

II. China and the World We Live In

A. “Made in China”

1. In the average American household today one finds products from around the world, but more products built in one country than in any other: China.
2. The “Made in China” label is on smartphones, computers, coffee cups, plush toys, pens, eyeglasses, and just about everything else.
3. It is the kind of thing one could easily take for granted, but it actually represents a very important fact that one needs to understand in order to make sense of the world.
4. Just two generations ago, China was such a poor and isolated country that almost *nothing* was made there. Then a huge change occurred. China is now the second largest economy in the world. (This is a complicated idea, but a simple way to think of it is that amount of “stuff” the Chinese make every year is now the second biggest amount of any country.) What happened?

B. 1978: *The Cardinal Anchor Fact of Chinese History Today*

1. The reason why China, previously a poor and isolated country, became a world economic leader is that in **1978** a radical change occurred in its government.
2. The leader of China, Deng Xiaoping, announced “*To get rich is glorious!*”
3. This declaration meant that the government of China was going to allow, and even encourage, its people to trade with the world, even though it had not allowed freedom of trade before.
4. China did not have freedom of trade up to that point because its form of government, “communism” did not allow it. (“Communism” is a form of government where the government controls all property, which causes the people to remain poor.) In **1978**, despite being a communist leader, Deng Xiaoping did something completely anti-communist. He encouraged China's people to trade and to profit (make money). To be more precise, the government stopped preventing the Chinese people from doing these things.
5. This is what explains China’s amazing success over the past forty years and the spread of all things “Made in China” around the world.



This “before and “after” picture of Shanghai, an important city in China, shows how much has changed since 1978.

C. Connecting to China's Ancient Past

1. The Chinese government decided recently to try to revive China's ancient past as a symbol of national pride as it starts to become a successful country again. The government created the *Xia Shang Zhou Chronology Project* to study the three most ancient dynasties of China's history, the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties.
2. The project resulted in the creation of an official Chinese history stretching back to **c. 2200 BC**. (When a "c." is in front of a year given in history, it means "circa" or "around". It means that we don't know exactly.)

D. c.2200 BC: The Founding of the Xia Dynasty as a Cardinal Anchor Fact

1. The beginning of the Xia dynasty (a family that ruled for many generations) is a story that reveals some important Chinese beliefs about government.
2. The Xia dynasty is said to have begun when the ruler of China at the time, King Shun, passed on power *not* to his son but to one of his ministers named Yu (who was *not* a member of Shun's family).
3. Yu was chosen by Shun because he had proven his desire and ability to serve the needs of China's people by building dams and canals as a way to cope with the flooding of the Yellow river.
4. The story of King Yu has always been considered important to the Chinese. It shows how they believe in *benevolent despotism*. (A "despot" is a person who has absolute power. A "benevolent" ruler is one who wishes his people well, and strives to serve them.)
5. In **1978**, when Deng Xiaoping granted permission to his people to trade with the world, he was acting as a *benevolent despot*. The amazing thing about Chinese history and culture is that he could do something like that *because of a tradition stretching back to c. 2200 BC*. In no other culture is that possible.