Politics in China

In the spring of 1989, China experienced a momentous and tragic series of crises that brought Chinese politics to the forefront of world attention. For week after week, hundreds of thousands and eventually millions of demonstrators filled Tiananmen Square ("The Gate of Heavenly Peace") in the center of Beijing. Despite the government’s official criticism of the "turmoil," the demonstrators camped in the square, staged a hunger strike, and broadcast to the world their demands for democratic reform. Even the government’s declaration of martial law on May 20 did not end the demonstrations, and initial attempts to enforce martial law were peacefully frustrated by popular support for the demonstrators. In the meantime sympathetic demonstrations were occurring in most other Chinese cities. Not only were the demonstrations reported with approval and optimism by the Western press (and the Western response was immediately relayed back to China through Voice of America and BBC World Service), but even the official Chinese press was clearly sympathetic. Finally, however, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) shot its way into the center of the city to disperse the last demonstrators, leaving hundreds of dead civilians in its wake. At one stroke, the June 4 Massacre forced China in a new and dark direction.

As it became clear that the regime had apparently succeeded with its repression and the demonstrations were indeed over, world attention shifted to the more optimistic political developments in Eastern Europe. The brutal massacre in Beijing led many governments and international organizations to adopt sanctions against China, and China’s international trade and tourism dropped precipitously. But China was not ostracized for long. Sanctions began to soften six months after the massacre, and they were generally abandoned after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait required China's cooperation in the United Nations.
President Bill Clinton unlinked U.S. human rights concerns from economic policy toward China just before the fifth anniversary of the massacre, and in late 1994 Secretary of Defense William Perry visited China to renew military contacts between the United States and China. In domestic politics, Deng Xiaoping persisted with his policies of market reform and international openness. In contrast to the struggling economies of the post-Communist states of Europe, China continued to maintain the world’s fastest rate of economic growth, and has attracted increasing amounts of foreign investment despite its Communist leadership. But the eventual death of Deng Xiaoping and the other octogenarians who reasserted control in 1989 will surely have massive but unpredictable repercussions.

The Tiananmen events demonstrated the continuing importance of two strands in Chinese politics. The first is the struggle for order and unified leadership in the face of chaos, a major characteristic of Chinese politics since the fall of the Chinese Empire in 1911. The second is the unfolding and diversification of society as it has progressed and modernized. The first strand is most evident in Deng Xiaoping’s power politics as reflected in the bloody suppression of the demonstrations, but it can also be seen in the student leaders’ radicalism and refusal to compromise. Twentieth-century Chinese politics has been a turbulent and bitter struggle for power; the familiar style of politics is one of revolutionary struggle.

The second characteristic, the expression of a diversified society, was a minor and subordinate theme of Chinese politics until the 1980s. Only in the last decade were economic prosperity and individual material welfare acknowledged as basic social goals. From 1979 until 1989, China experienced a decade of unparalleled prosperity under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, and China has continued to develop in the 1990s. Deng relaxed ideological tension, reduced state controls on economic activity, and permitted people to pursue profit. As a result, the lives of most Chinese were transformed from a monotonous routine tightly controlled by authorities to a more colorful existence with both new hopes and new anxieties, one in which the authorities played a more distant and ambiguous role. The students who demonstrated in Tiananmen were children of this decade of prosperity and decontrol. At bottom, they demanded that China’s leaders acknowledge and guarantee the new diversity and freedom of society.
But China’s leaders saw the threat of chaos in such demands for diversity.

Both characteristics continue to be major influences on politics in the 1990s. On the one hand, the fear of chaos and the habit of revolutionary politics can be seen in the government’s determination to keep control over society and not to compromise. Students and faculties at universities and workers at other organizations involved in the demonstrations have had to write personal accounts of their activities and to affirm their loyalty to the regime. On the other hand, Deng Xiaoping has continued to expand economic reform, despite opposition from more conservative leaders, and the economy has continued to grow, to diversify, and to internationalize. It is not clear, however, how long the regime can combine economic reform with political repression, in the absence of Deng’s personal leadership.

In order to understand the current situation of Chinese politics, we must grasp both its general pattern of development in the twentieth century and the new context of politics which emerged in the 1980s.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) emerged in the 1920s as one of the forces attempting to save China from chaos, backwardness, and foreign oppression. China’s situation was indeed desperate. Its territory was split up among warlords who were constantly scheming and fighting among themselves, while in the cities foreigners controlled much of the modern economy from self-governing enclaves. Nine-tenths of the population struggled to eke out a living by farming; in the words of one observer, their situation was “like that of a man standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him.” The CCP could succeed as a revolutionary movement because of the disunity of the country, the threats from foreigners, especially Japan, and the misery of the people.

When the CCP came to power and founded the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, it was determined to transform China into a unified, independent, and modern country along the lines of the Soviet Union. The PRC was set up as a party-state; a state where all significant resources are controlled by public authorities and where all political power is concentrated in the hands of party leadership. In just a few years it was clear that China was unified, independent, and beginning to make economic progress.

However, the initial successes of the PRC led to overly ambitious programs and new political turbulence. From 1957 to 1977 leftist ideology promoted by Mao Zedong brought political tensions into every aspect of life and led to two major disasters, the Great Leap Forward of 1958 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966. Although in general China’s economic development continued, most Chinese lived lives of deprivation and anxiety. In contrast to the situation before 1949, the problem was not that of a central government that was too weak, but one of a party-state that was too strong, too intrusive, and too capricious. The death of Mao in 1976 presented the opportunity of swinging the pendulum away from the concentration of party-state power, and Deng Xiaoping took the lead.

