

CHAPTER 10 Who are the superpowers and how does their power develop over time?

Key terms

Asian financial crisis
Capitalism
Cold War
Communism
Democracy
Dependency theory
Feudal
Kondratieff cycle
Military industrial complex
Purchasing Power Parity
Rising superpower
Socialism
Superpower
World systems analysis

Key term

Superpower — a nation or group of nations that has a leading position in international politics.

Synoptic link

Look at the Crossing the border article on pages 78–9 of Edexcel AS Geography.

Learning objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to discuss these ideas and concepts and provide located examples of them:

- The concept of a superpower has developed to include economic, cultural, military and geographical influence.
- The geography of power and international influence can be seen through geographical patterns of military reach, trade and cultural dominance.
- Patterns of power change over time.
- There are differences in the emerging powers versus the existing superpowers in terms of regional and global influence.
- World systems analysis and dependency theory help explain these differences.

Power – both economic and political – is unevenly distributed. Some countries have a disproportionate influence over regional and global decision-making, whereas others have little influence. The geography of power changes over time. Some nations gain power and influence, while others lose it. Equally, the nature of power has changed, from direct to more subtle indirect control, through trade, culture, flows of capital and resources.

Who are the superpowers and how does their power develop over time?

The concept of a superpower has developed to include economic, cultural, military and geographical influence, for example, the development of the USA and the former USSR, and more recently the growth of China, India and Brazil.

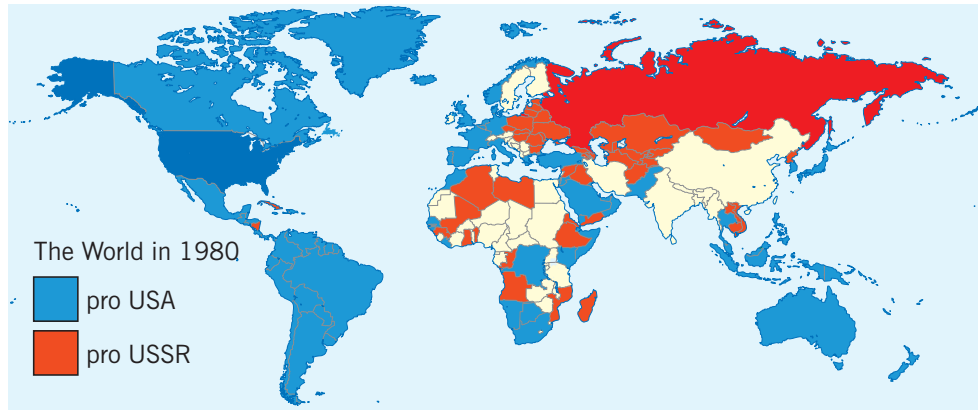
Superpowers are able to influence policy on a worldwide scale, and often in different regions at the same time. The term was first used in 1944 by T.R. Fox, in his book *The Superpowers: The United States, Britain and the Soviet Union – Their Responsibility for Peace*. These three nations fought on the same side in the Second World War, but afterwards became involved in a battle for economic, political and military power. At the end of the war, the British Empire covered about 25% of the world's land area and had 25% of its population. However, its power was in decline, whereas the USA and USSR were emerging as the new superpowers.



► **Figure 10.1:** 1945 map of world superpowers.

The British Empire became the Commonwealth of Nations and former colonies became independent of Britain. The USA did not suffer as much damage on its territory as European or Asian countries. By the end of the war it had developed into a very strong military and industrial country, as well as a major creditor for countries weakened in the war. Post-war US policy was to contain the spread of Soviet influence.

After the war, competition between the USA and USSR led to the development of the Cold War. Both countries sought to increase their dominance on the world scene. By the 1980s their respective powers had greatly increased.



▲ **Figure 10.2:** 1980 map of superpower influence.

There were several differences between the USA and the USSR. Politically, the USSR promoted communism and the economy was state-controlled. In contrast, the USA was managed as a democracy and had a free market (capitalist) approach to the economy. Both countries were keen to extend their influence and support other countries. The USSR developed strong links with eastern Europe and developing countries. The USA, on the other hand, had firm relations with western Europe, the Commonwealth, Latin America and key Asian countries. The USA also supported a number of right-wing dictatorships in their attempt to reduce Soviet influence and the spread of left-wing tendencies.

