

## Why Did a Communist Revolution Happen in China? - Part II

### V. *Why did the Communists Win the Chinese Revolution / Civil War?*

#### A. The Appeal of Marxism

1. In the 1920s some Chinese found that Marxism explained China's weak position in the world. According to Lenin, foreign imperialism (in China's case by the Europeans and Japanese) was the same as the bourgeoisie's exploitation of the proletariat.
2. Marxism also provided a scientific method to achieve economic prosperity for all and a means of defeating the imperialists through a world revolution led by the working class.

#### B. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was formed in 1921.

#### C. The famous Long March led by Mao Zedong from 1935-36 into the remote mountainous area of Yanan gave the CCP a reputation for enduring hardships for the sake of the people.

#### D. During the Japanese occupation of China, the CCP established mostly rural (as opposed to Lenin's urban) bases among peasants. Mao and his fellow communists gained strength by calling for united resistance with the KMT against the Japanese and for their experiments with land reform and other policies which would ease the desperate plight of the Chinese peasants.

#### E. After WW II ended with the defeat of Japan in 1945, a civil war continued between the Nationalists and the Communists over the right to lead China's political and economic development and to reestablish China's position in the world.

1. The CCP won and established the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949.
2. The Nationalist government evacuated to the island of Taiwan, where it established the Republic of China.
3. Each government continues to claim that it is the sole legitimate government for China.

### VI. *How Did Mao Adapt Communism for China?*

#### A. Maoism

1. Mao Zedong laid great stress on the need to adapt Marxist-Leninism, a western ideology, to the Chinese context; this led to the development of Maoism or Mao Zedong Thought.

#### B. The Chinese belief in the perfectibility of man through education, self-cultivation, and the moral example of rulers was reflected in the CCP style of rule under Mao; party members, steeped in Maoist thought, were supposed to lead by their personal commitment and moral example. Mao's philosophy was particularly evident in the treatment of those who deviated from party policy:

- if anyone strayed from the party line, a 'struggle' would be undertaken to reform and return the 'deviant' to what was viewed as a useful role in society.
- "Rectification campaigns" and "criticism/self-criticism" meetings were used to convince people of the error of their opinions or habits.

#### C. Mao altered Marxist-Leninism in two major ways:

1. First, he argued that the Chinese peasants, instead of the urban proletariat, could be the key element in the revolutionary struggle.
2. Second, he extended the Chinese folk belief that man could overcome objective conditions and accomplish things by sheer force of will. This led to the tension between being 'red' (trained in Maoism) and being 'expert' (having scientific, technical, or intellectual expertise).
  - a. This conflict became particularly acute during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1968-1976), when Mao encouraged de-professionalization and de-urbanization of industry.

- b. His most radical break from Chinese tradition was a de-emphasis on formal education; Mao ordered that students be sent to the countryside to live with and learn from the peasants, who were idealized as the source of revolutionary zeal. Party members, whose qualifications were primarily political, had authority over experts, such as factory managers and school principals, reflecting the Confucian idea that moral qualities, not technical expertise, ultimately benefit society.
- D. Agrarian Policy and Economic Development under Mao
1. In order to achieve economic modernization, the government that came to power in 1949 had to find a way to squeeze the very small surplus out of the countryside (where 80% of the population lived) and invest it in industry.
  2. The Chinese borrowed the commune system of collectivized agriculture from Stalin's USSR. Property was pooled to form large tracts of land that could be farmed more efficiently; land was owned jointly by large groups of peasants. An individual was paid for his/her part in the communal labor by a system of work points, which were decided on by the commune after the state got its pre-set allotment.
  3. Although the state was able to promote industry from the profits of collectivization, the land was over-farmed, peasants saw fewer and fewer rewards in farming for work points, and the redistribution of food sometimes resulted in famine and mass starvation, particularly at the end of the Great Leap Forward.

VII. *How Did China Change After Mao's Death?*

- A. Following Mao's death a new approach to economic development was taken by China's leaders under Deng Xiaoping. Today, market mechanisms and material incentives are gradually replacing state control and moral exhortation as techniques for managing the economy, and there is greater interaction with international markets.
- B. Foreign investment is welcomed and China's provinces, particularly in the coastal area, are vying to compete with the other newly emerging economic powers in Asia: Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore.
- C. The debate over China's place in the world and how much of Western values and ideas China must adopt or adapt to modernize continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

***Having experienced foreign encroachment and intrusion in their internal affairs from the mid- 1800s to the mid-1900s, the Chinese government remains sensitive to any perceived challenges to its national sovereignty.***