The 1980s were generally a time of optimism and prosperity during which the party-state loosened its control over society. Practical results became more important than ideological purity, and families who got rich through hard work were praised. Massive changes occurred in the economy, in governmental policies, and in administrative personnel. Significant reforms were adopted even in the political system, although the CCP’s monopoly of power was not questioned and there was not a firm, official commitment to glasnost as in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev. China also opened its economy to the world market. The reforms were remarkably successful. China became one of the most rapidly developing economies in the world, and the nonstate sector developed especially rapidly. Consumer goods proliferated, and lifestyles diversified. Of course, such phenomena as corruption, crime, and pornography also increased. All these changes appeared to signal the end of the revolutionary era and the beginning of a postrevolutionary era in which the party and state would play a defined and limited role.

In 1989 at Tiananmen, the optimism and societal changes of the 1980s unexpectedly collided with the political structure of the party-state formed in the crucible of revolution. Political life in China in the 1990s has been clouded by the violence of 1989 and by anxieties concerning political succession after Deng Xiaoping. In the meantime, making money attracts the attention and efforts of almost everyone, and the economic picture continues to be optimistic. But the mood of Chinese politics can change rapidly,
and the hopes and violence of 1989 have become an important but undigested part of China’s political heritage.

HISTORICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

In Chinese perspective, the PRC is a new political system. The old imperial order, which ended in 1911 with the overthrow of the Qing (Manchu) dynasty, had endured more than 2,000 years. This political tradition, with its remarkable power and longevity, continues to influence Chinese political thought and institutions. Historical orientations, analogies, and comparisons remain common in political discourse.

Personal experience reinforces the closeness and relevance of tradition. Most of the leaders who governed the PRC until recently were born before the fall of the Qing dynasty. Mao and his colleagues knew imperial society at firsthand and were educated, at least partly in the style followed by Chinese intellectuals for centuries. In the 1980s leadership shifted to younger figures without direct experience of the imperial past, but even they are aware of traditional ideas and social patterns that survived after 1911. More importantly, the identity of the CCP was set by three decades of revolutionary activity before it came to power in 1949, and even the younger leaders had come to political maturity during the party’s struggle for victory. It is important, therefore, to take a closer look at the political tradition and revolutionary setting from which the CCP emerged. These sections will be followed by an overview of post-1949 political history, emphasizing changes in China’s society, economy, and international environment.

The Chinese Political Tradition

The Chinese Empire was a centralized authoritarian system staffed by a scholar-bureaucracy. In contrast to Western feudalism, there were no grants of authority to hereditary landed nobility, and entrance to the bureaucracy was gained by means of an examination system that was open, in principle, to anyone. Nevertheless, there was a strong cleavage between the elite and the rest of the population with regard to privileges and opportunities for advancement. The elite included officials of the imperial bureaucracy and the degree-holding scholars or gentry from whose ranks officials were chosen. Supplementing the distinction between elite and commoner was a hierarchic structure of authority throughout society, an intricate network of superior-inferior relationships. Within the political elite, the emperor stood alone at the top of the hierarchy, with absolute power over all his officials and subjects. The bureaucracy was divided by ranks and grades, with each official’s position fixed in a hierarchy descending from the emperor. Beneath the officials came degree holders not selected for official position, ranked according to the degree they held.

Ordinary subjects, who constituted most of the population, fell outside of this political hierarchy. But where the political hierarchy left off, a highly complex structuring of social relationships took over, with profound implications for the political system. Authority within a family or larger kinship group was held by the eldest male within generational lines; the older generation held sway over younger ones, and elder males were superior to females and younger males of the same generation. Of course, the family head was subordinate to the hierarchy extending downward from the emperor, and thereby brought those beneath him into an ordered relationship with political authority. Therefore, the pattern of hierarchic authority was dominant at both elite and popular levels; any kind of social action, political or not, had to take place within its framework. As a result, the rupture of authority that came with the collapse of the old political system traumatized all social relations, and Chinese attempts to reconstruct their political system have usually involved authoritarian and hierarchic authority structures.

The authority structure of traditional China gave the political system supreme power, since the emperor and the bureaucracy—the political leaders—sat at the top of the social hierarchy. Equally significant was the political system’s relative independence from external influence or restraint.

One important aspect of the system’s autonomy was its handling of political recruitment and advancement. Individuals could prepare for a political
career by acquiring knowledge or wealth, but formal
certification came only from the government. Once
there, an officeholder had no constituency that
might dilute service to the emperor. Political repres-
sentation was an unknown concept, although a
quota system in the examinations encouraged distri-
bution of degree holders among the provinces.

Just as it denied external claims to influence or to
membership, the regime acknowledged no legal or
institutional limitations on its actions. The govern-
ment could initiate, manage, regulate, adjudicate, or
repress as it saw fit. Elites admitted a moral obliga-
tion to provide just and responsive government, but
enforcement of that obligation depended on recruit-
ment, which allegedly chose only men of superior
virtue, or on the bureaucracy's own mechanisms of
control and supervision. That is, the obligation was
enforceable only by elite self-regulation.

