

CHINA

THE END OF CIVIL WAR AND THE VICTORY OF THE COMMUNISTS

Once carried to power in 1949, the communists were able to establish effective rule over the mainland of China and end the warfare that had torn the country apart since the first decades of the twentieth century. Chinese sovereignty was soon extended to the offshore islands and in 1950 forcibly to Tibet. Only Taiwan and a few other small islands remained outside the control of the new Chinese Republic. There, Chiang Kai-shek, vowing anew each year to continue the civil war, established a separate state by occupying the islands with his fleeing army. Taiwan (Formosa), together with the Pescadores and the tiny islands of Quemoy and Matsu, continue to represent the other China. However, the possibility of renewing the civil war has long ago vanished. The People's Republic has ceased to be shunned by the West and its representative has taken his place as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Even the brutal suppression of the movement, largely of students and young people, crushed so bloodily in Tiananmen Square in 1989, isolated the Chinese communist leadership from the West for only a short time. Today China benefits from huge Japanese and Western investment.

The father of Chinese communism was Mao Zedong. The China he knew in his youth had been exploited and invaded in turn by foreign nations – Britain, France, Russia, Germany and Japan – in the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth. The Chinese Republic

founded and presided over by Sun Yat-sen was too weak to halt foreign depredation, and modernisation efforts made slow progress in the face of the hugeness of China's problems, the backwardness of the overwhelmingly peasant population and the decades of incessant warfare.

This was the China Mao Zedong had known all his adult life. He was born in 1893, just two years before Japan's first victory over China in war had added to its humiliating record of defeats by the Europeans. His father, through thrift and by means of lending his savings at usurious rates, amassed what was for a peasant modest wealth. Mao worked on his father's farm, collected his father's loans and, taught by a tutor, read widely. In the turbulent last years of the Manchu dynasty and during the revolution of 1911 that followed, Mao gained first-hand experience of the poverty and distress of the peasantry, and felt the stirrings of social revolt and patriotism of these years. For a short time he became a soldier in the service of the revolution. Like other Chinese progressives, he avidly read Western books to gain the new knowledge that the progressives believed would save China. But as Mao later remarked, 'Imperialist aggression shattered the fond dreams of the Chinese about learning from the West. It was very odd – why were the teachers always committing aggression against their pupil?'

The Russian Revolution then brought a new learning to China, Marxism-Leninism. Mao was an enthusiastic supporter of the May the Fourth

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Movement (1919), demonstrating and rising in protests against both the conservative society and foreign subjugation. His patriotic and radical views soon led him beyond the May the Fourth Movement to Marxism and, in 1921, joining the Chinese Communist Party. For all his adaptations of this doctrine to Chinese conditions, Mao remained faithful to the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism all his life. He would later claim that it was Russia after Stalin's death that was departing from the course prescribed by Marx, Lenin and the younger Stalin and that the mantle of the world leadership of the true faith had passed to China. But the sense of world mission did not exclude a strong feeling for China's unique national identity. The world would be transformed not by Chinese conquests but by the Chinese example and the successful struggle of the suppressed masses of other nations.

Through all the turmoil of fighting against his Chinese opponents from 1927 onwards and then against the Japanese too, Mao's vision was of a China that would be reborn 'powerful and prosperous', a 'people's republic worthy of the name'. Mao hated his enemies with passion, could act with bitter ruthlessness to destroy opponents but was also able with brilliant tactical good sense to persuade and cajole, to divide the opposition and so to emerge the strongest. For Mao, China's future required the mass mobilisation of the peasantry, the vast majority of Chinese citizens, and he believed that the application of Marxist-Leninist doctrines would transform their lives. The social classes which could not place the good of the community before their individualistic desire for gain might be reformed, but if that failed they would be destroyed. At the root of the social revolution, Mao observed, lay a revolution of the human spirit. This would occur not by itself, but only through unremitting class struggle and the teaching of the masses.

Mao repeatedly warned that perseverance was necessary to bring about the socialist economic revolution but that this would not be enough, that it was necessary also 'to carry on constant and arduous socialist revolutionary struggles and socialist education on the political and ideological fronts'. His ideology was fanatical; in his

pursuit of it, millions would die and suffer. Marxism-Leninism provided Mao both with the means to be adopted and the ends which would thereby be achieved. The disciplined party – the party groups, the cadres, sent to convert the masses community by community – was the basic method used in the Soviet Union and later in China too. In China, Mao concentrated on the countryside, the poor peasantry, driven to increasing desperation by the combination of the natural and human depredations afflicting China in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Village associations, youth movements, student federations, women's organisations and other societies had millions of members after 1949 and served as the means of linking the central authorities with the masses. But no mercy would be shown to those identified as the enemies of the people. Violent death on a huge scale was nothing new to Chinese history. Mao pursued his vision of utopia regardless of human cost.

