

# The Great Leap Forward



Mao's Second Five-Year Plan  
1958 to 1963

# Modernizing China

Mao had toured China and saw that the Chinese people wanted to modernize. The two primary tasks that he felt they should target were industry and agriculture. Industry could only prosper if the work force was well fed, while the agricultural workers needed industry to produce the modern tools needed for modernization. To allow for this, China was reformed into a series of communes. To convince the people that this change would be good, an intense propaganda campaign was created.

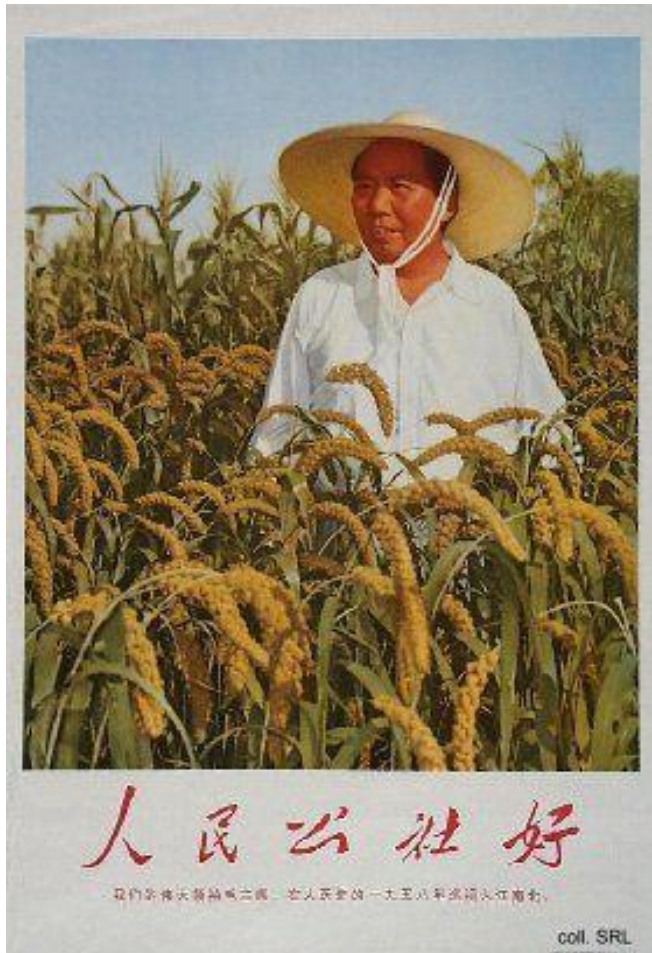


# Life in a Commune

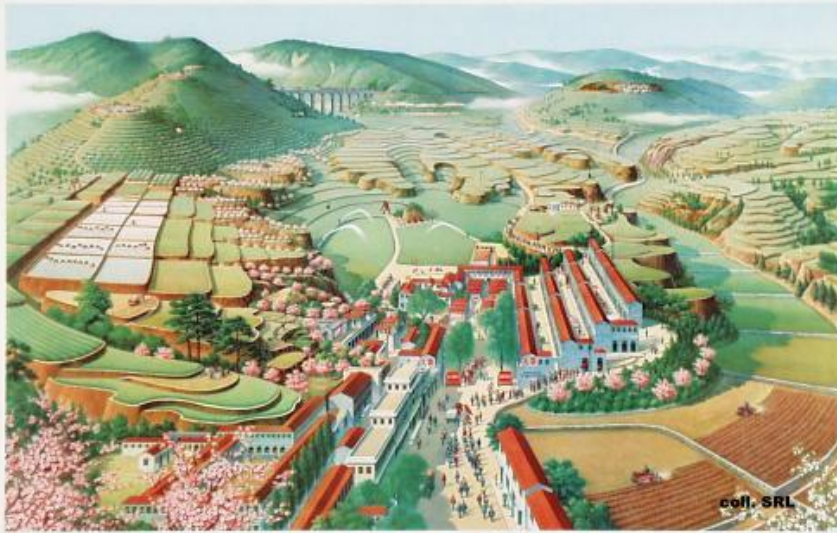
Most communes contained about 5000 families. The people gave up all their possessions, everything was owned by the commune. People now worked for the state and not for themselves. Schools and nurseries were provided so that all adults could work. Health care was provided and the elderly were moved into "houses of happiness" so that their families did not have to care for them.



# Propaganda Posters



# How the Commune worked



大寨

The commune provided all that was needed – including entertainment. Soldiers worked alongside people. The population in a commune was sub-divided. Twelve families formed a work team. Twelve work teams formed a brigade. Each sub-division was given specific work to do. Party members oversaw the work of a commune to ensure that decisions followed the correct party line.



要抓革命促生产, 促工作, 促战备, 把各方面的工作做得更好

By the end of 1958, 700 million people had been placed into 26,578 communes.

# Productivity Increases

The Great Leap Forward encouraged communes to set up "back-yard" production plants. There were 600,000 backyard furnaces which produced steel for the communes. When all of these furnaces were working, they added 11 million tons of steel to China's annual total.

