

The Successes and Limitations of Chinese Economic Growth

A Document Based Question

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Lesson Overview

The lesson that follows asks students to evaluate the consequences of China's economic growth in the last quarter century. The lesson is in the form of a Document Based Question (DBQ), a common form of assessment in Advanced Placement courses.

Classroom Context

As presently designed, this lesson is intended for an 11th/12th grade elective course entitled Economic Development and Global Poverty. One of the units in the course examines the impact of economic growth on a nation's overall well-being, and this lesson serves as a case study and assessment for this unit. It is assumed that students in the classroom have at least a very basic understanding of some key economic terms (such as GDP).

This lesson could also be used, with some modification, in a class focusing more upon Chinese history than economic development. In such a class, teachers might choose to replace some of the documents provided with documents describing famous historical events (such as the photograph of Tiananmen Square, see Supplemental Document #1).

Document Based Questions

DBQs are typically used as formal assessments of student understanding at the end of a lesson or unit. They assess not only students' understanding of the content studied, but also their reading and writing skills. To perform well on the DBQ, students must analyze documents and synthesize large quantities of information in coherent essays.

The DBQ includes a wide variety of sources, ranging from written sources to visual sources such as tables, maps, photos, and political cartoons. Students are expected to use both the documents and their outside knowledge to answer the question provided. This particular DBQ includes 9 documents related to China's recent economic growth, as well as an appendix that includes 6 supplemental documents. Teachers may use these supplemental documents – or any other documents – as substitutes for the original 9 documents.

China's Economic Growth and the Documents

China's economic boom in the past quarter century is well documented. China has become the world's leading exporter of manufactured goods, and its growth rate has hovered near 10% since the 1980s. There have been clear benefits of this economic boom for many of the Chinese people. Per capita income has increased significantly in recent decades, and China has improved significantly according to some indices of quality of life, such as life expectancy.

Despite such gains, however, several important concerns related to the consequences of China's economic growth remain. For example, there are growing concerns about both the environmental consequences of China's economic growth and the growing class inequality attributed to that growth. Some commentators have also expressed concerns that economic growth is undermining traditional Chinese family relationships and cultural values, especially as families are split apart when some members migrate to find work. Poor working conditions in some manufacturing centers and the lack of political democracy also remain sources of concern.

The documents below touch upon both the positive effects of China's economic growth and the concerns described above. Students are expected to discuss both the positive effects and concerns, and use the documents provided and their outside knowledge to draw a conclusion about the overall benefits of China's economic growth.

Document Based Question

Directions: The following question requires you to construct a coherent essay that integrates your interpretation of documents A-I and your knowledge of the period referred to in the question.

Question: Evaluate the impact of China's economic growth since 1980. Be sure to discuss both its successes and limitations.

Document A

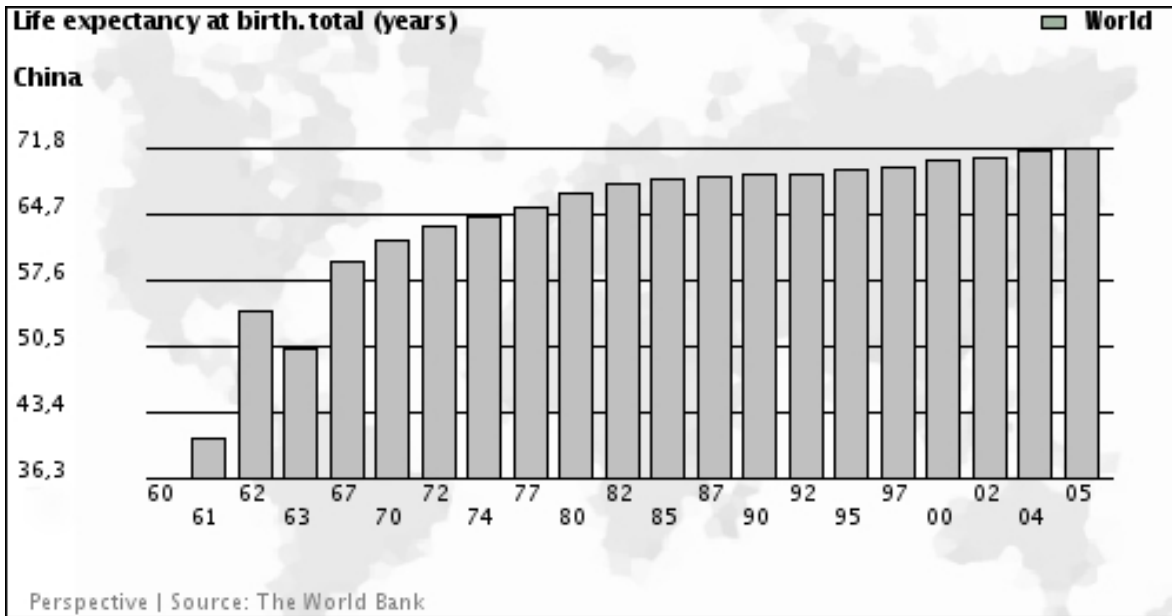
Source: Deng Xiaoping, Excerpt from Talk with Frank B. Gibney, Vice-Chairman of the Compilation Committee of Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. of the United States, Paul T. K. Lin, Director of the Institute of East Asia at McGill University of Canada, and others; 1979.

