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The changes and continuities in the social structure in China in the 20th century were: the role of women, land ownership, and opportunities for the peasants.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the role of a Chinese woman was a domestic one. This role usually consisted of household chores and raising children. This role ended up keeping women in seclusion. One of the reasons for this idea of a woman’s role was that serving the family in such a way was seen as family loyalty, which was taught in the Confucian ideologies. When Mao came into power, he changed things so that women had a much more free role. They were allowed and encouraged to get an education and employment outside of their homes. This is due to how Mao had been influenced towards sympathizing with the cause. It also could be a successful attempt to get women to side with the communist cause. A part of the role of women that did not change was that even with their new lives outside of the home, women were still expected to fulfill the duties inside the home. This is because the Nationalist attempts at turning back the progress in women’s rights had some influence, keeping the domestic expectations alive.

Land was owned by those of a landowning class at the beginning of the 20th century. This is because owning land was a symbol of social status, so those who could afford to hold the land would own it for the social status. This was changed by the end of the period, however, when the landowning class was basically abolished and the land was distributed among the peasants. Because the peasants now had the land, that aspect of social status was closer to equality, which was the goal of the act which was put into place by the communist leaders. The continuity in landowning was that the people, though from a different group, still owned the land. This method was kept because, as proved by the actions put into place for the ‘Great Leap Forward,’ total collectivization of the land would bring about disastrous results.

The opportunities offered to the peasants showed changes and continuities in the social structure. At the beginning of the 20th century, peasants had few opportunities that would help to better their lives. This is because peasants didn’t have time for things such as education and there were no programs put into place to offer other things such as health care. By the end of the period, this changed. Peasants were able to have better access to education and there were better offerings of health care and land reforms that offered new opportunities in the way of land. This came about due to Mao’s goal of helping the peasants to become better citizens. Some things didn’t change, however, especially in rural areas. This is because it is harder to reach those areas, and thus it is harder to enforce changes.

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