**China: The Communist Revolution**

Before World War II, hardly anyone would have described China as a “major world power.” Today however, most everyone agrees that the US and China are the world’s two superpowers. So how did this happen? During the 19th century, China was dominated by Western nations. During World War II, China was conquered by Japan. So, what happened in the years since to allow China to unite and become more powerful? Read on…

**China after Imperialism**

After the last Chinese emperor of the Qing Dynasty was forced to step down in 1911, China had split apart with different regions controlled by various warlords. It was definitely not a world power at this point, and chaos would be the best description for China’s political situation as warlord squabbled with warlord over territory.

A political party known as the “**Nationalists**” however wanted to reunite China together under 1 government and make it into a democracy. Led by **Chiang Kai-shek**, the Nationalists dreamed of basing China on Western ideas of popular sovereignty (where the people rule) and having separate branches of government running the nation. The Nationalists weren’t powerful enough to unite China all by themselves, so they soon allied with another group: the Chinese Communists.

**The Rise of the Chinese Communists**

The Chinese Communist Party was formed in 1921 – inspired by the Russian Communists who had successfully turned Russia into a communist nation. Like their Russian counterparts, the Chinese Communists wanted to radically change society and reform the economy and how land was distributed to be more equal. At first, the Nationalists and the Communists attempted to work together to reunite China under 1 rule, coordinating their forces to take territory away from the warlords that were in control of China. However, their goals were too different to make things work. The Nationalists, many of whom were members of the middle class, wanted a Western-style democracy and the Communists wanted an entire social revolution and end to social classes. The Nationalists soon betrayed the Communists and began persecuting them.

One of the main leaders of the Chinese Communist Party by now was **Mao Zedong**. Mao’s plan for making Communism succeed was to gain support among China’s large peasant population. He was incredibly successful at convincing the peasants to join the Communist cause and raising a large peasant army – the **Red Army**. As his forces gained control of territory, he would seize land and then divide it equally between the peasants.

**The Long March - 1934**

**Chiang Kai-shek** and the Nationalists were now fearful that the Communists were gaining territory and wanted to end the Communists as a threat. With a force of over 700,000 troops, Chiang encircled the Communist territories and routed them. The Communists now had no choice but to run and try to escape the Nationalists.

The Communist leaders ordered the Red Army to attempt to break through the Nationalist army lines and escape to safety to the north of China. Only the able-bodied were allowed to join the retreat as it was feared that the weak and sick would slow the army down. On October 15, 1934, the Long March began. The March included 85,000 soldiers, 15,000 Communist party officials, and 35 women, who successfully fled southern China to journey to the North.

After a journey of over six thousand miles, over mountains, rivers, forests, and wasteland, the Communists finally reached their destination after an entire year! Only 8,000 people had survived the March – out of the initial 100,000! But once the Communists established a new base in the north, new Communist forces began to arrive latter on to join them. Eventually, the Communist forces numbered 30,000. After the Long March, Mao was now the undisputed leader of all Communist forces in China – and he began to rebuild his forces and push back against the Nationalist forces.

**China’s Civil War, 1945-1949**

During World War II, Japan invaded China. At that point, the Nationalists and the Communists had to focus on fighting off the Japanese. After Japan surrendered at the end of WWII, China was then divided between the Nationalist government led by Chiang K'ai-shek and the Communist forces led by Mao Zedong, who controlled most of north China. The Nationalists sought to over-whelm the Communists with a big military push in 1946. They amassed victory after victory against the Communists and took over much Communist territory.

Mao Zedong, however, had a plan. He knew he could not beat the Nationalists immediately in 1946, so he decided to wage a long-term war. As the Nationalist Army spread itself thinner and thinner occupying more land, the Communists were slowly building up their forces. Over the next few years, the Communist forces began to strike back and win many battles against the Nationalists. In the last year of the fighting, the Nationalists suffered over a million and a half casualties. The army collapsed, and the Communist forces were victorious by 1949.

On October 1, 1949, Mao declared the creation of the People's Republic of China – declaring China to be a Communist State. The Nationalist government fled across the sea to the island of Taiwan latter that year to set themselves up there. From this point on, China and Taiwan would be separate countries with the Communists the undisputed rulers of mainland China.

**Differences Between** **Mao’s Communism vs Soviet Communism**

One might wonder why Communist China did not unite with the Communist Soviets and become a powerful force for Communism that the rest of the world would be unable to resist. However, the Soviets and the Chinese had too many differences and distrust between one another to ever truly be allies. One key difference between them was their beliefs on the best way to achieve Communism.

The Soviets believed that Communism could only be achieved by industrial workers rising up to overthrow their middle-class employers. Since, China was not an industrialized nation, the Soviets believed that China should first industrialize before they could begin to transition to the final stages of Communism.

Mao believed that the social class that should achieve communism was agricultural peasants. He believed that rural peasants had values that promoted the simplicity and equality at the heart of communism, not urban factory workers. That is why he based his armies on recruiting peasants. Soviet and Chinese arguments over the proper path for Communism led to a growing split between the two nations.