The two nations had shared characteristics in terms of population, land and resources. While the USSR was the world's largest country, with a land area of over 22 million km², the USA was the world's third largest with over 9 million km². The USSR was the world's third largest in terms of population size (over 285 million at the time of its break-up), whereas almost 250 million people resided in the USA. Both had many valuable economic resources; in particular the USSR had oil and gas, whereas the USA contained valuable minerals, metals, forests and a modern agricultural and industrial system. At the time, the USA had the world's greatest economy, while the economy of the USSR was the second largest. To complete the superpower checklist, the USSR had the world's largest land-based army and the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons. In contrast, the USA had the world's largest and most powerful navy and one of the two most powerful air forces in the world.

Culturally both the USA and USSR affected large areas of the world. Conflict between the two superpowers was not limited to military threats – the Cold War also affected the worlds of chess and basketball, and the respective countries and their allies did not attend the Olympic Games held in Moscow in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1984.

Synoptic link

Refresh your memory about Commonwealth countries by looking at page 82 of Edexcel AS Geography.

Key terms

Cold War — the name given to the period of heightened tensions and competition between the USA and USSR and their allies between 1945 and the early 1990s.

Communism — a form of political development that envisages equality among people and a classless society. It's a type of revolutionary socialism based on the common ownership of the means of production and a shared economy. Each person should work according to his/her capacity and gain according to his/her capacity.

Democracy — a form of political development in which the government is elected by the people in free elections.

Capitalism — an economic system for the generation of goods and services based on private enterprise. Most of the resources/means of production are owned by a relatively small number of individuals or companies. Workers convert their labour for wages.

After the collapse of communism and the break-up of the USSR in 1991, the USA was left as the world's only superpower. However, since 2001 and the terrorist attacks on the USA, US military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has not achieved its desired ends. Some critics argue that the USA is losing its superpower status. Economically, following the 2008 financial crisis, the USA has lost economic strength (as have many countries that had been propped up by US money) and other nations are in the ascendancy. China in particular has experienced massive economic growth, as well as having a very large military. Whether it fulfils all of the criteria of a superpower is debatable. The European Union, a group of 27 countries, has also been described as a superpower. Internal differences between member countries reduce the cohesion of the EU as a superpower.

Case study: How does Europe differ from the USA as a superpower?

The European Union (EU) has a population of about 493 million people, so it is one of the world's largest economic superpowers. In addition, most of the population is wealthy in global terms. In just 50 years, Europeans have made the likelihood of war between member countries remote. The EU has brought a number of its countries out of dictatorship into democratic governments. Surrounding the EU there are about 1.5 billion people who rely on the EU as their main trading partner and source of foreign investment and aid. Nevertheless, within the EU there are 27 different national governments, each with its own agenda. Despite differences, the EU attempts to incorporate and change countries into stable political and economic systems, such as in the case of Poland and currently Serbia.

Key term

Rising superpowers — countries, or groups of countries, experiencing an increase in economic, military, cultural and geographical influence, currently Brazil, Russia, India and China.

Taking it further

To find out about the concerns regarding potential superpowers in the early 20th century read 'Managing superpowers in the early 20th century' on your Student CD-ROM.

Taking it further

Use the Student CD-ROM to find out more about the characteristics of superpowers.

Examiners' tip

Stay up to date – save the BBC News website as one of your website favourites and keep up to date with news about your chosen superpowers.

Rising superpowers

The economic rise of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and the oil-rich OPEC states brings economic benefits to many. Equally there may be economic costs to the existing superpowers and environmental and resource implications. In an increasingly globalised and interdependent world, it is likely that tensions will develop as power shifts.

The geography of power and international influence

The USA: the evolution of a superpower

After the Second World War, the USA had a greatly enhanced status and power. The Great Depression of the 1930s had been replaced by an economy stimulated by wartime production. Unlike Europe, the USA did not suffer from wrecked infrastructure. US involvement in the Second World War – the large-scale air and land campaigns in Europe and the 'island-hopping' war against Japan in the Pacific – set a precedent for the global projection of US military strength.

It was not just economic and military strength. The USA encouraged the establishment of international institutions and international law. The United Nations headquarters were located in New York, and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund were based in Washington. Although these were, and continue to be, international organisations, US institutions had greater access to them than if they had been located elsewhere.

