

## Modern China

Japanese aggression in China was a leading factor to World War II in the Pacific. The Japanese invasion of China had a major affect on the internal politics of China. Modern historians believe that the Japanese occupation actually solidified the Communist Party of Mao Zedong.

When the Japanese invaded China in 1938, the Nationalist Party, led by Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) fled to a new located in Chongqing (Chungking). Mao viewed the Japanese invasion differently and gained the support of the peasant class by using guerilla warfare tactic of “hit and run” against the Japanese.

When Japan surrendered after the dropping of the atomic bombs in 1945, the Chinese Communist and Nationalist parties went back to their civil war to see which party could control China. In 1946 the fighting erupted in Manchuria and continued for three years when, in 1949, the Communists gained control of the majority of China. The People’s Liberation Army was now victorious. The Nationalist Party, still lead by Jiang Jieshi fled to the island of Taiwan off the coast of mainland China. He claimed this island as the Republic of China and he funded his campaign there with the gold reserves he took with him from the mainland.

On October 1, 1949 Mao Zedong and his Communist Party founded the People’s Republic of China. He began to reform Chinese society using the system of Communism found in Soviet Russia. Mao called this development stage the New Democracy even though it was not democratic. This time period saw a close alliance with China and the Soviet Union. It was strong enough to have the United Nations Security Council remove Taiwan as a member. On half of all Chinese exports went to Russia and in turn, the Soviet Union heavily invested financial support to China. This agreement broke down in the 1960s. China claimed that the Soviet Union did not give them enough aid. They also accused the Soviets of assisting Tibet with their revolution even though there was no real evidence for this. The Soviets had given aid to India and the Chinese believed this money went to Tibet despite the Soviet neutrality claims.

The Chinese also copied the Soviet Union’s political system. The country was governed by a Central Committee and a Politburo. There was a constitution in place and it did state that a national assembly could be formed through a popular election but Mao followed Stalin’s footsteps and began purges within China. Any surviving Nationalists or other opponents were executed or sent to labor camps, never to return. Between 1949 and 1954 it is believed that Mao disposed of 800,000 political opponents one way or another.

In 1955, Mao created his own equivalent of a Five Year Plan. His goal was similar to Stalin, he also wanted to industrialize China and make it self-sufficient. His plan copied Stalin by focusing on heavy industrial and not consumer goods. Mao also attempted land-holding reforms. He took away land from the ten largest landholders, approximately 70 to 80 percent of the best land, and redistributed this acreage to over 300 million peasants. Each peasant received an equal amount of land or allotment and some of these holdings are still in existence today.

## **The Great Leap Forward**

This was Mao's plan for full industrialization between 1958 and 1961. He abolished all private farms and created a system of collective farms. They were home to entire communities who used small-scale industrial production. To motivate them they were fed propaganda on a daily basis and taught that the old system of family bonding was inferior to Communism. Mao's system advocated true communism and an end to individualism. However the great Leap Forward did not work, it was a "Great Leap Backward."

The collective farms could not meet the high quotas set by the government and combined with several bad harvests due to natural disasters the plan was doomed. Mao blamed his failure on sparrows claiming that the birds were counterrevolutionaries. He ordered the birds to be killed which caused further damage because he insects that they ate were now free to eat whatever crops remained. By 1962 over 20 million Chinese had died of starvation as a result of the failure of the Great Leap Forward.

## **The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution**

Another attempt to destroy resistance to Mao's rule came during the period of 1966 to 1976. Mao had accused the Soviets of being "revisionists" of Communism and spreading this unwanted belief into his system. Mao now purged Chinese intellectuals and professions who his party believed held these values of openness to foreign influence and belief that there could be an upper class within a Communist system. This so called revolution removed China's educated population by putting them in jail or in work camps. This anti-educated elite revolution sent China backwards compared to world education levels. Mao's red book of Communist philosophy was the only source of necessary education allowed within his system.

## **Deng Xiaoping**

When Mao died in 1976, Deng Xiaoping came to power. He inherited a nation that had been made stagnant and poor by Mao's policies. In 1981 he arrested the Gang of Four who were Mao's closest associates and co-leaders that included Mao's widow Jiang Qing and either executed them or gave them life terms in prison.

