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Inside CHINA

What you need to know about China's rise
and how it affects the U.S.—and your future p. 14



A selfie with a soldier near Tiananmen Square in Beijing, 2014

SCHOLASTIC

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10
THINGS YOU
NEED TO
KNOW ABOUT

China

PART
1 OF 2

**What does China's rise mean for the U.S.—
and your future?** BY PATRICIA SMITH



With a history that stretches back more than 4,000 years, China is one of the world's oldest civilizations. Until the early 20th century, it was ruled by powerful emperors, many of whom kept the country largely cut off from the rest of the world.

In 1949, an authoritarian Communist government took over, but China remained isolated and plagued by poverty until it began to transform itself by opening up its economy in the 1980s. Since then, China's increasing economic and military might has left much of the world feeling uneasy about its growing role on the global stage.

With 1.4 billion people, China has the world's largest population. Its \$10 trillion economy is the world's second biggest, after the U.S. And it's one of only five nations—along with the U.S., Russia, Britain, and France—with veto power in the United Nations Security Council.

"China is unquestionably one of the most influential and powerful countries in the world," says Stapleton Roy, a former U.S. ambassador to China.

That's why it's a critical nation for Americans to understand. Here and in the next issue of *Upfront*, we'll answer 10 questions that help define China and the challenges it poses for the U.S. and the world.

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JIM McMAPSON (MAP); REUTERS/LANDOV (CHINESE MILITARY)

1. Is China a superpower?

Thirty years ago, China was a poor country. The streets were full of bicycles because almost no one could afford a car. People needed ration coupons to buy cooking oil or clothes.

Today, China's booming cities are clogged with traffic. The country boasts more than 400 billionaires and 9 of the world's 20 tallest buildings.

"I don't think there's any country in world history that's changed as much as China has in the past two decades,"

says Orville Schell, a China expert at the Asia Society in New York.

Despite the country's massive transformation and undeniable strength, most experts agree that China hasn't yet achieved superpower status. Even though it has a huge economy (*see chart, p. 17*), China looks a lot less impressive if you consider its per capita GDP (\$12,900, compared with \$54,800 for the U.S.). That puts it behind struggling countries like Kazakhstan and Iraq. While 300 mil-

lion Chinese have joined the middle class in the last few decades, more than 100 million Chinese still live in poverty.

China is, however, growing much faster than the U.S., and there's an increasing sense that China is nipping at America's heels. Many experts believe its economy will surpass America's by 2020.

"There's no doubt that there's a shift in relative power between China and the U.S.," says Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, a China expert at the United Nations. "They're much closer than they were even 10 years ago."



Chinese troops in Beijing celebrate Communist rule; China's military, with 2.3 million people, is the largest in the world.

2. Why does everything seem to be made in China?

Look around your room. There's a good chance that most of what's there—from your smartphone to your jeans and sneakers—was made in China. In 2011, Chinese factories churned out more than 320 million personal computers—more than 90 percent of worldwide production that year. They also produced 1.1 billion cellphones (70 percent) and 12.6 billion pairs of shoes (63 percent).

China didn't always dominate the business of making things. Many American companies used to manufacture products right here in the U.S., with everything from sneakers and Barbie dolls to steel once coming from American assembly lines.

What changed? With a massive rural population, China has had a huge supply of eager workers willing to labor long hours in factories for low pay, because the \$1.36 an hour they earn on average is substantially more than they'd make farming.

"China was able to take advantage of low-cost labor and a hardworking . . . population to essentially become the manufacturing powerhouse of the world," says Ambassador Roy.

Chinese manufacturing began with cheap plastic toys and clothes. Then China started producing basic electronics and then more advanced electronics like iPhones and computers.



70%
Percentage of the world's umbrellas that are made in China.

SOURCE: STATISTIC BRAIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

But the shift of production to China may be slowing. In some ways, China is a victim of its own success. Rising wages mean it isn't as cheap a place to make things as it once was. So Western companies are increasingly locating their factories in less-developed countries like Bangladesh. And after years of moving manufacturing overseas, some U.S. companies, including Microsoft and Whirlpool, are starting to move some production back home.

In response, President Xi Jinping is pushing for innovation; he wants China to master the most advanced part of the production process—the work of designing new products that everyone wants to buy. Could a Chinese company be the next Apple or Google?

3. Is China still a Communist country?



Western companies, like Starbucks, have a growing presence in China.

Officially, China has been a Communist country since 1949, when Mao Zedong's Communist forces won a civil war and founded the People's Republic of China. By the time Mao died in 1976, China's economy was in ruins. His successor, Deng Xiaoping, introduced free-market reforms in 1978 that allowed private business and foreign investment—and led to three decades of explosive growth.

But at the same time, China has remained an authoritarian one-party state with tight control over political power and strict limits on individual rights. In fact, there are about 500,000 political prisoners in China.

That makes today's China a contradiction: "The government is Communist, but the people are capitalist," says Kleine-Ahlbrandt of the U.N.

Most Chinese have applauded the economic reforms: 76 percent say they're better off under a free-market economy, according to a recent Pew poll.

The conventional wisdom has long been that people earning middle-class wages and participating in a free-market economy will demand and eventually get political freedoms. But China's Communist leaders show no sign of loosening their grip.