The October Revolution in Russia had been spearheaded by the industrial proletariat. Mao's contribution to revolutionary theory, it is often claimed, is that he relied on the peasantry: to surround the towns with the countryside and then to conquer them – that was the model of the Chinese revolution. For Mao, however, this was a matter not of inventing a new doctrine but of practical necessity. He had to rely on safety in remoteness and on the peasantry for the recruits to his army and for its supplies. This led him to organise regions over which communist authority could be established as rural 'base areas' where the peasantry were to be won over by redistribution of land. Mao's revolutionary struggle thus also belongs to the tradition of the great peasant risings in China's history.

Mao's capacity for organisation had already showed itself in 1929 when he analysed the requirements of these communist base areas; he stressed the need for discipline, tight leadership and a ruthless, single-minded sense of purpose. The Chinese warlords were ruthless too, but the indiscipline and cruelty of their armies were wanton and indiscriminate. Mao's goal was political power, and the means to attain it was the Red Army. But this army was not to conform to the

existing pattern of Chinese armies, to be encouraged by prospects of rape and booty or driven to fight by fear of punishment. Mao explained, 'The Red Army must not merely fight; besides fighting, it should also shoulder such important tasks as agitating among the masses, organising them, and helping them to set up political power.' His ideal was an army recruited from volunteers, a people's army, whose task it should be to teach and help the people of China in their daily tasks, to gain their support and to motivate them to communist victory. The Red Army was to be the instrument of the party, not its master; its ultimate objective was to make possible the revolution along the lines determined by the party. The army was to be a part of the masses, to be egalitarian and to win respect for its honesty and discipline. Theory and reality usually part company. The 'instrument of the party' tended to obey what the party's leaders believed was for the good of the people and not what people believed was good for themselves. It would be used whenever necessary to suppress popular discontent and to carry out orders against other Chinese groups.

Mao, just as Lenin did, saw that the fundamental problem in all societies was the relationship between the leadership and the mass of the people. If the commands were given by a small, all-powerful party group, how were they to be transmitted to the masses without an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy filling the gap between the two? This was no mere theoretical problem. During the anti-Japanese-War phase of Chinese communism from 1937 to 1945, communist base areas had to be consolidated not only in Chiang's Chinese controlled territory but also behind Japanese lines. The resources and production to maintain and expand the communist-controlled regions, which enabled the Red Army to carry on the fight against the Japanese, had to be developed within these areas.

Mao's response during those years was tactical flexibility, to which communist ideology, land reform and egalitarianism had at this stage to be subordinated. The peasants' aspirations had to be taken into account, the cooperation of the masses won as far as possible by persuasion and by material help. Mao's slogan was 'From the masses to

the masses', and he developed a programme of contact with the masses that became known as the 'mass line'. Trained communists, well indoctrinated, were sent in groups into the communities, where they said they had come to listen to the desires and ideas of the people. On their return, the party would then learn what measures would particularly appeal and would incorporate and adapt them to their own policies, which would be presented in turn to the people. The process was intended to be continuous and became a powerful tool of propaganda. By 1945 the communists had reached 100 million people and the mass line was now carried to the people by more than 1 million party members. The maintenance of party unity, the acceptance of common goals by the communists scattered over the vast regions of China, however, was a constant problem, and the mass line had to be matched by periodic attempts to tighten discipline and intensive periods of internal discussion and 'self-examination'. Over all this, Mao established in the 1940s his authority and leadership.

A large proportion of the trained Communist Party leadership did not come from poor peasant or worker backgrounds. Once in their own regions sympathies with relations and friends, even with their own social class, affected the way in which they accomplished their tasks. This became especially evident during the first two years after the communist takeover. A close study made of early communist rule in Canton shows that it took several years to bring under communist control the vast areas of central and southern China that had been militarily overwhelmed in a short space of time. Many administrative tasks had to be left still to Chiang's Kuomintang to provide the necessary expertise. The early transition from Kuomintang to communist rule was accomplished by example, by persuasion, and by terror as 'enemies' were summarily executed.