Xiaoping began a policy in 1979 of one-child-only in an effort to combat China's exploding population. From 1949 to 1970 China's population had grown by 270 million people and was causing a tremendous drain on the nation's resources. The policy only applied to the Han Chinese and the people who lived in cities. Ethnic minorities were not included. Many avoided this rule by simply not declaring their children to the government or having abortions or sending their female children to orphanages. This policy is still somewhat in force today.

A new series of reforms were instituted and became known as **Deng's Revolution**. His plan put forward **Four Modernizations** that changed agriculture, industry, national defense and technology. Peasants could now lease land from the collective organizations. Any surplus grown after their rent was paid could be sold on an open market allowing them income. The poor who lived in the countryside were allowed to have their own cottage-industries thus adding income and tax money to the national economy. By the 1980s, the average income on a farm had doubled and this plan was deemed a success for the poor. Crops other than rice could now be grown and the government began to turn a blind-eye toward the one-child policy as these new births provided extra labor on the farms that added further needed labor and income.

By the 1990s the standard of living in China had increased and the private sector now produced over 10% of China's Gross Domestic Product. A Middle-Class had begun to emerge and in response, China began to shut down the old state-run industries and allow private ownership to prevail.

Deng Xiaoping reversed the isolationist policy of Chairman Mao but this move did not come without major consequences. Chinese students were now allowed to attend foreign universities. By being in other countries their ways of thinking were being changed by democracy and westernization. They brought these ideals back to China and soon students began to openly protest for more reforms and rights.

In 1989 one such protest took place in **Tiananmen Square** in Beijing which is in front of the Forbidden Palace, once the home of the ancient emperors. Deng Xiaoping saw the students as a major threat to his rule so he ordered his military to move in on the students with tanks and guns. Many students died but what was worse for Deng Xiaoping was that the events were streamed live across the world by television crews who were in the buildings above the square. The world saw these atrocities of human rights that took place in China and Deng Xiaoping was now facing great pressure from the outside world for his actions.

Deng Xiaoping died in 1997. After his death China was again a nation of dramatic change. While alive, Deng Xiaoping had created a two-sided policy that allowed one nation but two systems of rule. During the Opium Wars, Britain gained Hong Kong. Prior to that, the Portuguese had taken control over Macao. Deng had promised that the Chinese socialist system would not apply to these regions. On July 1, 1997, in accordance with previous treaties, the British returned Hong Kong back to Chinese rule. In 1999 the Portuguese then returned Macao back to China under a similar agreement. These actions meant that China had now entered the worldwide economic community. In 2001, a further attempt was made by China to become an economic superpower when it joined the World Trade Organization. Massive industrial growth of the private sector took place but it was also accompanied by major internal problems.

## **Economic Problems in the Modern Chinese System**

China has again seen a rapid increase in population growth. Agricultural techniques have improved creating surplus crops and combined with foreign goods, have created low prices for farmers. This resulted in mass urbanization to the cities of Beijing and Shanghai. However, the closing of state-run industries created large-scale unemployment in these cities. The majority of the state-run factories employed women as their main source of labor so they suffered the most as a consequence of these economic changes.

Foreign investment still continues in China. It has become the manufacturer of many low-priced items on the world marketplace due to the high number of cheap-labor factories. The production costs in China to make these goods is much less than in other countries so China's export market has boomed. Its main market for these goods is the European Union, closely followed by the United States. Its balance of trade is well in favor of exports but as the nation's wealth continues to grow and the middle-class and upper classes continue to grow there is a greater demand for more expensive imported goods.

China has become the world's leading importer of oil and other fossil fuels. Its own reserves are dwindling in supply or becoming more expensive to mine. Those who live in the cities are becoming wealthier but those who remain in the countryside are not gaining any or little of this economic prosperity. New cities are being built to house the increasing population but the land used is taking away valuable agricultural regions and China's food production is reaching critical levels to feed their people. The more China grows the greater the divide between the classes is taking place.