The ideal of government by a disinterested, edu-
cated elite, chosen through examinations without
reference to class or wealth, profoundly affected tra-
ditional China, but it was never an unqualified real-
ity. Wealth mattered, since officials and official status
could be bought. Personal obligations and loyalties
to family could erode an official's impartiality, as
could those to the same clan, locality, or school. The
system tolerated these discrepancies within bounds
because it had little choice; but it never granted them legal or moral acceptance, and it frequently
punished factional activity or favoritism toward
friends and relatives.

Like its imperial predecessor, the Communist
elite has rejected claims to representation or recogni-
tion of partisan interests within the government.
Competing political organizations are firmly sup-
pressed in favor of the monolithic authority of the
party. Factionalism within the ruling structure is
anathema now, as it was under the emperor, al-
though disapproval has failed in both cases to pre-
vent the evil. In contrast to the past, the present sys-
tem has extended its authority directly to the mass
level, reducing sharply the limited local autonomy al-
lowed under the Manchus. At the same time, by
enlarging the size and responsibilities of the bureau-
cracy and by encouraging economic development and
mass political mobilization, it has made the govern-
mental process more complex and more open to so-
ciety's pressures and demands.

The Chinese tradition contained from ancient
times a number of philosophical-religious schools of
thought, but Confucianism became the official ideol-
ogy of the imperial system. Government officials
were appointed mainly on the basis of superior per-
formance in examinations that tested their knowl-
dge of the Confucian classics. Through lifetime
study of these classics, officials and other scholars in-
ternalized the Confucian beliefs that the role of gov-
ernment is to maintain social order and harmony and
that successful performance of this role rests mainly
on moral education and conduct. The legitimacy of
political authority rested on observance of this moral
discipline, and Confucian ideology thus became an
integrative force that justified political rule, defined
the purposes of the state, provided the values of the
elite, and harmonized diverse interests in society. To
the extent that it was widely accepted, it would bring
society and officialdom together in common loyalty
to rightful imperial authority.

The indispensability of official ideology, carefully
defined and studied, is also central to the Commu-
nist government, although the content of contempo-
rary ideology is completely different. Indeed, the
CCP has gone far beyond the imperial elite in ex-
ploring the integrative benefits of ideology. More-
over, the current ideology stresses the virtues of the
common people and their role in society, making it
significantly more populist than the Confucian ethic.

The Revolutionary Setting

By the late nineteenth century Chinese reformers be-
gan to despair of salvaging the imperial system and
to favor revolutionary programs. When the CCP be-
came a significant force in Chinese politics in the
1930s, the revolution had been in progress for de-
decades and the themes of nationalism, economic
development, and reunification were already at the
top of the political agenda. Communist victory in
1949 reflected the party's ability to respond credibly
to these concerns.

Nationalism was at the forefront of the revolution
throughout, from the initial anti-Manchu sentiment
that held the foreign Qing dynasty responsible for
China's predicament; through frequent boycotts,
strikes and demonstrations that expressed growing
popular resistance to imperialism; and culminating in national struggle against Japanese pressure, invasion and occupation in the 1931–45 period. China was never a full-fledged colony but its "independence" between 1890 and 1945 was only nominal as the country was too weak to exercise its sovereignty. Imperialism’s effects were especially visible to urbanized laborers, intellectuals, and businessmen. They believed that foreign economic activities retarded China’s development and they resented the foreigners’ forced and privileged penetration of their country. China regained full independence after 1945 but conflicts with the United States and the Soviet Union continued the legacy of nationalistic struggle against foreign enemies.

Socioeconomic conditions, the second source of demands for revolutionary change, imposed heavy burdens on a troubled and rebellious population. Most peasants were desperately poor and vulnerable to ruin, due to the power of landlords; high taxes, rents and rates of tenancy; usurious credit practices; fragmented fields and traditional farming methods; illiteracy; and the frequency of flood, drought, banditry, and pillage. Although cities offered better opportunities for a small, growing proletariat, urban living and working conditions were harsh. By the 1920s socioeconomic reform was well established in revolutionary programs but it was a much more controversial goal than nationalism. Although the need for modernization was clear, class issues were divisive. The Guomindang (GMD, Nationalist Party, also called KMT) and its supporters resisted radical land and social reforms, while the CCP gained popularity with its programs for land redistribution and more thoroughgoing social change.

As Qing capabilities declined, it became increasingly evident that China needed not only a nationalist and socioeconomic revolution but also a new system of government that could provide effective leadership and administration. Creation of new political institutions was impossible, however, so long as the country was divided by rival revolutionary and warlord forces. After 1911 China experienced a long era of warlordism in which dozens of regional military leaders competed for local and national power. This chaotic scene channelled popular support toward the GMD and CCP, even encouraging a brief alliance between them against the warlords. After 1928 the GMD achieved a tenuous unification but

never eliminated all the warlords; but the GMD was again at war with the CCP (1927–37), then the Japanese (1937–45), and then resumed civil war with the CCP (1945–49). Only after the unification of the mainland in 1949 could the CCP address the more difficult task of institutionalizing a new political system.