Composition of the Communist Party in 1949

Poor and middle peasants	3,240,000
Rich peasants and urban middle class	1,125,000
Workers	90,000
Total membership	4,455,000

From the first there were strong contrasts between the Russian and Chinese revolutions. While Marx, Lenin and Stalin provided models and inspiration, the Chinese were determined to develop a Chinese communism to suit the very different circumstances and needs of their country. Mao adapted dogmatic communist ideology to his experience in the years before victory in 1949. The leadership of Mao had been accepted by 1935. He never forgot the lessons of a decade earlier when the old Bolshevik leadership sought to spread revolution by first trying to capture the cities. It was in the rural regions that the communists built up their bases from which the cities and the rest of China were revolutionised. Revolution in China was not to be brought about within a short space of time, as it had been in Russia; indeed it took two decades to accomplish. The Chinese Revolution might never have been carried forward to a successful military conclusion but for the opportunities provided by the Japanese invasion of China. The barbarity of the Japanese turned the Chinese against them. They sought protection from the Japanese army's killings, lootings and spoliation and found it wherever the communists could establish their authority. Mao's call for resistance by all Chinese classes to the Japanese invaders, coupled with the programme for rural reform, attracted mass support. The composition of the Communist Party in 1949 provides striking evidence of this: just as the war aided the growth of communism, so it revealed the corruption, incompetence and inefficiency of the Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-shek's leadership. The mistakes of the generals and the generalissimo, a rank Chiang had accorded to himself, were accompanied by hyperinflation, which destroyed the economy in the rear. The arms supplied by the US were frequently turned against the Nationalist armies as the Red Army captured them or as whole sections of the Nationalist forces deserted. The mass of the Chinese people had lost all confidence in the Kuomintang regime and longed for an end to famine, death and the civil war.

Mao's triumph occurred in 1949. He now faced an entirely different problem – not only of organising

a revolution against the state's authorities, but of managing the vast Chinese continent with the revolutionaries as the rulers. The greater part of China had fallen into communist hands only during the last months of the civil war, much more quickly than he had anticipated. Unlike the old liberated base areas where communist rule had already functioned for years, more than half of China had recently been under Kuomintang control. There were simply not enough trained communist personnel to take over the running of thousands of villages, towns and cities. Faced with the alternatives of total disruption or of a more gradualist approach to the transformation of China, Mao chose to take time to win wide support.

The ideology and tactics of Mao and a few trusted advisers would determine the fate of millions of Chinese. But the Chinese people had won no more rights. Mao thought in terms of history and destiny, of the future of the quarter of humanity that was Chinese, of the fate of the world. In an almost godlike fashion he never doubted his mandate, and became impatient as he grew older. The sacrifice of millions of Chinese to promote the fulfilment of China's destiny counted for little in the scales of history as he saw them. Justifying the means by the end took on the most frightening aspects when applied to the lives of whole peoples by the twentieth-century ideological messiahs; they were tyrannical and ruthless in pursuit of their particular visions of a better world. Mao was one of these.

Mao was ready in the aftermath of military victory in 1949 to accept help from many quarters provided it would assist China in achieving the two main preliminary goals the communists had set: freedom from foreign control and the ending of 'feudalism'. Feudalism in this definition was a broad concept; it encompassed exploitation by the landlords and 'capitalists', so that in abolishing it China would undergo an economic and social revolution both in the countryside and in the cities. Mao was supremely confident that China's revolutionary role was as significant as Russia's. Although China's revolution, like Russia's, would be based on the concepts of Marxism-Leninism, it was to remain distinct. In the early years Mao acknowledged Russia's leadership of revolution in the

communist association of nations; but every nation, Mao believed, must remain the master of its own destiny, completely sovereign and independent. The corollary of this attitude was that revolution could not be imposed externally – it had to develop from within. Mao was at times ready to adapt policies opportunistically; at other times he imposed his own doctrinaire ideas. No particular interpretation of Marxism would block the path he wished to follow.

