

Mao & China

Dates:

- **1927-1949:** Intermittent Chinese Civil War.
- **1920s-1930s:** Increasing inflation in urban areas.
- **1927:**
 - Central Shanghai General Union reached 800k members.
 - Bad harvest in north-west China leading to 3 million deaths.
 - End of the first united front
 - Shanghai massacre
 - Beginning of the 'purification movement'
- **1900:** Boxer Rebellion.
- **1911:** Overthrow of the Qing Dynasty by Sun Yat-Sen's KMT.
- **WW1 Period:** China's claims for self-determination ignored at Versailles.
- **1921:** CCP established.
- **1926:** CCP and Sun Yat-Sen's NRA launch the Northern Expedition.
- **1927-1945:** KMT reliance on shifting alliances with local leaders and warlords.
- **1934:** KMT armies rebelled in Fukien.
- **1934-1935:** The Long March.
- **1936:** Xi'an incident.
- **1937:**
 - Second United Front formed.
 - CCP membership at 40,000.
- **1942-1944:** Rectification campaign.
- **1943:** Mao becomes official CCP chairman.
- **1945:** CCP membership over 1 million.
- **1946:** US-arranged ceasefire (Mao refuses to demobilize troops).
- **1947:** CCP begins attacking urban centers.
- **1949:** CCP membership reaches 4.5 million.

Statistics:

- **4.5%:** Percentage of the Chinese population urbanized in industrial cities.
- **85%:** Percentage of the Chinese population that were peasants.
- **60-80%:** Percentage of all lands controlled by Chinese landlords and religious groups.
- **70%:** Percentage of crops produced that peasants paid as rent.
- **800k:** Number of members in the Central Shanghai General Union under CCP control by 1927.
- **3 million:** Deaths due to the 1927 harvest failure in north-west China.
- **5000:** Number of communists killed in the Shanghai massacre of 1927.
- **250,000:** Estimated number of people killed in the 'purification movement'.
- **1.5 million:** Number of troops demobilized by Chiang Kai-Shek in 1946.
- **200:** Rival communists executed in the 1930 Futian incident.
- **1000:** Cadres tortured by Kang Sheng.
- **40,000:** CCP members dismissed during the rectification campaign.
- **20%:** Percentage of the Politburo secretariat removed during the rectification campaign.
- **Up to 60:** Number of party officials coerced into suicide during the rectification campaign.
- **As much as 10,000:** Estimated deaths during the rectification campaign.
- **90,000:** Size of the Red Army before the Sino-Japanese war.
- **4 million:** Size of the Red Army by the end of the Sino-Japanese war.
- **Over 4 million:** Growth in CCP membership from 1937 to 1949 (from 40,000 to 4.5 million).

Mao came to power after victory in the Chinese Civil War (intermittent 1927-1949) therefore the long-term and short-term causes of the Chinese civil war (and Mao's victory in it) also act as the conditions which enabled the creation of an authoritarian state in China

Social and Economic Factors

Urban Poverty: Living and working conditions were poor with inflation increasing in the 1920s, into the 1930s. Furthermore, wages were low and workers did not have social

security. China's high population meant that the workforce was easily replaceable too. This led to increased class tensions as trade union memberships increased (Central Shanghai General Union increased to 800k members under CCP control by 1927). Statistically, cost of living index increases correlated with number of strikes. However, only 4.5% of the Chinese population was urbanized in industrial cities. Rural poverty was a more important cause.

Rural Poverty: 85% of the Chinese population were peasants yet Chinese landlords and religious groups controlled as much as 60-80 percent of all lands during the period. As a result, peasants needed to pay rent which amounted to as much as 70% of the crops produced, landlords were despised. Furthermore, the KMT treated peasant communities brutally especially during the period of the Sino-Japanese war: grain requisitioning and conscription was the norm, which created conditions that pushed people towards communism. The KMT also supported conservative traditions like foot-binding which infuriated most of the Chinese and especially women. These conditions were made worse due to bad harvests including the 1927 one in north-west China leading to 3 million deaths.