CCP History

The Chinese Communist Party was founded in 1921 by a small group of intellectuals, including Mao Zedong, largely in response to two events. One was the May Fourth Movement of 1919, a national anti-imperialist outburst linked to a broader intellectual effort to promote fundamental change in Chinese culture and society. Radical elements within the May Fourth Movement were looking for a new solution to China’s problems. They found it in the second watershed event, the Russian Revolution of 1919 and Lenin’s call for global revolution. The Russian example of socialist revolution in a decaying bureaucratic empire plus direct Soviet advice and assistance through the Communist International (Comintern) led to the creation of the CCP in 1921. The Comintern was also assisting Sun Yat-sen’s reorganization of the GMD at this time, and it persuaded both parties to join in a united front (the First United Front, 1924–27) against the imperialists and warlords. By 1927 the CCP had grown considerably, but so had the army of the Guomindang under Chiang Kai-shek, and Chiang expelled and attacked the Communists as he was completing his military campaign to unify China.

The CCP remnants in 1928 were a fragmented outlaw party, composed of small armed bands in remote rural areas. It was in these conditions of bandit-like existence that Mao Zedong began to develop his guerrilla military tactics and his combination of political, economic, and military measures. As CCP military power began to grow, its rural bases became the target of increasingly strong GMD attacks. In 1934 this mounting pressure forced the Communists out of their Jiangxi stronghold onto the Long March that ended a year later across China in the northwest province of Shaanxi. There, eventually headquartered in the town of Yanan, the CCP began yet another period of growth that culminated in the 1949 victory.
### TABLE 14.1

**GROWTH OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY, 1921–1992**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period and Year</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
<th>Years Covered</th>
<th>Average Annual Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIRST REVOLUTIONARY CIVIL WAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921 (First Congress)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 (Second Congress)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923 (Third Congress)</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925 (Fourth Congress)</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927 (Fifth Congress)</td>
<td>57,957</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927 (after GMD-CCP rupture)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—47,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECONDARY REVOLUTIONARY CIVIL WAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928 (Sixth Congress)</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>122,318</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>59,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937 (after the Long March)</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTI-JAPANESE WAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>253,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>763,447</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—36,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>735,151</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—27,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>853,420</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>58,635</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945 (Seventh Congress)</td>
<td>1,211,128</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>357,708</td>
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<tr>
<td>THIRD REVOLUTIONARY CIVIL WAR</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1,348,320</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>137,192</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>2,759,456</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,411,136</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>3,065,533</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>306,077</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>4,488,080</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,422,547</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>5,821,604</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,333,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>5,762,293</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>59,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>6,001,698</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>239,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>6,612,254</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>610,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956 (Eighth Congress)</td>
<td>10,734,384</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,374,043</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>12,720,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,985,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>13,960,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>620,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>17,000,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,920,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969 (Ninth Congress)</td>
<td>22,000,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>625,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973 (Tenth Congress)</td>
<td>28,000,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977 (Eleventh Congress)</td>
<td>35,000,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 (Twelfth Congress)</td>
<td>39,000,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>44,000,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>48,000,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,333,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 (Fourteenth Congress)</td>
<td>51,000,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: The figures for 1921 to 1961 are reprinted from John Wilson Lewis, *Leadership in Communist China*. Copyright © 1963 by Cornell University. Used by permission of Cornell University Press. Figures from 1969 on are from official sources.*

The success of the "Yanan Period" (roughly 1936–45) rested on two ingredients. One was a “Second United Front” to resist the Japanese invasion of 1937. Given the previous experience, this was never much more than an armed truce between the two deeply hostile parties, but it gave the CCP more visibility and some respite from full-scale civil war. The second ingredient was the maturation of the Maoist rural revolutionary strategy—essentially a Communist-led peasant revolution drawing appeal from land reform and national defense against Japan. By close association with the peasantry and skillful struggle
against the Japanese and the GMD, the CCP grew into a formidable political and military force by 1945 (see Table 14.1). Although inferior to the GMD in numbers and armament, its dedicated popular support in rural areas enabled it to drive the GMD from the mainland by 1949 and to officially establish the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 1.

During the Yanan period Mao became the CCP’s supreme leader and ideologist. The ultimate ideology was Marxism-Leninism, of course, but Mao’s contribution was his adaptation of Marxism, a theory of urban proletarian revolution, to the Chinese situation in which the overwhelming majority of people lived in primitive rural areas. The fundamental Maoist principle was the mass line, which recognized that the CCP was dependent on the masses for recruits and support and must therefore be mindful of their interests and listen to their views. By insisting that officials should be in close contact with the common people, the CCP hoped to establish a populist image and avoid bureaucratism without giving up its actual decision-making power. Given the GMD’s superiority in every resource except village-level support, the mass line maximized the CCP’s one advantage. Second, Mao extolled self-reliance, the principle that individuals, units, and regions should, so far as possible, be self-sufficient.

While the mass line and self-reliance were appropriate to the CCP’s task of waging a rural revolution, they were far removed from the emphasis on the laws of economic development that Marx had emphasized. Mao’s revolutionary ideology inevitably put more emphasis on correct political leadership, ideological education, and collective willpower than either Marx or Lenin, and his victory confirmed these proclivities. To a great extent the mistakes of Mao’s later leftism can be traced to the nostalgic application of ideas that worked in Yanan to the vastly different circumstances of a complex, modernizing nation.

