



# Origins of the Modern Chinese State

*Philip Kuhn*

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## **Origins of the Modern Chinese State** Philip Kuhn

What is “Chinese” about China’s modern state? This book proposes that the state we see today has developed over the past two centuries largely as a response to internal challenges emerging from the late empire. Well before the Opium War, Chinese confronted such constitutional questions as: How does the scope of political participation affect state power? How is the state to secure a share of society’s wealth? In response to the changing demands of the age, this agenda has been expressed in changing language. Yet, because the underlying pattern remains recognizable, the modernization of the state in response to foreign aggression can be studied in longer perspective.

The author offers three concrete studies to illustrate the constitutional agenda in action: how the early nineteenth-century scholar-activist Wei Yuan confronted the relation between broadened political participation and authoritarian state power; how the reformist proposals of the influential scholar Feng Guifen were received by mainstream bureaucrats during the 1898 reform movement; and how fiscal problems of the late empire formed a backdrop to agricultural collectivization in the 1950s. In each case, the author presents the “modern” constitutional solution as only the most recent answer to old Chinese questions. The book concludes by describing the transformation of the constitutional agenda over the course of the modern period.

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