The growth of US military influence worldwide grew out of a number of doctrines. These included:

- the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 (which declared that European colonial intervention in the western hemisphere would be resisted by force)
- the Truman Doctrine of 1947 (which committed the USA to support free peoples threatened by communist takeover)
- the Nixon Doctrine of 1969 (under which arms shipments rather than US troops would be supplied to allies in the fight against communism)
- the Reagan Doctrine of the 1980s (which provided US arms and training to groups seeking to overthrow Soviet-backed rulers).

The USA has by far the world's largest and most technologically advanced fleet of warplanes, ships, tanks and artillery systems. These give it dominance over air, sea and land. Control of space and information are key aspects of US military strategy for the 21st century. There are many interlocking strands in the USA's global military presence. These include overseas bases, ships and aircraft that allow the USA to apply force to any part of the globe, the supply of weapons and military training to a wide range of countries, and a network of listening posts which gather and disseminate vital information.

The US defence industry employs over 2 million people, with local manufacturing plants or research and development facilities in most US states. Approximately 1 in 6 households in the USA has someone employed in the military industrial complex. Annual spending on defence exceeds \$100 billion a year. Federal funding for military research is \$40 billion a year, twice what is spent on health, energy and environment combined. The institutions and organisations which have developed over 50 years of intensive military spending have created vested interests with huge political clout.

For example, most US warplanes, bombs and missiles are made by a small group of very large contractors, including in particular Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, TRW and Textron. In 1998–9, Lockheed Martin employed 130,000 people in the USA and overseas and had over 900 facilities in 45 US states. Internationally, the company had business locations in 56 nations and territories. In the early 1990s, when defence spending dropped in the wake of the Soviet collapse, the US government urged defence contractors to merge with each other in order to consolidate their strength and maintain America's defence capabilities. The outcome was a rapid series of mergers, which gave rise to a handful of giant groups.

Selling arms and military services worldwide

Moreover, the USA accounts for half of all international arms sales. Much US military equipment destined for export is manufactured abroad under licence. For example, Turkey has made F-16s since the mid-1980s. The USA cooperates closely with certain allies, including the UK and Israel, on high-tech projects such as missile defence.

Apart from the huge ongoing requirement for production of new aircraft, tanks, ships and weapons systems, there is a vast procurement programme for spare parts, fuel, munitions and the myriad other supplies which sustain the US military machine. Huge amounts are spent on developing new weapons. Although the USA is widely acknowledged to have the world's most advanced combat aircraft, it is busy making the next generation of fighter planes.

Space, the final frontier – superpowers and space missions

It is no surprise that the countries that have developed space technology are the superpowers. They have the finance and the technology. For a country to be considered as a superpower, it needs to have a space programme. The following list shows how space programmes vary between the original superpowers and the emerging superpowers.

USA: NASA put Neil Armstrong on the moon in 1969. Plans include a return manned trip to the moon by 2020.

China: Completed its first manned space flight in 2003 and launched a lunar satellite in October 2007. In 2008 Zhai Zhigang became the first Chinese to walk in space. Ambitious plans include the creation of its own space station.

Russia: First to launch a satellite in 1957, and four years later launched the first human into space.

Europe: European Space Agency's Ariane rocket programme became a world leader in commercial space launches in the 1990s. Plans a mission to search for signs of life on Mars in 2016.

Japan: First ever space development minister appointed in 2008.

Key term

Military industrial complex — the part of the economy that provides goods and services for the military, such as aircraft, warheads, missiles, clothing, catering, etc.

Synoptic link

Refresh your memory about multinational companies by looking at page 75 of Edexcel AS Geography.

Taking it further

To learn about India's space mission read 'India's space mission – or another military industrial complex?' on your Student CD-ROM.

Patterns of power change over time

We have seen how the British Empire covered about 25% of the world's land area and had 25% of its population in the past. However, the cost of fighting two world wars and the damage to the British economy and infrastructure meant that it could not afford to run its colonies. Moreover, many of the people in the colonies wanted independence from Britain. The post-war period therefore marked the decline of the former British Empire and the independence of the former colonies.

The collapse of the USSR as a superpower was later and different. In 1979 Russia invaded Afghanistan in an attempt to prop up the communist government there. Russian troops were later withdrawn from Afghanistan in 1985. During this period the USA had developed the neutron bomb, cruise missiles and a 'Star Wars' defence system with space satellites. Russia could not afford the arms race and its economy was backward. The Russian president Gorbachev started Strategic Arms Reduction Talks. Free elections in Poland led to Solidarity, originally a banned trade union, gaining power, and this was followed closely by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989.

