

## **CHINA TODAY**

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China has the fastest growing economy in the world. The country, with its huge potential market, is attracting large inputs of capital. Manufacturers are seeking to take advantage of low labour costs. The sharp upturn in the Chinese economy is in an embryonic stage. Most citizens still ride bicycles and earn, in a month, what a Canadian family may spend on a single meal in a fast-food restaurant.

It is a country of contrasts. There are large cosmopolitan cities. In Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, for example, you will find tall office towers, streets jammed with people and traffic, pollution, five-star hotels, discos and clubs, high fashion, and a wide variety of both western and Asian cultural activities such as theatre, concerts and dance. The Chinese dictum, "To get rich is glorious," is a message readily embraced by many. You may see someone making a business deal on a cellular phone while riding a bicycle down the street. You will also see beggars and itinerant workers dressed in rags, sleeping outside railway stations.

In rural areas, there are similar contrasts. Rich farmers, who have made money selling specialty vegetables on the open market, are building two-story farm houses.

Elsewhere, peasants live in mud and straw huts, scratching out a living equivalent to less than \$100 a year. Vast numbers of rural people, who make up between 70% and 80% of the population, have not yet become a part of the cash economy or are very poor, with little opportunity for schooling, medical care, or employment. Most of the economic development has touched only the coastal areas of the south and east.

One of the many interesting observations one can make about China is the way in which it has resisted outside influences. Since the Mongol Invasion in the twelfth century, the country has twice been totally controlled by non-Han invaders (Mongols during the Yuan Dynasty; Manchus, Qing Dynasty). The Chinese people were heavily dominated by western European and American commercial interests during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But throughout these periods Chinese culture prevailed, absorbing both Mongol and Manchu influences, and almost completely rejecting western influence. Chinese culture has remained strong and exclusive to this day.

In many ways, China's "cultural superiority" has been both its strength and weakness. Although its culture has