Political History of the PRC

The PRC’s history falls into three periods. In the first (1949–57), the CCP’s desire to attain security and rapid industrialization by emulating the Soviet Union led it away from its own revolutionary principles (summarized at the end of the preceding section). The second period (1958–76) saw the ascendancy of the Maoist model that revived indigenous revolutionary themes and sought to translate them into developmental policies. The third (1977–89), which has emphasized socialist modernization based on a mixture of Chinese and foreign techniques, was one of ambiguous reform. The leftist dogmatism of the preceding period was rejected, and China experienced sweeping changes under Deng Xiaoping’s pragmatic leadership. However, the CCP was unwilling to give up its monopoly of power, and increasing tensions ultimately led to Tiananmen. Since the massacre, the regime has been in a transitional phase politically, while remaining committed to economic and technological modernization.

The Soviet Model: Reconstruction and the First Five-Year Plan, 1949–57. In January 1950 the PRC concluded a treaty of friendship and alliance with the Soviet Union. In the Cold War climate, soon to be worsened by Sino-American military confrontation in Korea, Mao saw the treaty as China’s best hope for national security and economic assistance. Despite previous conflicts between Chinese and Russian Communists, and obvious differences between the two societies in economic development and revolutionary history, the Soviet model seemed the best, indeed the only, guide for socialist development.

To reconstruct the economy, devastated by decades of war and disorder, was the first task. It was completed by 1952, with production restored to prewar highs, national finances stabilized, and the way prepared for socialization of the economy. The CCP was also consolidating its control over the administrative structure and extending its organizational apparatus to the mass level. Both efforts moved forward in conjunction with mass campaigns that served as vehicles both for party penetration of the villages and implementation of policy. Land reform (1949–52) took land from large holders and gave it to small holders, tenants, and agricultural laborers, breaking the power of the landlords and leveling the rural economy and society. The marriage law campaign proclaimed the legal equality of women and initiated (though far from completed) important changes in kinship organization, social values, and sex roles. Suppression of counterrevolutionaries eradicated GMD supporters and other opponents of the new order, removing any doubts about the new
government's willingness and capacity to deal harshly with its enemies. With its political authority consolidated, major social reforms underway, and the economy restored to an even keel, the CCP was ready to begin the transition to socialism.

The First Five-Year Plan, for 1953–57, was a comprehensive program of planned economic development closely modeled on Soviet practice and emphasizing investment in heavy industry. Soviet aid provided many key industrial facilities and supplies. Land that had been redistributed during land reform was gradually consolidated into rural collectives.

The plan brought rapid industrialization and urbanization. The power and complexity of the central government kept pace, with a top-heavy bureaucracy emerging as the controlling force in Chinese society. Signs of institutionalization were evident in the CCP, in the state structure established in the constitution of 1954, and in the panoply of mass organizations. But a combination of factors diverted this modernization from its conventional course.

Sino-Soviet relations began to cool with Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech in 1956 and the related disorders in Poland and Hungary, which the Chinese saw as symptoms of Russian irresponsibility at home and disregard of "fraternal" parties abroad. Soviet overtures to the United States and lack of enthusiasm for providing military backing or nuclear development aid to the PRC revealed increasingly divergent international interests between the two socialist powers. Domestically, Mao was concerned about the centralization, urbanization, and bureaucratization accompanying the plan. An outburst of criticism from intellectuals in the spring of 1957, in the Hundred Flowers Campaign, persuaded Chinese leaders that it was no time to relax their guard against the "bourgeois" intellectuals, specialists, and technicians favored by modernization. These complicated issues were debated at length between 1956 and 1958, but by late 1957 Mao had led his colleagues to reject the Soviet model and adopt a new, leftist approach to development. The Anti-Rightist Campaign was initiated in which those who had spoken out during the Hundred Flowers Campaign were condemned as "poisonous weeds" and punished.

The Maoist Model: Great Leap and Cultural Revolution, 1958–1976 The Maoist model emerged gradually from the debates of the mid–1950s, but its characteristics became clear only in the Great Leap Forward of 1958 to 1960. The Great Leap was the pivotal issue in Chinese politics between 1958 and 1966, and, despite the massive starvation that it caused, the general principles it advanced held the political initiative until Mao's death in 1976. The Great Leap pulled China sharply away from the Soviet model, embarking on policies of more in keeping with the CCP's revolutionary tradition and Mao's perception of China's priorities. The difficulties it soon encountered led to retreat from some of its features. The result was increasingly tense differences between Maoists and their more moderate opponents, which erupted in the Cultural Revolution and continued throughout the next decade.

Four principles—drawn from a combination of Mao's thought, CCP experience, and dissatisfaction with the five-year plan—underlay the Great Leap. First was the idea of all-around development, that China could accelerate development on all fronts without leaving any sectors behind. Industry retained priority, but agricultural production, and the rural sector in general, were to catch up with it. The people's commune, which emerged in the summer of 1958, was the institution for promoting the Great Leap in the countryside. In 1958 the communes, a larger and more collectivized unit, replaced the cooperatives and simultaneously became the unit of local government in rural areas. Mass mobilization, the second principle, indicated the resource base for the developmental surge. Greater utilization of personnel—through harder work, better motivation, larger organization, and mobilization of the unemployed—made China's population an asset to be substituted for scarce investment funds.

The third principle—that politics takes command—brought much greater emphasis on political unanimity and zeal, partly a reaction against the rightist criticism of 1956–57, and shifted decision-making power away from state ministries toward party committees. Political cadres (party workers), not bureaucrats and experts, were to guide the process. Bureaucrats and intellectuals were pressured to mend their bureaucratic ways and engage in manual labor at the mass level. The fourth factor, decentralization, loosened central control and encouraged lower level units to exercise greater initiative. Decentralization also reflected the heavy stress on
mass line and populist themes that characterized the rhetoric of the period.