We Can Develop a Market Economy Under Socialism

Modernization does represent a great new revolution. The aim of our revolution is to liberate and expand the productive forces. Without expanding the productive forces, making our country prosperous and powerful, and improving the living standards of the people, our revolution is just empty talk. We oppose the old society and the old system because they oppressed the people and fettered the productive forces. We are clear about this problem now. The Gang of Four said it was better to be poor under socialism than to be rich under capitalism. This is absurd....

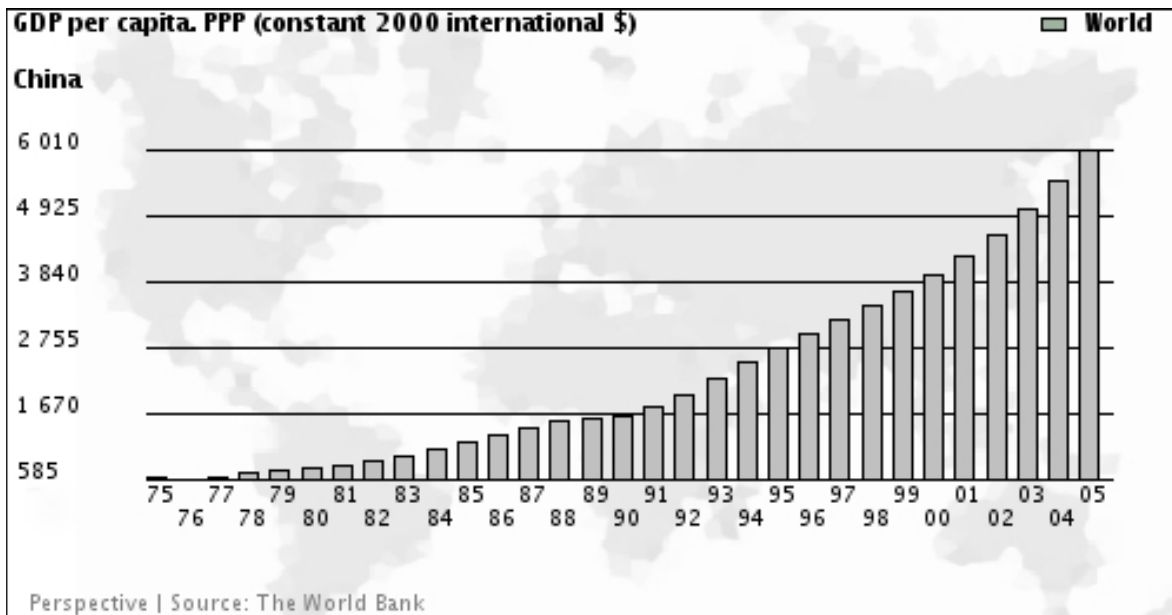
Document B

Source: World Bank, 2005.



Document C

Source: World Bank, 2005.



Document D

Source: *New York Times*, August 29, 2007.

Wages Rise in China as Businesses Court the Young

SHENZHEN, China, Aug. 28 — At the Dahon bicycle factory here, Zhang Jingming's fingers move quickly and methodically — grabbing bicycle seats, wrapping them in cardboard and smoothly attaching them to frames.

Working a 45-hour week, Mr. Zhang makes the equivalent of \$263 a month; as recently as February, he was making just \$197. Some of his higher pay comes from working more efficiently. "When I first started, I wasn't this fast," he said.

But a good portion reflects a raise Mr. Zhang got: to 1.45 cents for each bicycle seat from 1.32 cents. It is a small difference that signifies major change.