Case study: Economic transformation of China

Since 1978, the standard of living of most people in China has tripled. Market reforms have been introduced gradually, avoiding the 'big bang' approach. Following the death of the Chinese leader, Chairman Mao, in 1976, a more moderate faction led by Deng Xiaoping gained control of the government. One of Deng's first acts was to inject an element of free enterprise into agriculture, allowing peasant families to keep for themselves anything they produced over the state quota. This responsibility system resulted in an almost immediate leap in food production. A similar approach was later applied to the industrial sector.

In 1992 Deng gave official blessing to business entrepreneurship throughout China. When Deng died in 1997, Jiang Zemin became the leader. Under his leadership, China saw major improvements in its diplomatic standing and economic strength, although there were growing disparities between urban and rural living standards.

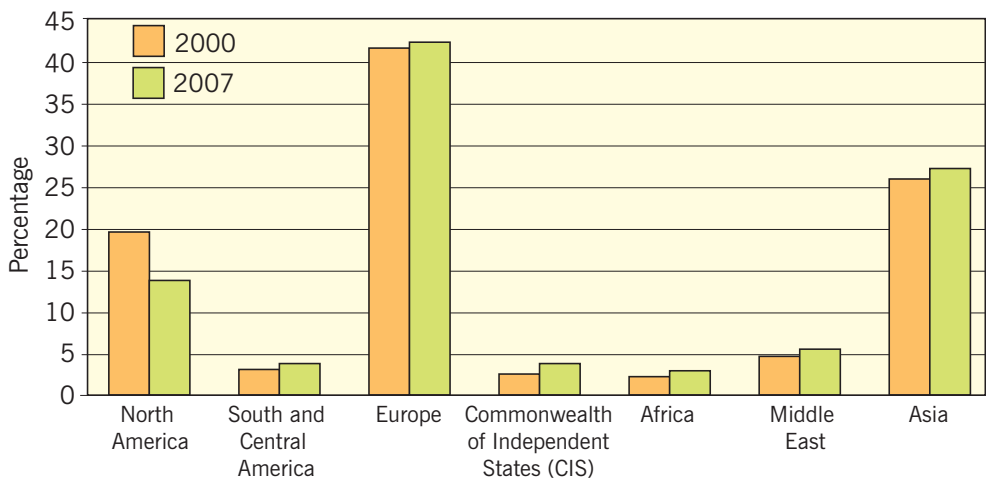
China's economic miracle has had an enormous impact on ordinary people. Village and township enterprises have sprung up all over the country. The Yangtze valley has become integrated into the Asia-Pacific trade bloc. Developments in the Pearl River Delta Region have built upon Hong Kong's success to create a dynamic business region in southern China. Economic growth in China has had a major impact on trade among the superpowers and the geographic regions of the world (see Figure 10.3). The EU is the dominant trading region, followed by Asia and then North America.

Taking it further

To find out how the imports and exports of traditional and emerging superpowers have changed between 1948 and 2007 read 'World merchandise imports and exports' on your Student CD-ROM.

Synoptic link

Revisit China by looking at pages 93, 124–5 and 149 of Edexcel AS Geography.



► **Figure 10.3:** Regional shares in world merchandise exports, 2000 and 2007.

The Asian financial crisis saw the collapse of many Asian banks and the value of their stocks and shares in the late 1990s. Many countries were forced to restructure their economies and reduce their levels of debt.

Despite the Asian financial crisis in 1997–8, China’s GDP has continued to grow by 8% a year.

China’s demand for the raw materials of this economic boom had a major impact on world markets in oil, iron ore, metals, petrochemicals and machinery. One of the largest of China’s many infrastructure projects was the Three Gorges Dam, the world’s largest hydro-electric plant. More giant projects are planned, including the diversion of river water from the south to the water-hungry north. Despite rapid change, the structure of the Chinese economy still has the character of a poor developing country, with almost half the workforce employed in the primary sector. Industry accounts for 22% of jobs, but 51% of output, with manufacturing 35%. This reflects the fact that China has become the world’s leading manufacturing centre, although much of the value-added output is from foreign-owned plants in China’s special development zones.