Among the most urgent tasks of 1949 was to work out a new relationship with the Soviet communist leaders. Mao could have had few illusions about Stalin or the Soviet Union. Stalin's chief concern appeared to be to avoid provoking the US to war, and in his conservative view, as in Roosevelt's and Truman's, Asia took second place to Europe in the East-West confrontation. Stalin faced the task of reconstructing the Soviet Union, of building up its strength sufficiently to deter the capitalist West, of strengthening Soviet leverage in Eastern and central Europe; meanwhile he wanted Asia to remain relatively quiet. 'Reparations' were one obvious means of assisting the repair of Russia's devastated industries. As long as they could be moved, machinery and whole factories were transported to Russia from China. Half the capital equipment the Japanese had accumulated in Manchuria to develop industry there was carried off by the Russians with scant regard to China. Stalin, moreover, had completely miscalculated Chinese communist strength and had expected Chiang Kai-shek to stay in power and to have the capacity to crush the communists. Despite giving limited help to the communists in northern China, he had recognised Chiang Kai-shek and had allied with the Nationalist Kuomintang, thus backing the wrong horse. Mao therefore had little reason for gratitude to Stalin or to the Soviet Union. The Chinese had made their own revolution, despite the Russians. Nor did Mao regard a breach with the US and the West as inevitable in 1949. Indeed, a very significant portion of China's export trade continued with the West after the communist victory.

Nevertheless, in 1949 Mao counted on receiving Soviet help and on a reorientation of Soviet policy towards China. He wished to build up

China's industrial potential, and China's communists had little expertise in bringing about the necessary changes in the urban economy and in urban societies. The Soviet Union, which had faced this task after 1917, could serve as a useful model. The communist cadres, Mao told his party followers in 1949, had to learn quickly the new task of administering cities. It was not out of love for Stalin or acceptance of Soviet leadership that Mao proclaimed early in 1949 that there was no middle way and that China must 'lean' to one side or the other and so against 'capitalist imperialism'. China was weak. The US needed to be deterred from backing Chiang's cause further, indeed from protecting the Nationalist remnants on Taiwan. The 'liberation' of the island was a priority in 1949, to complete the revolution territorially.

But there was a further reason for leaning to the Soviet Union. There was nowhere else the Chinese communists could go. Mao regarded himself as Marx's and Lenin's disciple and regarded the Soviet Union as the first successful revolutionary state. As he saw it, a broad ideological division existed in the world and China belonged to the Marxist-Socialist camp opposed to the imperialist aggressive nations. He also recognised the pre-eminent power of the Soviet Union in the communist alliance of nations and believed that this power was essential to safeguard the weaker socialist nations. What Mao would not accept was that this gave the Soviet Union a right to interfere with and dominate any of the smaller communist states, or that each nation should not be able to choose its own path of evolution based on Marxist-Leninist teaching but suited to its particular society and needs. There was thus, to use Mao's favourite tool of analysis, a 'contradiction' in the Sino-Soviet relationship. China, the weaker ally, needed the financial, technical and military support of the Soviet Union, so China would openly identify itself with the communist nations led by, by far, the most powerful of them. But China rejected Moscow's leadership in determining the course of its revolution. Mao's own strong sense of national and ideological independence here asserted itself.

After winning the civil war in China, Mao immediately turned to the Soviet Union, jour

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coming to Moscow in December 1949. He was received by Stalin without much warmth. After all, not only was his victorious leadership in China living proof of Stalin's misjudgement, but Stalin recognised in Mao a leader of enormous strength of will and of an intellectual calibre approaching his own self-estimate. Then there were the more immediate material concerns of Soviet interests in China, which were now a problem. It had been possible for Stalin, with American and British backing, to impose Russia's terms on Chiang Kai-shek, who was trying to gain control of his country and to defeat the communists. It was going to be very much more difficult to justify these gains when face to face with a communist ally who was determined to rid China of all foreign 'imperialist' shackles. Two tough and ruthless men faced each other in Moscow during the winter of 1949. Mao and his entourage pursued their tasks with tenacity, remaining in the Soviet capital for an unprecedented eight weeks from December 1949 to February 1950.

A new alliance treaty was eventually concluded on 14 February 1950. Agreement was reached on the setting up of joint Sino-Soviet trading companies, which would continue to give the Soviet Union a special position in Manchuria, though it was humiliating for Mao to concede this foreign 'colonial' incursion. In the treaty text Mao also had to confirm that China relinquished any claim to Outer Mongolia. But he won some major revisions of the 1945 alliance treaty Stalin had concluded with Chiang Kai-shek; he reasserted Chinese sovereignty over the Manchurian railways (the Chinese Eastern Railway), and Dairen and Port Arthur were to be handed back to China not later than 1952. Stalin promised to send technical advisers to assist the Chinese authorities especially in industrial and urban development, in which the Chinese communists lacked experience. He also promised financial aid. A meagre Soviet credit of the equivalent of US\$300 million was granted. Finally, and perhaps most importantly from Mao's point of view, the Soviet Union and China bound themselves to a defensive alliance by which they agreed to come to each other's aid in the event of aggression by Japan or by any state allied with it: this referred to the US, though it