The Great Leap achieved some production increases at first, but a crisis soon developed. Flaws in the early leap strategy included weakening of planning and statistical controls, initiation of ill-conceived projects, overworking of the labor force, and general disruption of established work, marketing, and administrative patterns; the last was particularly acute, as the communes amalgamated units that had not previously worked together. Agricultural output declined precipitously in 1959 and 1960 while grain sales to the state increased, leading to a famine that cost more than 20 million lives. As the agricultural base of the economy shrank, all other programs suffered drastic cutbacks.

In 1961 the CCP moderated the Great Leap. Political mobilization gave way to a cautious orientation toward restoring production. Planners, managers, technicians, and experts regained some of their lost status. Commune policy shifted in fundamental ways. The effect was decollectivization of rural management back to the mid-1950s level, although many centralized features of commune life remained.

These reforms had widespread support but soon became controversial. For one thing, some moderates wanted to go further, to experiment with even more "capitalistic" formulas. Increasingly, the issue seemed not simply how to adjust the Great Leap, but whether the CCP was to remain committed to the Maoist model. The issue escalated to more general and potentially factional grounds, feeding on tensions generated by the now open Sino-Soviet hostility. Because the Maoists saw the Soviet Union as both hostile and an "incorrect" model, they looked more closely at domestic opponents for signs of similar tendencies. They found enough evidence to persuade them that their fears of capitalist restoration were justified. For Mao, the danger to his idea of the revolution was real and immediate.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was the second great effort to implement the Maoist model. Like the Great Leap, it began by asserting the model in dramatic, and extreme, terms, moved into a period of consolidation of central control, and ended with a dilemma concerning how much of the initial movement to retain. Unlike the Great Leap, the Cultural Revolution was not primarily an economic campaign—the post-Great Leap economic adjustments remained, despite some criticism—nor did it produce economic difficulties as severe as those of 1959-61. It was far more violent and disruptive, however, and it posed far more sharply the question of how, and at what level, the Maoist model should be institutionalized.

The campaign began in the fall of 1965 with media criticism of some literary figures. In the spring of 1966, the attack shifted to some high party leaders, charging that capitalist roaders trying to install a revisionist system were opposing Mao. Simultaneously, it demanded thorough reform of culture—thought, attitudes, and behavior—to implant the Maoist ethic of struggle, mass line, collectivism, egalitarianism, and unstinting service to society. Soon students in Red Guard groups were carrying the struggle to the streets with fearless criticism of and sometimes violent action against those believed to be opposing Mao or representing bourgeois culture. The Cultural Revolution was thus at once a purging of the political elite, a drive for cultural reform in the broadest sense, and a mobilization of mass action that invited spontaneous organization and criticism. Of course, the Maoists in Beijing sought to control the movement, but their encouragement or at least tolerance of Red Guard activities—which included publication of uncensored newspapers, formation of federations among the mass organizations, and direct action against rival groups and individuals—gave the campaign a degree of spontaneity unique in the history of Communist systems.

Between the summers of 1966 and 1967, the PRC slipped close to anarchy. Party and state offices were paralyzed, schools were closed, cadres at all levels were vulnerable to disgrace or dismissal, and mass organizations brought work stoppages, disrupted transportation and communications, and, in many cases, engaged in full-scale street fighting among rival groups, many of them armed. When the disorder began to involve units of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Maoists pulled back. From the fall of 1967 on, order was restored. The PLA assumed control of much of the administrative apparatus, mass organizations were disbanded, economic functions were reemphasized, and the reconstruction of party and state offices began. The Ninth Party Congress in April 1969 proclaimed defeat of the capitalist roaders and initiation of new policies in accord
with Chairman Mao’s directives. Roughly half the party leadership was gone; the two highest victims were Liu Shaoqi (second to Mao in pre-1966 party rankings) and Deng Xiaoping (perhaps fourth in power, after Mao, Liu, and Premier Zhou Enlai, and who later was to make two dramatic returns to prominence). Replacing these old revolutionary cadres were a large number of PLA commanders, radical party figures, and some new mass representatives who had achieved prominence in the campaign. Of course, there was also a substantial contingent of experienced leaders who had passed the test of the Cultural Revolution and remained in office.

The post-1969 leadership was a coalition of three groupings: the most ardent radicals, who drew strength from close association with the Chairman and their manipulation of his directives (Jiang Qing, Mao’s wife, was perhaps most representative of this group); military figures who, though not united, benefited from Defense Minister Lin Biao’s designation as second-in-command and Mao’s chosen successor; and veteran administrators, led by Zhou Enlai, who represented what was left of the moderates.

This coalition proved unstable. Lin Biao’s purge in 1971, for allegedly plotting a coup against Mao, was followed by reduction in PLA influence. The radicals and moderates were left in uneasy balance, with mounting tension as Mao’s health failed and Zhou sponsored restoration of many old cadres purged in the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping was the most prominent example. His return to power triggered an intense dispute, forced into the open in January 1976 when Zhou died, leaving Deng as his most likely successor as premier. Instead, the Maoists engineered Deng’s second purge, with the premiership going to a relative newcomer and compromise choice, Hua Guofeng. But when Mao died in September, the tables were turned. Hua Guofeng arrested the Gang of Four—the epithet chosen for Jiang Qing and the three other leading radicals—and unleashed a vitriolic campaign against them for distorting Mao’s thought, sabotaging the government and economy with the factionalism, and generally following a right-wing line under the guise of radicalism.

