

TEN BIG CHANGES IN CHINA SINCE 1989

1. Communism is dead.

In 1978, moving slowly at first, Deng Xiao-ping and the Communist Party launched a plan to modernize the economy without reforming the political system. This objective has been successfully attained through replacing ideology with practicality.

China's economy is the fastest growing in the world and is now one of the most powerful and influential. The free-market system has been adopted and has supplanted communist or socialist methods. While the economy is still centrally planned--i.e., by the Communist Party--it is a free-market system.

For example, any state enterprise, from agriculture to manufacturing, that was unable to show a profit, was closed down and the workers pensioned off (with very small pensions) or laid off. Socialized medical care has been largely privatized, and doctors and hospitals are increasingly profit-oriented. While some medical coverage is still provided by one's work unit, citizens must pay part of the cost of care themselves. Universities, previously free to all students, are allowed to charge fees, with the result that there is less concern to ensure open access to all students who qualify academically. From corner shops to local restaurants to brand-name retail stores in glittering malls, the free-market has taken over.

News media may sell advertising and compete for subscribers. However, all media are still state-controlled. Even the PLA is allowed to run businesses.

Foreign companies by the many dozens have set up in China, everything from courier services to banks and retail chains.

2. Jobs are no longer provided by the state.

In the past, a university graduate was assigned a position by the state, often far from home and often in a field not desired by the graduate. Now, citizens in all walks of life find their own employment, and may leave a job if they wish to find something better.

3. The control of population movement is gone.

Citizens are now free to move from place to place as they wish. This change in policy has led to one of the largest internal migrations in human history, with as many as 300 million persons relocating from countryside to city, usually in search of

employment. City populations have consequently swelled. Many farmers have abandoned their old way of life and sought work in or near the large cities.

China has 174 cities whose population exceeds one million people.

4. Homes may be purchased.

Many citizens now own their own apartments--or, at least, have mortgages on them. It is also permissible to own more than one apartment.

5. Emigration is allowed.

Citizens may now acquire a passport and leave the country for holidays or for permanent emigration. China still does not allow dual citizenship; those who take up citizenship in other countries lose their Chinese citizenship.

6. China is the world's fastest growing market for private automobiles.

A system linking all parts of the country by highway is well under way.

7. Pollution is one of China's biggest problems.

Pollution in China is a huge problem. China has four or five of the world's most polluted cities, and China is one of the world's biggest (soon to be THE biggest) sources of global warming. Part of the reason is that industry still relies heavily on coal--and the coal is generally poor quality, "dirty" coal. Water supplies are under serious threat.

8. Religious observance is allowed.

Religion may be practiced, but only through "official" institutions. There are churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples in China. Falun Gong is illegal in China because the movement is not officially recognized as legitimate.

9. Marriage-age women are in short supply!

As a result of the application of the one-child-per-family policy instituted in the late 1970's it is not as easy to find a wife as it used to be, especially in the countryside where the traditional bias toward male children is felt strongest.

Abortion is sometimes used to terminate female fetuses, and abandonment of female infants is not unheard of. (This issue forms the basis of a Y/A novel I co-authored with Ting-xing Ye titled *Throwaway Daughter*.) The end result is that nowadays females of marriageable age are far outnumbered by males. Young women are now able to call the tune in any marriage negotiations between families.

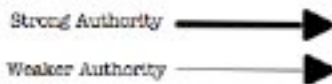
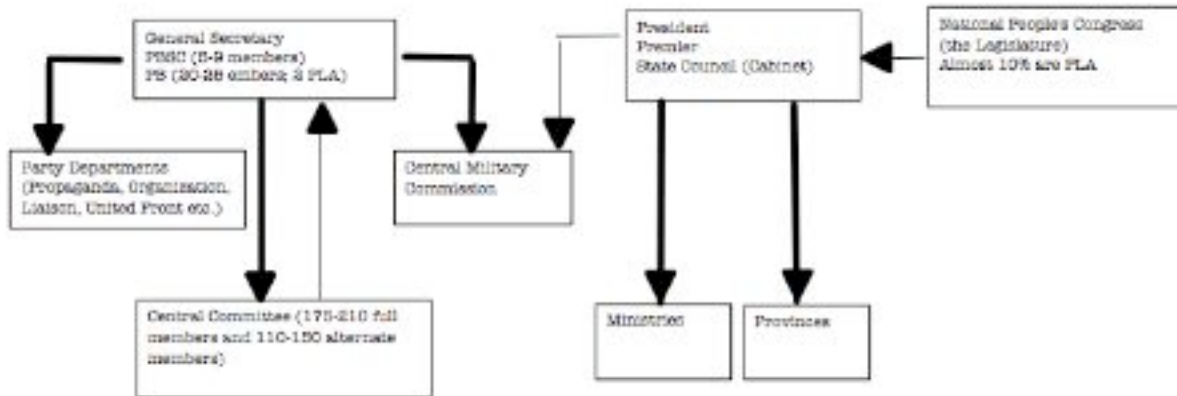
The government has launched a "girls are precious" campaign to counter these practices.

10. China has experienced (and allowed) a media revolution.

While there is still no freedom of the press as Western countries know the term, China has experienced an explosion of news and information sources. When Deng Xiao-ping began the modernization of the economy in 1978, there were 69 newspapers in the country, all of them run by the Party or other government organizations. As of 2003, there were around 2,000 newspapers and 9,000 magazines. The media are market-driven rather than financially backed by the state.

The Party continues to monitor and ultimately control the media, but obviously this is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive.

China's Central Government
Organization Chart



PB: Political Bureau
PSC: Political Bureau Standing Committee
PLA: People's Liberation Army (Armed Forces)

The Communist Party Central Committee is chosen by the Party Congress (2,000 members) that meets every 5 years. The Central Committee meets every two years, and its members are appointed by the top leaders. This committee in turn elects the top leaders in the Polit Bureau and the Politbureau Standing Committee, and general secretary. Election is by secret ballot and nominations are made by the incumbent leaders. Thus power flows both ways: officials who are members of the Central Committee are accountable to the Party leaders who appoint them; at the same time, the Party leaders are accountable to the officials in the Central Committee who elect them.