Political Factors

Western Colonialism had led to foreign control of major Chinese trades and ports by the turn of the 20th century. The failure of the ruling Qing dynasty to check this growing influence led to the 1900 Boxer Rebellion and overthrow of the dynasty by Sun Yat Sen's nationalist KMT in 1911. This led to growing resentment of the Western powers. Despite fighting with the allies in WW1, China's claims for self-determination were ignored by the Big Three at Versailles who instead gave Germany's base in China (Shandong) to Japan. The Chinese delegation stormed out in protest and the population, filled with resentment, began looking towards communism as the way forward to a more powerful nation.

Political Fragmentation and Warlords: The CCP was set up in 1921 and in 1926, along with Sun Yat Sen's NRA, the CCP launched the Northern Expedition against warlords and their Western imperialist backers, which successfully reached its goals. However, the nationalist regime was never able to fully consolidate its control over China. From 1927-45, it relied on shifting alliances with local leaders and warlords. This fragmentation weakened the KMT as it made it impossible for the KMT to implement reforms with areas like Manchuria remaining outside their control. This left a vacuum of power and the CCP would take advantage of it.

KMT's Ideology: The KMT nationalists' ideology disadvantaged them due to the socio-economic context mentioned earlier. They favored a capitalist economy with the protection of private property rights by law which wasn't viewed favorably by the poor population. They sought to maintain Confucian values (like filial piety and respect for

authority) which became unpopular following the rise of the new culture movement (and its associated intelligentsia) who blamed it for China's weaknesses. They implemented limited social reforms concerning education and women's rights without challenging the status quo. The KMT also only supported limited land reform to keep the support of the disliked landlords while also implementing half-hearted measures like rent reduction and the sale of public lands which only acted as temporary measures that didn't address the root structural issues. Crucially, the KMT wanted to maintain the existing social order and property rights over redistribution. The KMT was inspired by western political thought and western capitalism (Three Principles of the People). Despite increasing disgruntlement with western powers and imperialism, the nationalists sought to attract foreign investment and trade while viewing close ties to the west as crucial to China's modernization. Many viewed them as overly dependent on foreign powers and subservient to western interests. Furthermore, some historians also suggest that Chiang Kai Shek failed to embrace the original ideology of Sun Yat Sen (Democracy, Nationalism and Welfare)

KMT's actions: Chiang Kai Shek ended the first united front in 1927 and followed up with the Shanghai Massacre of 1927. They used informants from the underworld of triads and gangsters to kill 5000 communists. They carried out similar attacks in other cities, in what was known as the 'purification movement'. Estimates suggest about 250,000 people were killed and the CCP was almost destroyed by the end of 1927. Chiang Kai Shek set up the Blue Shirt Society secret police force which was on the lookout for communists. This began the first phase of the civil war. This negatively impacted the KMT however, deeply, and divided them deep in the years that followed. His armies rebelled in Fujian in 1934 and in the 1936 Xi'an Incident he was abducted to sign the opening of a second united front. This also began to paint a clearer picture among the populace of Chiang Kai Shek as a tyrant.

Impact of War

The Second United Front was formed in 1937 after the 1936 Xi'an Incident and saw China ally with Japan to fend off the Japanese invasion. Chiang Kai Shek had to be kidnapped as he believed the CCP was more of an enemy than Japan, he was then coerced into the front. Chiang Kai Shek's focus on the CCP made him look unpatriotic among the populace, in contrast to the nationalist ideology that the KMT nationalists supposedly supported. Furthermore, KMT conscripts were poorly treated, antagonizing the rural population. Chiang Kai Shek also poorly treated peasants, he flooded the Yellow River leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths just to resist the Japanese. The CCP was viewed as the true nationalist force as they were the ones who offered to form the 2nd united front. The CCP also took the opportunity to showcase land reform in areas they liberated, building up rural support.