Sharp border clashes with the Soviet Union in 1969, coupled with the beginnings of U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, made Mao and Zhou more receptive to rapprochement with the United States, which was consummated with President Richard Nixon’s visit and the Shanghai Communique early in 1972. Once this step had been taken, the logic of trade and cooperation with capitalist countries—to serve China’s trade, technology, and security needs—was unmistakable. The radicals resisted this notion, as well as any diminution of post-Cultural Revolution reforms, but the latter were already slipping or becoming routine. The factional struggle sharpened, with labor disputes, intra-enterprise feuds, and lowered labor morale. An economic slowdown occurred from 1974 to 1976, caused by many factors but providing good ammunition for those who disliked the Maoist emphasis on struggle. Thus, when Mao died his model was less secure politically and institutionally than one would expect from the apparently unqualified support it had received over the previous decade.

Modernization Model: 1977–1989 A new model emphasizing socialist modernization began after Mao’s death, passing through a transitional phase before assuming clearer form. Modernization had been a goal of the PRC all along, but in contrast to Mao’s leftism, the new model emphasized economic achievement over ideological purity. This historic shift away from a half-century of revolutionary politics and toward a more stable, pragmatic regime has affected every area of policy, but policy change has been uneven, with both advances and retreats. The modernization model is similar to the Maoist model in that there was no general blueprint for policy at the beginning, only a rather vague but determined commitment to a “path.” Modernization has been the most successful path that the PRC has yet pursued, but by the second half of the 1980s it had given rise to tensions between conservative and reform groups within the leadership. The reforms also fostered the growth of societal forces such as intellectuals, students, and entrepreneurs whose interests were in tension with the party-state’s continued monopoly of power. The tensions within the leadership and the demands of new societal forces for more citizen rights led to the Tiananmen crisis in 1989. Since the crisis, the regime still claims to pursue a modernization model and certainly does not want to return to the Maoist model, but the advanced age of the current leaders, uncertainties concerning succession, and the trauma of Tiananmen define the current
situation as one of waiting for a new direction to consolidate itself.

In the transitional phase from Maoism to modernization, lasting from the fall of 1976 to December 1978, Hua Guofeng, who had followed Mao as CCP chairman while continuing as premier, proposed an ambitious development program that would realize the “four modernizations” (of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology) by the year 2000 without discarding Maoist symbols. He proceeded by focusing all criticism on the Gang of Four, not on Mao or Maoism, and by glossing over the hard choices inherent in his call to accelerate economic growth. Hence, although much of the modernization rhetoric appeared, the new approach remained vague.

Deng Xiaoping reemerged as the advocate of a strong commitment to modernization and a break with the Maoist model. He returned to his old positions of party vice-chairman and governmental vice-premier in mid-1977 and mounted an increasingly severe attack on the Maoist model, coupled with indirect criticism of Hua’s ties to it. In May 1978, Deng supported the slogan “Practice Is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth,” which suggested that Mao’s opinions and writings should no longer be binding on PRC policy. The outraged leftists were provoked into a losing struggle with Deng’s “practice faction.”

In December 1978, at the Third Plenum of the CCP’s Eleventh Central Committee, Deng’s forces triumphed. They criticized remaining Maoist leaders, who were among Hua’s main supporters, and announced a “shift of focus” to socialist modernization that would go far beyond the initial post-Mao attacks on the Gang.

The Third Plenum is now considered the beginning of a new era in Chinese politics. Politically, the Maoist model was repudiated in a series of important decisions: posthumous rehabilitation in February 1980 of Liu Shaoqi, arch-foe of Cultural Revolution Maoism; Hua’s loss of the premiership to Zhao Ziyang (September 1980) and of the party chairmanship to Hu Yaobang (June 1981), both new leaders being Deng’s followers; and adoption in June 1981 of a CCP Resolution on Party History that explicitly criticized Mao’s leadership during the period 1958 to 1976, reducing the late chairman to normal human dimensions as one who had both strengths and weaknesses, accomplishments and errors.

Deng’s repudiation of Maoist leftism was balanced by an affirmation of CCP leadership and Communist orthodoxy, leaving the regime in a middle position between leftism and positions considered too bourgeois. Deng was supported in his
struggles with Hua by posters put up on Democracy Wall in Beijing, but after he had consolidated his power, he closed Democracy Wall and outlawed spontaneous political posters. In March 1979 he declared that everyone must uphold the four fundamental principles: the socialist road, the leadership of the party, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought. Statements that officials deemed contrary to these principles became in effect political crimes, and thousands suffered administrative and criminal sanctions. Although the general abolition of class labels was declared in 1979, the notions of dangerous bourgeois elements, bourgeois spiritual pollution, and bourgeois liberalism remained in the CCP's ideological arsenal.

The core of the modernization model was economic policy. Although economic reforms took some steps backward as well as many forward, in general there was an unparalleled expansion in the use of material incentives and of market forces, resulting in the greatest economic growth in modern Chinese history. Individuals and families were encouraged to "enrich themselves," and they did so.

