

## Section 2

# A Brief History of China



### As you read, look for

- ▶ the type of government in China before World War I;
- ▶ how China became communist;
- ▶ the importance of Mao Zedong to modern China;
- ▶ the success or failure of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution;
- ▶ the protests at Tiananmen Square in 1989;
- ▶ terms: **Qing Dynasty, Nationalist Party, Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Long March, Red Army, Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, Red Guards.**

## Early History of China

China is one of the oldest civilizations in the world, dating back thousands of years. Some of the greatest accomplishments of ancient China include the inventions of gunpowder, silk, tea production, the compass, and papermaking. For most of its history, China was an absolute monarchy, but as the 20th century began, unrest grew throughout China.

Before World War I, nationalism began to grow in China, like it had in Europe. The **Qing Dynasty**, which was an absolute monarchy, had ruled China since the 1600s. However, in 1912, Chinese nationalists overthrew the Qing Dynasty and created a new government without a monarch. The new government was called the Republic of China. One of its declared aims would be an end to foreign control in China's affairs. The leading political party was called the Kuomintang, or the **Nationalist Party**, led by a man named Sun Yixian.



**Above:** The flag of the Qing Dynasty.  
**Left:** This ancient village is still occupied.



The new government was not able to either bring order to China or help the Chinese people. Many people were killed as robbers and thieves roamed the countryside. Agriculture was wrecked and many Chinese faced famine. World War I took the attention of most people away from the problems of China. At the end of the war, European politicians signed the Treaty of Versailles, restoring the government of Sun Yixian and giving Japan control of some Chinese territory. Many young Chinese were angry about the treaty and wanted an end to what they felt was the failed government of Sun Yixian and the Kuomintang. They were unhappy with western-style democracy and looked to Russia and their communist system.

## Communist Revolution

In 1921, a group of young Chinese men, including a young teacher, Mao Zedong, met in Shanghai to form the first **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**. After Sun Yixian died, the new head of the Nationalist Party, Chiang Kai-shek, tried to make alliances with the new Chinese Communist Party, and for some years the two groups worked together to try and bring order to China. Eventually though, Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang government turned on the communists, and many of the communists were killed. In 1929, Jiang Jieshi announced the formation of his new government, the Nationalist Republic of China. Mao Zedong survived the attack on the communists by Chiang Kai-shek's government. He decided that his future and the future of the Communist Party in China would be found in the countryside with support from the peasants.

A civil war began between Mao and his communist followers and the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek. In 1933, Mao and his followers, over 600,000 people, fled into the mountains to escape being defeated by the Nationalist government. They walked nearly 6,000 miles to avoid capture. This journey is known as the **Long March**, and Chinese communists today look back at this as a sign of Mao's dedication to his cause and to what he felt was the cause of the Chinese people. The Chinese communists and the Nationalist forces had to call a temporary truce during World War II as both groups fought to keep the Japanese from taking over China. At the end of World War II, the truce ended.



**Top:** The red flag and hammer and sickle are symbols of the Chinese Communist Party. **Above:** The Chinese fought against the Japanese during the early 20th century. **Bottom:** This monument at Mao Zedong's mausoleum in Beijing honors common people who became revolutionaries.



Civil war between the two groups raged from 1946 until 1949, when Mao's communists, now called the **Red Army**, removed the Nationalist government from power. The remaining Nationalist forces and supporters fled to the island of Taiwan. In October 1949, Mao proclaimed the creation of the People's Republic of China, a communist government ruling one of the largest countries in the world. Mao tried to reorganize all of China along communist lines of collective ownership of farms and factories. Private ownership was eliminated and production quotas were set for agriculture and industry.



### Mao and His Programs

In 1958, Mao created a program called the **Great Leap Forward** that would help solve China's agricultural and industrial problems. Mao hoped that the program would help China industrialize quickly. One major part of the program was that every urban neighborhood and village had a small backyard steel furnace so that people could make their own steel. Mao also decided to organize all farms into large collectives, where all ownership and decision making would be in the hands of the government. Many Chinese farmers did not like the large farms. They missed their own land and, because they no longer owned anything themselves, they had little reason to work very hard. A series of crop failures in the late 1950s made everything even worse, and China went through a period of famine. In all, about 20 million people starved to death. The Great Leap Forward was abandoned in 1960.

After the failure of the Great Leap Forward, some people in China began to suggest that private ownership might not be a bad idea. Farmers and factory workers began to do some work for themselves. Mao saw his ideal of a classless society, one where everyone was treated exactly the same and no one had more than anyone else, drifting away. His response was to announce the **Cultural Revolution** in 1966. He urged students to leave school and make war on anything in Chinese society that looked like it was encouraging class differences.