Chinese wages are on the rise. No reliable figures for average wages exist; the government's economic data are notably unreliable. But factory owners and experts who monitor the nation's labor market say that businesses are having a hard time finding able-bodied workers and are having to pay the workers they can find more money.

Document E

Source: Reports of Forced Labor Unsettle China, *New York Times*, June 20, 2007.



Workers rescued in May from a brick kiln in Linfen, in Shanxi Province, in northern China, in what has become an unfolding labor abuse scandal.

Document F

Source: Rural Exodus for Work Fractures Chinese Family, *New York Times*, December 21, 2004.

HUANGHU, China - Yang Shan is in fourth grade and spends a few hours every day practicing her Chinese characters. Her script is neat and precise, and one day, instead of drills, she wrote letters to her parents and put them in the mail.

"How is your health?" she asked.

Shan, who is 10, then added a more pointed question: "What is happening with our family?"

Her parents had left in March. Their absence was not new in Shan's short life. Her father, Yang Heqing, has left four times for work. He is now in Beijing on a construction site. Her mother, Ran Heping, has left three times. She is in a different city as a factory worker.

Over the years, Shan's parents have returned to this remote village to bring money and reunite the family. They leave when the money runs out, as it did in March. Her father had medical debts and needed cash to see another doctor. Shan's school fees were due, and her grandparents also needed help.

Document G

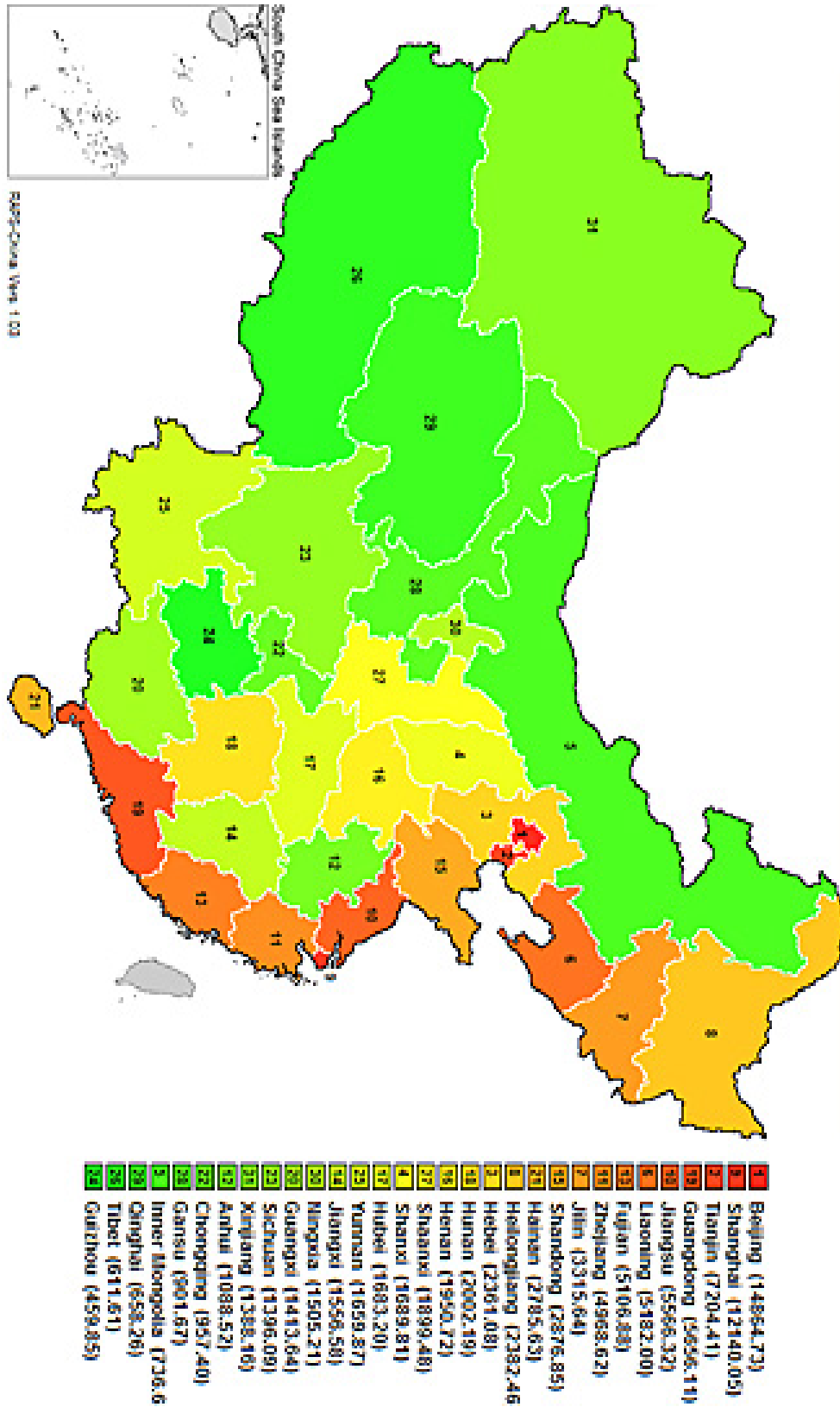
Source: As China Roars, Pollution Reaches Deadly Extremes, *New York Times*
August 26, 2007.