Rank	Country	Spending \$US bn
1	USA	535.9
2	China	121.9
3	Russia	70.0
4	UK	55.4
11	India	22.4
13	Brazil	16.2

◀ **Figure 10.4:** Defence spending in 2006.

Rank	Economy	GDP \$US bn
1	USA	13,164
4	China	2,645
5	UK	2,377
10	Brazil	1,067
11	Russia	987
12	India	912

◀ **Figure 10.5:** Size of the economy in 2006.

Theories relating to superpowers

Dependency theory

According to dependency theory, countries become more dependent upon more powerful, frequently colonial powers, as a result of interaction and ‘development’. As the more powerful country exploits the resources of its weaker colony, the colony becomes dependent upon the stronger power. Goods flow from the colony to support consumers in the overseas country.

Andre Frank (1971) described the effect of capitalist development on many countries as ‘the development of underdevelopment’. The problem of poor countries is not that they lack the resources, technical know-how, modern institutions or cultural developments that lead to development, but that they are being exploited by capitalist countries.

Dependency theory has a very different approach from most models of development.

- It incorporates politics and economics in its explanation.
- It takes into account the historical processes of how underdevelopment came about, that is how capitalist development began in one part of the world and then expanded into other areas.
- It sees development as a revolutionary break, a clash of interests between ruling classes and the working classes.

Examiners’ tip

Use FFE (facts, figures and examples) to improve your mark – they will give substance to your answer.

Key term

Dependency theory — countries become more dependent over time as more powerful, frequently colonial powers push them into a state of underdevelopment.

Synoptic link

Revisit the following pages in the Edexcel AS Geography textbook: Developed world 31–2, 58; Developing world 29–30, 81, 241–3; Development pathways 54, 59–60; Economic group of nations 80–2; Economies in transition 54, 58, 62. Also take a look at Unit 3 Topic 5 Bridging the Development Gap in this book.

Key term

World systems analysis — treats the whole world as a single unit and divides the countries into a core, largely MEDCs; the periphery, which can be identified with LEDCs; and the semi-periphery, where social change and class struggles are taking place.

- It believes that modernisation does not necessarily mean Westernisation and that underdeveloped countries must set goals of their own, which are appropriate to their own resources, needs and values.

However, it is a largely economic theory (from a Western perspective) seeing the outcome as a form of economic determinism.

World systems theory

World systems analysis is identified with Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) and is a way of looking at economic, social and political development. It treats the whole world as a single unit. Any analysis of development must be seen as part of the overall capitalist world economy, not on a country by country approach. Wallerstein argued that an approach that looked at individual countries in isolation was too simplistic and suffered from developmentalism. The developmentalism school assumed that:

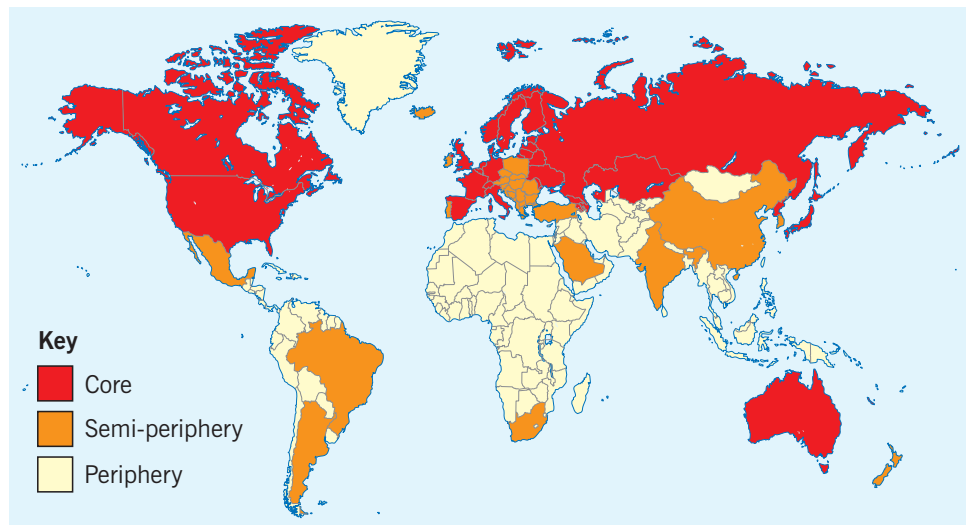
- each country was economically and politically free (autonomous)
- all countries follow the same route to development.