**Middle:** Backyard steel furnaces were one of Mao's ideas for the Great Leap Forward.



Many high school students were organized into an army known as the **Red Guards**. It was his or her job to single out and remove anyone who was preventing China from becoming a really classless society. These students were told to target the “four olds” in Chinese culture: old customs, habits, culture, and thinking. Mao wanted China to become a nation of farmers and workers, all of whom would be equal. Leaders in the Chinese community who seemed to be in higher positions were attacked. Business managers, college professors, even government officials who did not agree and support the Cultural Revolution were thrown out. Some were put into prison; others were killed. The result was chaos.

The Cultural Revolution raged on for almost ten years, at which time even Mao himself had to admit it had been a mistake. In 1976, the Red Guards were disbanded, and gradually order returned to China. Mao died in 1976, and by 1980, Deng Xiaoping was named the leader of China. Though Deng had been with Mao since the days of the Long March, he was more moderate in his ideas about the path China should follow. He began to allow farmers to own some of their own land and make decisions about what they would grow. He allowed some private businesses to organize, and he opened China to foreign investment and technological advances. He found that openness to western business meant that the Chinese people were also exposed to western ideas.



**Top:** The Red Guards were honored on this Chinese stamp. **Bottom:** Billboards such as this one featuring Deng Xiaoping honor communist leaders.



## Tiananmen Square

In 1989, when communist governments were under siege in a number of places around the world, China went through a period of student protests that resulted in a huge demonstration in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Over 10,000 students gathered to protest what they felt was corruption in the Chinese government. They called for a move toward democracy. The students even went so far as to raise a statue they called the Goddess of Democracy, modeled on America's Statue of Liberty. The world watched as the Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, ordered thousands of soldiers into Beijing to end the protest. On June 4, 1989, the Chinese government ordered the soldiers in Tiananmen Square to break up the demonstration. They fired on the students, destroyed the statue of the Goddess of Democracy, and arrested thousands of people. The brief pro-democracy movement was destroyed as well, and Deng Xiaoping was left in control. He held power until his death in 1997.



## Reviewing the Section

1. What type of government did China have until World War I?
2. How did China become communist?
3. Who was Mao Zedong? Why is he important in Chinese history?
4. Copy the chart onto your paper and complete it.

Historical Event	What Was the Purpose or Goal?	What Were the Major Events?	What Were the Results?
Great Leap Forward			
Cultural Revolution			

5. What were people protesting for at Tiananmen Square in 1989? What were the results of their protest?

## DID YOU KNOW ?

A Chinese searching the Internet for "Tiananmen Square protest in China" has no results. The government has blocked information about the protest from its citizens.

**Top:** Tiananmen Square was designed and built in 1651, and has since been enlarged by four times its original size in the 1950s. **Above:** The Goddess of Democracy statue was a symbol of protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

# special Feature

## One-Child Policy

Can you imagine living in a place where families are only allowed to have one child? This actually happened in China. By the late 1970s, the population of China was quickly approaching 1 billion. To compare, the United States' population in 1979 was just over 225 million. Deng Xiaoping, the leader of China, decided something must be done to slow population growth. At first, families were limited to two children, and no one was required to follow this rule. However, by 1980, the one-child policy officially began, limiting all families to only one child.

The policy was supposed to be universally enforced; however, exceptions were made. For example, some ethnic minorities were allowed more than one child, as well as couples whose firstborn had a disability. In urban areas, families were more likely to comply with this policy. In rural areas, however, families continued to have more children to help them work in the fields. Rewards in terms of money or jobs were given to people who complied, whereas punishments were given to families who did not comply.

While the one-child policy slowed population growth in China, it had other unintended consequences. The ratio between male and females became skewed. There are 3 to 4 percent more males than females in China today. Baby boys were traditionally preferred by families, which led to abandonment, or even death, of firstborn baby girls. During this time, tens of thousands of Chinese baby girls were adopted by families in the United States and other countries. By 1987, couples who had a firstborn daughter were allowed to have another child in an effort to stop this problem. Another problem with this policy was that there were fewer children to support the elderly. Finally, children who were born "illegally," or after the firstborn and never registered with the government, have had a hard time getting an education and jobs.

The one-child policy in China is no longer enforced. This policy ended in 2015, and families were legally allowed to have two children. What other problems do you think resulted from this policy?

**Top Right:** A sign posted by the government in this village supports China's one-child policy. **Right:** A Chinese baby girl may not have siblings if her parents follow the one-child policy. **Background:** Poster for family planning: Carry out family planning, implement the basic national policy.



*"I've always had this interest in sibling relationships because I don't have any siblings. I'm completely a product of the one-child policy in China, so I always kind of wished that I had an older brother or a younger brother or sister just to have that bond, so I find myself constantly writing about that relationship."*

-Marie Lu, author of young adult novels