Similar figures for coal, chemicals, timber, grain, cotton and cement showed huge rises. Mao spoke about the Great Leap Forward with the phrase "it is possible to accomplish any task whatsoever." By the end of 1958, it seemed as if his claim was true.



# The Consequences

However, in 1959, political decisions/beliefs took precedence over common sense. Communes were given quotas that they were incapable of achieving. Party officials would order the impossible and commune leaders who failed to meet these goals could be charged with being a “**bourgeois reactionary**” if he complained. Such a charge would lead to punishment and prison.



# The Failures

Farm machinery produced in factories fell to pieces when used. Thousands of workers were injured after working long hours and falling asleep at their jobs. Steel produced by the backyard furnaces was frequently too weak to be of any use and could not be used in construction.

Also, the backyard production method had taken many workers away from their fields – so desperately needed food was not being harvested. 1958 was an excellent growing season so food was plentiful. However, Party leaders claimed that the harvest for 1958 was a record 260 million tons – which was not true.





# Famine Arrives

The excellent growing weather of 1958 was followed by a very poor growing year in 1959. Some parts of China were hit by floods, in other growing areas, drought was a major problem. The harvest for 1959 was only 170 million tons of grain – well below what China needed at the most basic level. In many parts of China, starvation occurred.



# Disasters Continue

1960 had even worse weather than 1959. The harvest was only 144 million tons. That same year, 9 million people are thought to have starved to death and millions were left desperately ill. The government was forced to introduce rationing. Between 1959 and 1962, it is thought that over 20 million people died of starvation or related diseases.

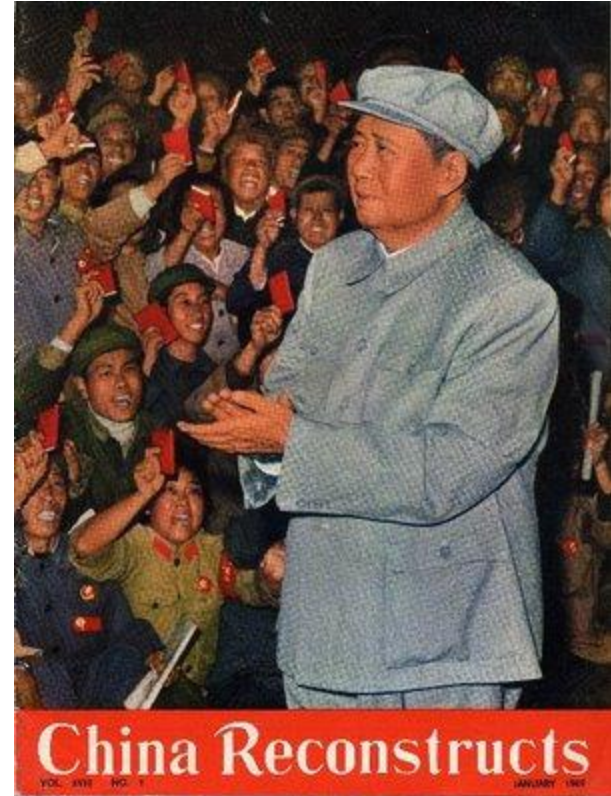


Also, the backyard furnaces used too much coal and China's rail system, which depended on coal driven trains, suffered drastically.

# *The Great Leap Backward*

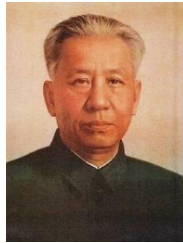
By 1959, it was obvious that the Great Leap Forward had been a failure and even Mao admitted this. Some party members put the blame of the failure of the Great Leap Forward on Mao.

He was still popular with the people but he was forced to resign from his position as Head of State though he still remained as the powerful Party Chairman.



# New Leaders for China

The day-to-day running of China was left to three moderates:  
Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping



In late 1960, they abandoned the Great Leap Forward. Private ownership of land was reinstated and communes were cut down to a manageable size. Peasants had the incentive to produce a surplus and sell their harvests at open markets. The moderate leaders restricted Mao's power but his standing among the ordinary Chinese people was still high. He was seen as the leader of the revolution. He was to use this popularity with the people to resurrect his authority at the expense of the moderates. This was in the so-called **Cultural Revolution**.

# What Came Next?

Maoists called the period a three-year natural disaster, but it was a man-made disaster....or, a “Mao-Made” disaster. During the Cultural Revolution, a decade characterized by national madness and fanatic violence, human suffering was justified in the name of revolution. Indeed, the most popular song of the time was called "Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party."



# 'To get rich is glorious'

Deng Xiaoping reformed Mao's China. His slogan was "To get rich is glorious." When the reform began in 1978, it clearly had the "mandate" of the Chinese people. Deng and his associates stressed economic development and social stability.

The switch from a planned economy to a more market-oriented economy, and from autocracy to the "open door," brought an economic boom. Between 1979 and 1997, the growth rate of China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 9.8 percent annually, about three times greater than the world average.

During the same period, 170 million people were lifted out of poverty. Chinese citizens' bank savings increased 220-fold, from 21 billion Yuan (roughly U.S. \$2.5 billion) to 4,628 billion Yuan (about \$560 billion).

**Never in history have so many people made such economic progress in a single generation.**