China's industrial growth depends on coal, plentiful but polluting, from mines like this one in Shenmu, Shaanxi Province, behind a village store.

Document H

Source: Internet Usage per 100,000 People, Ministry of Information Industry, 2001.



Document I

Source: The Party Orchestrates National Celebration of 50 Years of Communism, *Le Temps*, October 1999.



Appendix

This appendix includes 6 additional documents teachers could use to supplement or replace the documents above.

Supplemental Document #1

Source: June 5, 1989, Tiananmen Square, AP Photo.



Supplemental Document #2

Source: Illiteracy Jumps in China, Despite 50-Year Campaign to Eradicate It, Washington Post Foreign Service, April 27, 2007.

LIUPU, Last year, finally, everyone in Liupu village was able to read and write 1,500 Chinese characters, a census showed. Village leaders threw a big dinner to celebrate, presenting commemorative teacups to the last two adults to make the grade.

But ask Zhao Huapu, the earnest principal of Liupu Shezu Girls School, how many people here can actually read and write, and he gives an embarrassed smile. Nearly 30 percent of Liupu's adults are illiterate.

"That's just reality. . . . A lot of them can't read and write," said Zhao, who acknowledged that the census is based on a test that fails to measure adult literacy accurately.

Illiteracy is increasing in China despite a 50-year-old campaign to stamp it out and a declaration by the government in 2000 that it had been nearly eradicated. The reasons are complex, from the cost of a rural education to the growing appeal of migrant work that draws Chinese away from classrooms and toward far-off cities.

Supplemental Document #3

Source: Thomas Friedman, Op-Ed Column in *New York Times*, September 23, 2007.

The more I see China wrestling with its environment, the more I'm convinced that it is going to prove much, much easier for China to have gone from communism to capitalism than to go from dirty capitalism to clean capitalism.

For China, going from communism to its state-directed capitalism, while by no means easy, involved loosening the lid on a people who were naturally entrepreneurial, risk-taking capitalists. It was tantamount to letting a geyser erupt, and the results of all that unleashed energy are apparent everywhere.

Going from dirty capitalism to clean capitalism is much harder. Because it involves restraining that geyser — and to do that effectively requires a system with some judicial independence, so that courts can discipline government-owned factories and power plants. It requires a freer press that can report on polluters without restraint, even if they are government-owned businesses. It requires transparent laws and regulations, so citizen-activists know their rights and can feel free to confront polluters, no matter how powerful. For all those reasons, it seems to me that it will be very hard to make China greener

Supplemental Document #4

Source: Bill Clinton Pays a Visit to China, *Die Weltwoche*, June 1998.



Supplemental Document #5

Source: Top Ten Countries in Gross National Product, 2005 and 2050, Goldman Sachs, 2006. See http://www.china-profile.com/data/tab_gnp_projection_1.htm.

2005		
Rank	Land	GNP*
1	USA	11,351
2	Japan	4,366
3	Germany	1,966
4	United Kingdom	1,647
5	China	1,529
6	France	1,455
7	Italy	1,212
8	Canada	728
9	Spain	655
10	Mexico	642

2050		
Rank	Land	GNP*
1	China	44,453
2	USA	35,165
3	India	27,803
4	Japan	6,673
5	Brazil	6,074
6	Russia	5,870
7	United Kingdom	3,782
8	Germany	3,603
9	France	3,148
10	Italy	2,061

* In Billion US\$; Source: Goldman Sachs

Supplemental Document #6

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, *China Statistical Yearbook*, 2005.

China's Merchandise Trade: Exports, Imports and Trade Balance (billion US\$)

