

Communism Spreads to China

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How Communism Came to China

Remember...

Mao Zedong and his Communist forces are fighting the Guomindang (nationalists) for control of China.

After WWII...

much of northern China was controlled by Communist forces. Fierce fighting between the two sides ensued. In the end, Mao and his Communist forces were victorious. Defeated Nationalists fled to Taiwan. After decades of struggle, China was under Communist control and Mao set up the People's Republic of China.

Why did Communism Win Out?

1. **The Communists had won the support of the large peasant population.** Peasants had long suffered from high taxes and brutal landlords. The Communists redistributed lands to poor peasants and ended oppression by landlords.
2. **Nationalists lost support as the popularity of the Communists grew.** Many Chinese resented the Guomindang led Jiang Jieshi and saw him as corrupt. They wanted to build a new China free from foreign domination (remember the Open Door Policy).
3. **Support in the countryside helped the Communists capture rail lines and surround Nationalist held cities.** This led to Nationalist held areas falling to the Communists. After dominating China, they conquered Tibet, leaving the Dali Lama to flee the country for his safety.

Changing Chinese Society

Mao built a Communist one-party totalitarian state in the People's Republic of China. Communists ideology guided the government's efforts to reshape the economy and society.

What were these changes?

- Discouraged practice of Buddhism and Confucianism
- Property seized from landowners and urban business owners
- Opponents were beaten, sent to labor camps, or killed
- Collectivization of land to increase agricultural output

The Great Leap Forward

A program from 1958-1960 that urged people to make a superhuman effort to increase farm and industrial output. The goal was to use the Soviet model of industrialization and bypass the more gradual process of industrialization.

Communes were created from multiple villages in order to create a more efficient agricultural system. Rural communes set up small-scale “backyard” industries to produce steel and other products.

The Great Leap Forward, however, turned out to be a failure. Backyard industries turned out low-quality, useless goods. The commune system actually cut food output leading to food shortages. Bad weather added to already existing problems, and led to famine. Between 1959 and 1961, it is thought that 30-55 million people starved to death.

Recovery was slow and took time. Some took this as an opportunity to criticize the Chinese government.

The Cultural Revolution

Launched in 1966, the Cultural Revolution was an attempt to purge China of “bourgeois” tendencies. Mao wanted a new generation of Chinese to experience the revolution firsthand. Urban youths were organized into groups called the Red Guards. They attacked those considered to be bourgeois. Millions were persecuted, publicly humiliated, beaten, and sometimes killed. People seen to be from the intellectual class (like skilled workers and managers) were removed from their jobs and forced to do manual labor. Schools and factories closed. The economy slowed and civil war threatened. Finally, Mao had the army restore order; but not before serious damage and setbacks to the Chinese economic and political systems.

China and the Soviet Union

What seemed to be an expansion of the Soviet's Communist power, turned out to be much more complex. The People's Republic had a very strained relationship with the Soviet Union. Borders disputes and a conflict with ideologies led the Soviet Union to withdraw all aid from China by 1960.

China and the United States

The United States had supported Jiang Jieshi's Nationalist government as the rightful representative of China. The US refused diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic as they were seen as a Communist threat.

Over time, however, the US saw advantages to improving their relationship with China. By "playing the China card," as it is sometimes called, the US might isolate the USSR between NATO in the west and China in the east.

China replaced Taiwan in the United Nations in 1971 and formal diplomatic relations with China began in 1979.