was not mentioned. Years later Mao recalled how difficult a struggle it had been to persuade Stalin to sign the treaty, not least because the Soviet leader wished to retain the option of mending fences with the US; he had not wanted a victorious communist revolution in China in the first place and now that it had succeeded he was afraid that Mao might become another Tito in Asia. He did all he could to ensure communist China's subservience to and dependence on the Soviet Union through economic, military and ideological ties, and until his death China played internationally a secondary role – too weak and too reliant on Soviet help to do otherwise.

Mao, within China, followed his own course, and in his lifetime was to make several sudden changes. The policy laid down in the spring of 1949 by Mao and the Chinese Communist Party was to secure broad popular support and a wide coalition of political forces under the leadership of the party, excluding only the Kuomintang. Mao proclaimed this ideological line to suit the particular popular-front tactics he wished to follow as the 'People's democratic dictatorship'. All depended on Mao's definition. Thus the 'dictatorship' was designed to destroy the 'enemies' of the people, while the 'people' included not only poor peasants and the 'middle' peasants and workers, but also professional people, intellectuals, the propertied, merchants and those of limited wealth. The peasants would continue to own their land – even the better-off peasants were left in possession – and so were the landlords of the land they themselves farmed. The Agrarian Reform Law, which came into effect in the summer of 1950, reflected this moderation. The same gradualist approach in 1949 and 1950 can be seen in communist dealings with industry. The thinking behind it was not a belief in the merits of a mixed economy but rather the realisation that the production of the rich peasants and of industry in private hands was essential if the aims of socialism and the modernisation of the country were to be realised. But the communist administration also continued to provide itself with the means to exercise increasing control over all production in the many regions of China.

The early achievements of the takeover were impressive. There was far less disruption than

would have ensued if a purist communist social revolution had been decreed from the start. The whole vast country of some 540 million people was pacified and brought under a unified control. The evil of rapid inflation was also mastered during the first two years of communist rule.

China's struggle to modernise had been dominated by the policies of the great European nations, which had carved the country into spheres of concessions, including ports which, like Hong Kong, became colonies, or the scores of 'treaty ports' in which the foreigners enjoyed special rights. The impact of the foreigners had provided an impetus to modernisation in big cities like Shanghai, in the construction of railways and in the growth of the Japanese-controlled industry in Manchuria. But all this development was designed to benefit the foreigners rather than the Chinese.

In 1949 Mao and the communist leadership set out to change the fabric of Chinese society and to unite and strengthen the country. Modernisation as the West understood it – improving technology, increasing industrial and agricultural production, spreading education and literacy, developing communications, rejecting traditional philosophies – was necessary not only to lift the population from the trap of abject poverty and periodic famine but to enable a Chinese nation to survive at all. How else would it be possible to muster the strength to eject the foreigner and prevent his return on any but China's terms? Yet Mao tried to find a way to profit from Western culture without wholesale Westernisation, to assimilate it in an essentially Chinese way. The Soviet model could

be followed, but like other Western models there would be no slavish imitation or subjugation. Mao was determined to wipe out the humiliation of the 'unequal treaties' exploiting China's resources which had been imposed by the Western powers, including Russia. For the time being Mao needed the protection of the Soviet Union, especially as he busied himself with expelling the Western 'capitalists'. While it was true that tens of thousands of Chinese had formed close ties with the West and that the Western presence – in missionary, educational and medical fields – was also humanitarian, most Chinese hated the foreigner for assuming a position of superiority in a land not his own. Many Western residents had already left the mainland by the time it fell under communist control. Those who remained were to be rapidly expelled in the wake of the Korean War.

The Korean War itself marked a watershed in the development of communist internal policies in China, in the relationships with Asia and in the triangular power alignments of the Soviet Union, China and the US. The enormous impact of the Korean War was felt in Europe as well. The communist and anti-communist confrontation was seen in Washington, Moscow and London more and more in interrelated global terms. Global strategies were devised to meet the threat and the independent forces shaping the future of Asia came to be viewed by the nations of the First and Second Worlds, both communist and anti-communist, through the distorting mirror of their own ideological assumptions. One consequence of enormous significance for China was its isolation from the West.

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