Developmentalism suggested that what happened in North America and Europe was best and would automatically happen elsewhere, which is not necessarily the case.

According to Wallerstein, the capitalist world system has three main characteristics:

- a global market
- many countries, which allow political and economic competition
- three tiers of countries.

The tiers are defined as core, largely MEDCs, the periphery, which can be identified with LEDCs, and the semi-periphery. The semi-periphery refers to countries where there are class struggles and social change, such as Latin America in the 1980s and eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It also includes the NICs where large-scale economic growth has occurred. Some of these NICs, notably China, India and Brazil, may be superpowers in the future.



► **Figure 10.6:** Global core, semi-periphery and periphery.

Wallerstein argued that capitalist development led to cycles of growth and stagnation. One of these cycles is a long-term economic cycle known as a Kondratieff cycle. This identifies cycles of depression at roughly 50- to 60-year intervals. The last two were in the 1920–30s and the late 1980s. Stagnation is important for the restructuring of the world system and allows the semi-periphery to become involved in the development process. Indeed, the recent financial crises may see some mini-superpowers emerging, notably the oil-rich Gulf States, with their vast financial resources.

According to the world systems approach, capitalism includes feudalism and socialism. They are extreme variations on the division of labour. As the world develops and changes, there will either be a swing towards a more socialist system or there will be a transition towards a more unequal (feudal) system.

Case study: Comparing China and India – impressive growth, important differences

China and India, together containing one-third of the world's population, have experienced tremendous economic growth since 1990. Their successes in advancing average wellbeing imply major improvements for a large section of humanity. Though both countries have achieved rapid, sustained economic growth, their rates of progress have been very different. China has enjoyed the fastest sustained economic advance in human history, averaging real per capita growth of 8% a year over the past decade. Its per capita income is now \$5,400 in PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) terms. Meanwhile, real per capita income in India grew at an average rate of 4.4%, reaching \$2,600 in 2007.

China's exceptional growth is partly explained by its market-based reforms that started in 1978, well before India's reforms in 1991. These reforms have enabled China to integrate with the global economy at a phenomenal pace. Today it is the largest recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) among LEDCs. FDI in India has also increased significantly, though at much lower levels.

Strong export growth has contributed to the economic performance of India and China, with a growing dominance of manufactured exports. Again, China has had much more success in this area. Its exports reached \$320 billion in 2001, compared with \$35 billion for India. Manufactured exports accounted for 53% of China's total exports in 1981 and 90% in 2001; in India that share rose from 60% to 77%. China has had particular success in moving from labour-intensive to technology-intensive exports; telecommunications equipment and computers now account for one-quarter of its exports.

Social investments are required for sustained economic growth. In China public spending on education is 2.3% of the GDP, while that on health is 2.1% of the GDP. India, in contrast, has traditionally had lower spending levels. Human development indicators for India remain much lower than for China.

It would be misleading to talk solely in terms of national averages for two countries so large in population and area. In China the highest economic growth has occurred in the coastal provinces, while the geographically isolated north-western provinces have experienced much lower growth. India also harbours stark regional variations. In 1992–7, the per capita economic growth ranged from -0.2% in Bihar to 7.8% in Gujarat.

Summary

In this chapter, you have learnt:

- that the concept of a superpower has developed to include economic, cultural, military and geographical influence.
- that the geography of power and international influence can be seen through geographical patterns of military reach, trade and cultural dominance.
- that patterns of power change over time.
- that there are differences in the emerging powers versus the existing superpowers in terms of regional and global influence.
- that world systems analysis and dependency theory help explain these differences and partly explain why there are potentially emerging superpowers.

Key terms

Kondratieff cycles — a long-term (approx. 50-year) fluctuation in the world economic system. Also known as long waves. Each cycle heralds the rise of new technologies, major infrastructural investments, changes in the international location of industry and technological change.

Feudal — a pre-capitalist mode of production in which land was held by rich landlords and peasants worked the land for the lord, but received protection from him.

Socialism — a movement to establish a classless society by substituting public ownership for private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Purchasing Power Parity — the value of gross national income related to local prices.

Examiners' tip

Aim for balance. Try to show opposing views, for example, how would your views differ if you were/were not living in a superpower?

Taking it further

To find out data for the literacy and infant mortality rate (IMR) for China and India, read 'Literacy and infant mortality rate for China and India' on your Student CD-ROM.