"From the Western point of view, the system shouldn't work," says Schell, "but so far, it has."



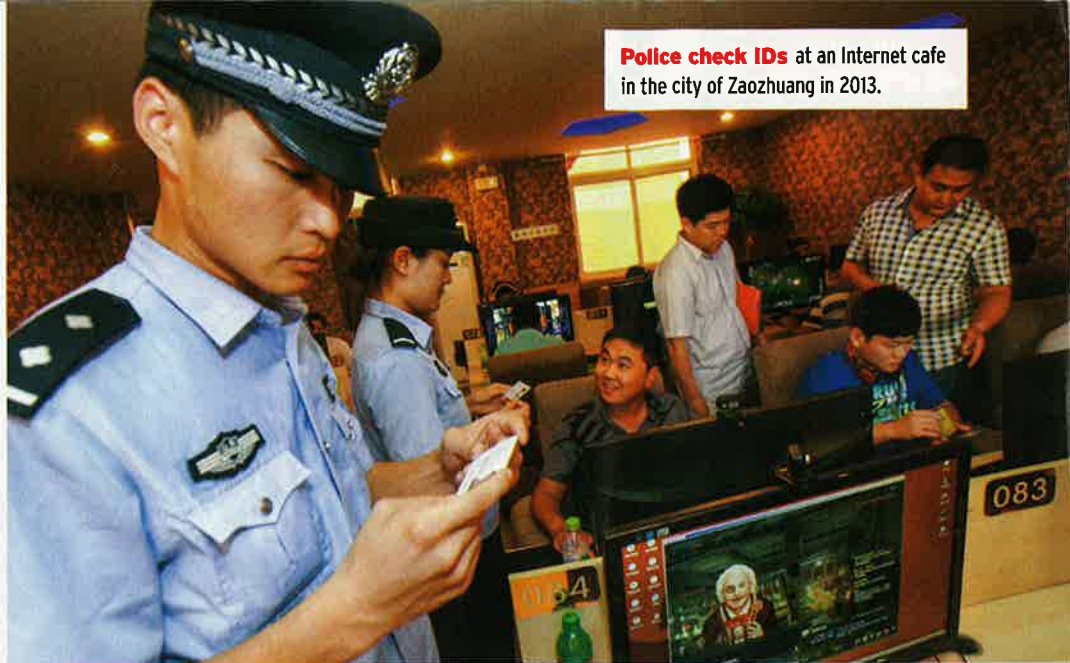
4. What is the Great Firewall?

It's hard to imagine the online universe without Google, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. But those are just a few of the sites that are blocked from China's 650 million Internet users.

Fifteen years ago, at the dawn of the Internet age, then-President Bill Clinton said attempts by China to control the Internet would be "like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall."

Now, it seems that China has managed to nail the Jell-O. China has more Internet users than any other country, and it's home to some of the world's largest Internet companies, such as e-commerce giant Alibaba. But its massive Internet censorship system controls what everyone sees.

How does China's government do it? With more than 100,000 Internet monitors—known collectively as the Great Firewall—who block thousands of websites, including American news sites like *The New*



Police check IDs at an Internet cafe in the city of Zaozhuang in 2013.

46%
Percentage of China's population that uses the Internet, compared with 87 percent in the U.S.

SOURCE: INTERNETLIVESTATS.COM

York Times. They scrub search results of information they don't want people to see, like discussions about democracy, and they monitor social media for signs of opposition. They also pay legions of teens to post pro-government comments online. China's leaders have gone to these lengths to maintain their grip on power.

"China has created a Chinese Internet within the Internet," says Kleine-Ahlbrandt. "There are some people who can get over the wall if they have the tools to do so, but it's getting harder and harder."

5. Should the U.S. fear China's rise?

China's military, with 2.3 million people, is the largest in the world. Its military spending, \$145 billion this year, is second only to America's \$577 billion. And increasingly, China has been flexing its military muscles.

In the past year, China has picked fights with several of its Southeast Asian neighbors, claiming control over vast swaths of the South China Sea and various islands also claimed by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam. It's even used landfill to create new islands that it claims as its own.

That has left the world wondering how to respond to China's growing might.

"The United States welcomes the continuing rise of a China that is peaceful, prosperous, and stable and that plays a responsible role in the world," President

Obama said last year in Beijing.

Even though experts say China's leaders aren't seeking a confrontation with the U.S., its growing regional influence and economic strength are enough to make Americans nervous.

China is currently investing \$250 billion a year in building new universities, and 7 million young people are graduating from Chinese colleges every year, poised to compete with Americans for jobs and opportunities.

There's a lot of disagreement about how the U.S. should respond to China's growing influence, but one thing is certain, says Scott Harold, a political scientist at the RAND Corporation, a Washington, D.C., think tank: "The U.S. cannot afford to ignore China's rise." •

China & the U.S.

GDP



Size of Workforce



Active Military Personnel



SOURCES: THE WORLD FACTBOOK 2015 (CIA); GLOBALFIREPOWER.COM

PART 2 In the Sept. 21 issue of *Upfront*, five more things you need to know, including human rights and U.S.-Chinese cooperation

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