Methods of Mao's rise

Use of Force & Coercion

- The 1927 Autumn Harvest Uprising saw Mao lead a series of small scale uprisings fought by poorly equipped peasant militias. It was a tactical failure but strategically important in Mao's rise as a leading figure within the CCP and set the stage for his leadership and rural revolution vision in the later phases of the revolution.
- The long march from 1934 to 1935 saw the CCP miraculously survive the encirclement campaigns of the KMT by marching and setting up a new remote base in Shaanxi. Mao led the march and at the end of it, he was recognized as one of the prominent leaders in the CCP (if not the most). The Long March also became vital symbolic propaganda for the strength of the CCP and Mao's leadership.
- Mao's guerrilla 3 phase strategy of strategic defensive, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive played a part in the CCP's victory in the civil war and allowed them to outlast the KMT in the long run. This allowed them to counter the initial manpower advantage held by the KMT and turn it in their favour.
- KMT relied on food transportations into the cities (they prioritized urban areas), this was sabotaged frequently while the CCP faced no significant food shortages due to Mao's strategy of controlling rural bases with farmers (who often had to forcibly give up food). They eventually leveraged this advantage in rural areas to attack urban centers from 1947.
- Mao also appointed Lin Biao as leader of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) who led the CCP to total triumph over the KMT in the "Three Great Campaigns".
- Mao also cleverly refused to demobilise any troops in the 1946 US arranged ceasefire while the KMT demobilised 1.5 million.
- However, Mao also used force and coercion outside the war. 200 rival communists were executed in the 1930 Futian incident. The rectification campaign from 1942 to 1944 saw punishment and brainwashing of CCP members until they adhered to the party line during Yan'an soviet. They were encouraged to undertake "self-criticism" or "struggle" in order to identify their errors. Mao used the campaign to eliminate internal dissent and establish himself as the undisputed leader of the CCP. Rivals were accused of ideological deviations and forced into purges or confessions. Kang Sheng, a CCP secret police leader tortured 1000 cadres while another 40,000 were dismissed from the party. 20% of the Politburo secretariat was removed and up to 60 party officials were coerced into suicide. Estimates suggest as much as 10,000 deaths.

- Mao also pursued a re-education campaign for intellectuals, bureaucrats and perceived counter revolutionaries forcing them to undergo intensive ideological indoctrination aligned with maoist principles. they created a culture of conformity, suppressed dissent and promoted loyalty to maos leadership.
- Mao became official ccp chairman in 1943

Ideology

- Mao's focus on the peasantry allowed the rural support necessary to overthrow Chiang's regime along with his cult of personality which set him apart from other CCP leaders.
- Popular land reform and social reform policies allowed Mao access to greater civilian support.
- During the sino-japanese war and period of Yanan Soviet (final destination of the long march), the CCP gained the support of local populations by treating them with respect through the Eight Rules of the Eighth Route Army which called for avoiding damage to peasant property, sanitary behaviour, good treatment of women and elders as well as mercy to prisoners of war. Mao also established the "Yanan Way" in Yanan Soviet with reduced taxes, rents and interest rates, redistribution of land from wealthy landlords to peasants, assistance with agricultural productivity to increase peasant incomes, fair prompt and transparent admin and justice, encouraged peasants to play an active role in local government.

Propaganda

- Mao appointed Chen Boda as a chief propagandist of the CCP who helped articulate Mao's ideas and created a cult of personality around him. As a result of this propaganda, membership of the CCP grew from 40,000 in 1937 to over 1 million in 1945 and reaching 4.5 million in 1949 (grew by over 4 million from 1937 to 1949). The red army grew from 90,000 to 4 million during this period.
- Edgar Snow, an American journalist, interviewed Mao at Yanan, and his book "Red Star over China" helped develop Mao's reputation among prominent intellectuals in China as a credible alternative ruler of China.
- Propaganda often spread widely the perception that Nationalist leaders had sold out to the west, financially, politically, and culturally.
- The Xi'an incident was used as a symbol of trust and patriotism.
- During the Zunyi conference, the 28 Bolsheviks became an idiom representing old-fashioned or stubborn behaviour.

- Mao began to be referred as “The Great Helmsman” towards the end of the war.
- CKC’s propaganda was horrible too, in the face of atrocities like the Rape of Nanking, CKC said that “The Japanese are a disease of the skin. The communists are a disease of the heart”.