In many respects agricultural reforms set the pace. Poor peasants in Anhui experimented with the "responsibility system" in which household production gradually replaced collective labor. By taking responsibility for production, households were allowed to retain profit, encouraging them to produce as much as possible. They were also allowed more discretion in deciding what to plant and more freedom in private marketing. The results were remarkable. Not only did peasant incomes more than double, but the number of peasants living in poverty was reduced drastically. There was a surge in productivity in both farm produce and rural industry. In 1984 the grain surplus exceeded the state's storage capacity. Such successes spurred further liberalization, including the abolition of mandatory grain production quotas in 1985. It turned out, however, that 1984 was the high point of success in grain production in the 1980s (see Figure 14.1). Grain production did not reach that level again until 1989. As a result, a conflict arose between the government's need for grain and the farmers' desire to grow more profitable crops.

China's urban economy is both more complex and more deeply embedded in the Stalinist administrative model; so reforms here were not as early or as successful as in agriculture. Nevertheless, the abandonment of Maoist reservations concerning profit, bonuses, and marketing led to growth. The structural reform of the urban economy adopted in late 1984 was a major step toward replacing the Stalinist administrative economic system with a socialist commodity economy, one that, like the rural economy, depends more on producer autonomy and market mechanisms. Not only was state industry restructured but also private and cooperative enterprises were encouraged, and these enterprises increased astronomically throughout the 1980s. Both the rapid growth and decentralization contributed to occasional supply crises and to inflation, with inflation becoming a serious problem by 1987 for the first time since the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward.

The modernization model included an "open door" in foreign policy, reforms in education, and efforts to institutionalize the revolution. The open door involved closer relations with the international economy, especially with capitalist countries. To help China acquire foreign capital, technology, and vital goods (oil-drilling rigs, computers, grain). Vital elements here were normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States in December 1978, increased diplomatic and cultural exchanges, rapid expansion of foreign trade with a tourism and export
drive to pay the import bill, and opening of “special economic zones” in China for foreign investment and manufacture.

New policies for education and the intellectuals included higher academic standards, expansion of higher education and research, and efforts to train a large cadre of specialists by identifying talented individuals and sending them to elite schools. Academic debate became more open, contacts with colleagues abroad more regular and productive. Publications became more numerous and varied, and political limits on art and literature were relaxed, though by no means abolished.

Institutionalization restored most organizations weakened or destroyed during the Maoist period. It was accompanied by calls to observe regular procedures and strengthen the legal system. New constitutions were adopted for the state and party in 1982, and both emphasized that the state constitution was binding on the party. A significant development was initiation of popular election of county congresses, with approval of some competition among candidates for popularly elected positions.

The success of the modernization model in delivering economic benefits to most of China’s population and in improving China’s world stature ended any possibility of the return to power of Cultural Revolution leftist. However, modernization faced Deng’s coalition of leaders with difficult choices: how far to go, how fast to go, how much social and political freedom to allow, how much centralization was necessary, and so forth. Opinions differed on every question and on every policy. When a daring policy, like the responsibility system in agriculture, succeeded, then the bolder options on other policies were strengthened. When difficulties with reform occurred, or when the leadership was scandalized by the appearance of crime or pornography, then voices spoke louder urging caution and tighter ideological control. As a result of these differing interpretations of modernization, two different camps gradually emerged among the leadership during the 1980s: the reformers, who favored more radical structural changes, and the conservatives, who wanted to protect the party’s total political control and state control over the economy. Deng Xiaoping remained the final authority because he had a foot in each camp. He was the most prestigious of the veteran leaders, and the conservatives could be confident that he would not compromise the CCP’s monopoly of power. Deng was also the chief patron of reform, and the new leaders of reform, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, were his proteges.

**Leadership Conflict, 1986–1989: The Road to Tiananmen**

Although not officially acknowledged, serious conflict within the central leadership became obvious in 1987, with Hu Yaobang’s resignation.

The course of events leading to Hu’s resignation had begun in early 1986 with a failed attempt by the conservatives to discipline outspoken reformers. The conservatives were encouraged to make this attempt by the inflationary problems associated with the urban reforms; Hu Yaobang, however, not only rejected their attack, but called for even greater freedom of discussion and a new “Hundred Flowers” campaign. Having been given the green light by Hu, the reformers took the offensive. They blamed the difficulties of the urban reform on feudal vestiges in the political system and said that that reform of economic institutions could succeed only if it were accompanied by reform of political institutions. The phrase “political structural reform” became a banner under which political reforms were discussed that were more radical than any hitherto considered. The party’s interference in state affairs was criticized, and greater societal and even political pluralism was suggested. Excited by the political atmosphere, students in 19 cities participated in peaceful demonstrations in December 1986.

The conservatives were of course outraged by the student demonstrations and even more so by the bold initiatives of the reformers. In January 1987 an enlarged Politburo meeting accepted Hu Yaobang’s resignation and began a heated campaign to oppose “bourgeois liberalization.” The conservatives, who appeared to have lost definitively in 1986, now removed their opponent. Hu was criticized for acting on his own without proper consultation, for speaking too freely in public, for encouraging bourgeois liberal intellectuals, and for responding too mildly to the student demonstrations. Many outspoken reformers were removed from their posts or criticized.

It was not a total conservative victory, however. Premier Zhao Ziyang, Hu’s fellow reformer, replaced him as acting secretary, and conservative leaders