different from those found in the east.

As Map 0.2 shows, the western two-thirds of China are relatively sparsely populated.[2] However, as a proportion of the total local population, the largest concentrations of non-Han ethnic groups are found in western regions, especially in Xinjiang (the home of most Uyghurs and Kazaks) and Tibet (home to the majority of Tibetans, although many also live in what are today the neighboring provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan and elsewhere). Historically, an eclectic mix of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism has influenced culture in the east, while in the west, a large proportion of the population are either Muslim or (Tibetan) Buddhist. Many of the peoples of the west were traditionally nomadic herders, and the herding of livestock continues to be more important in the west's agricultural economy than it is in the east. The west has also been much less industrially developed than the east, in large part because its inaccessibility and remoteness from population centers has made it difficult and costly to bring in labor and material and to transport produced goods to key markets outside the region.

[2] In past centuries, the population of the western region was even smaller. Since the mid-20th century, Han migration from the east, much of it state-led, has greatly increased the population of the western provinces.

Map 0.3 Topography, mountains and rivers.
Source: ANU Cartography 2012.