In this talk I will survey my recent results with my coauthors on varieties of general type with particular emphasis on the case of algebraic surfaces. The first theme will relate the deformation of canonical maps to construction of simple canonical surfaces, addressing a question of Enriques. The framework we develop allows us to describe some components of infinitely many moduli spaces of surfaces of general type. The second theme is to explore a higher dimensional analogue of the uniformization theorem of Riemann and Kobe, the so-called holomorphic convexity of the universal cover of a projective variety, which goes under the name of Shafarevich conjecture. Until recently, this was not known in its full generality for even surfaces fibered by genus two curves. We prove some general statements about fundamental groups of surfaces fibered by hyperelliptic curves of arbitrary genus. Examples show that this is an optimal result. As a byproduct we prove, a stronger form of Shafarevich conjecture for these surfaces, and a very attractive conjecture of Nori on fundamental groups. This also yields statements on second homotopy groups of fibered surfaces.