ESSAY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part I  The road to revolution, 1895-1919

1. Who were the “Boxers”? Why did they rebel? Rebel against whom?
2. What was the attitude of the Qing court to the Boxers?
3. Roughly what was the extent of “imperialism” in China in the early 1900s?
   What defines “imperialism” as opposed to other forms of foreign relations?

Chapter 1  The rise of Confucian racialism

1. What exactly did the 1898 reformers want to reform? Why did they feel political change was necessary? How far did they want to go?
2. What were the basic political beliefs of men like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao? How did they reflect Western ideas about politics?
3. What was “radical” about their Confucianism? How did they use Confucian ideas to support reform? How did they break from traditional Confucianism? To what extent did they represent the logical result of intellectual trends of the Qing?
4. How did the Qing political system traditionally function: who made decisions and what gave them the right to do so?
5. Why did some officials oppose the Reform Movement of 1898? Why did the Qing turn to similar reforms, called the “New Policy,” in 1901?
6. How did the examination system function and what role did it play in shaping Qing state and society?
7. Who were the “gentry”? If the gentry were at the top of society, why did some gentry (like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao) support radical reform?

Chapter 2  1911: History and historiography

1. In the final analysis, what did (and didn’t) the Revolution of 1911 accomplish?
2. Why has the 1911 Revolution given rise to distinct interpretations (historiographies)?
3. How do the major interpretations of the 1911 differ (and what do they have in common)?
4. Did the Qing dynasty fall or was it pushed? If it was pushed, by whom? If it mostly fell on its own account, what were its major weaknesses?
5. What major social groups supported/opposed/remained neutral in the 1911 Revolution? What new social groups were emerging in the early 1900s? Where could their voices be heard?
6. Why did the 1911 Revolution take the form of provincial secession rather than, say, a full-scale civil war?

Chapter 3  *Ideas and Ideals in the fall of the Qing*

1. How does a modern nation-state differ from a traditional empire? What defined Chinese identity during the Ming-Qing period?
2. What was Liang Qichao’s central argument? Zhang Binglin’s?
3. What were the main differences between the “constitutionalist” reformers and the “nationalist” revolutionaries? What did they have in common?
4. How did the debates of the 1900-1911 period shape Chinese identity? What were the roles played by race and culture in shaping “Han” identity?
5. What was the intellectual basis of anti-Manchuism? Why was this an appealing notion? How did its critics argue against it?
6. What was the role of social Darwinism in late Qing intellectual life? Did it contribute to the formation of national identity?
7. In what sense could the 1911 Revolution be called an “intellectual” or “ideological” revolution? Thinking back to chapter 2, how did new social forces shape the new ideas of the twentieth century?

Chapter 4  *From the military dictator to the warlords*

1. To what degree was Yuan Shikai’s presidency a break from the past? How much did he borrow from the imperial model? How had the Chinese polity changed in structural (or institutional) ways with the 1911 Revolution?
2. What explains the increasingly dominant role of the military in the 1910s?
3. What forces were working to “modernize” China in the 1910s? What problems did the new government face? How did it (try to) achieve legitimacy?
4. How did warlordism develop? What were its roots? Its “rules of the game”? Why was no warlord able to unify China under his rule?
5. How did warlordism affect Chinese society and economy? Chinese politics?
6. During the period of contending warlords, what prevented the total disintegration of China?
Chapter 5  Social conditions in the countryside

1. What were the basic features of Chinese farming practice in the early twentieth century?
2. What was the relationship between the social structure and farming?
3. What was the relationship between farmers and the state?
4. How was rural China affected by the political changes of the early twentieth century? By the Qing’s New Policy reforms? By the 1911 Revolution? By warlordism?
5. From a peasant family’s point of view, what were its needs and problems?
6. What forms of collective action were available to peasants and rural communities? How did they organize themselves to press their demands?

Chapter 6  Urban social change

1. Why did public spaces or “civil society” merge in the cities rather than the countryside? How did such spaces encourage people to think of themselves as “citizens”? Who didn’t count as a citizen in early Republican China?
2. How did professional and social groups shape China’s growing cities of the early twentieth century? What was the role of people who had been largely ignored in the traditional Confucian social structure, such as students and women? How did foreigners (the imperialist powers) shape China’s cities?
3. In what sense should we conclude that the cities belonged to the bourgeoisie, compradors, and merchants? How did these powerful men shape the politics of the day?
4. How was the new industrial working class formed? What was it like to be a worker? What could workers do to protect themselves?
5. How did women begin to emerge into the public sphere in early twentieth-century cities? What rights did they demand? How did women’s lives change in the cities?
6. Why did China’s cities seem so much more dynamic than the countryside?

Chapter 7  Intellectuals, the Republic, and a new culture

1. In what ways did the intellectuals of the new Republic “go beyond” those of the late Qing? Were their ideas more radical? better thought-through? more “Westernized”? Or were they more utopian, less practical, disconnected from the cultural of ordinary people?
2. How were early Republican intellectuals reacting against the 1911 Revolution? How were they reacting against the entire Confucian tradition?

3. As opposed to the better-known radicals and liberals, what were the arguments of conservatives and traditionalists? Did Chinese intellectuals, debating among themselves, share any values and attitudes in common? What were the basic “premises” of the age?

4. What were the institutional bases of intellectuals in the early Republic? How did they live and work?

5. Was the later turn of some prominent intellectuals to Marxism foreshadowed in the 1910s?

6. What did intellectuals in the 1910s actually propose to do?

7. Is the intellectual life of the early Republic best described in terms of ideologies (“isms”—like anarchism, socialism, liberalism, Marxism, traditionalism, individualism, feminism, Confucianism) or rather in terms of vaguer ideals, hopes, and notions?