

Chapter summary

- In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao Zedong, defeated the capitalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek. Having won the Civil War, the communists formed a new nation, the People's Republic of China.
- China's economy had been very badly damaged by the Second World War and the Civil War. Much of China's industry had been destroyed or had been sabotaged by the Japanese or by the nationalists who had fled to Taiwan.
- China was still largely an agricultural nation. Its economy was still dependent on backward farming methods. Eighty per cent of the population were landless, illiterate peasants.
- The People's Republic was controlled by three interlocking institutions: the Communist Party of China (CCP), the Central People's Government of China and the People's Liberation Army (PLA).
- Mao's personal political prestige increased greatly during this period. The policies that he introduced in the early years of the PRC, such as land reform and attacks on criminal gangs, were largely popular and effective.
- The government of China was based on the concept of democratic centralism. This promised to provide democratic rights to the people of China for the first time while providing a strong central government that could solve China's problems. In reality, these democratic rights were for propaganda purposes; the Communist Party ruled as a one-party state.
- The Communist Party used the People's Liberation Army to control the border regions of China such as Tibet and Xinjiang. Declaring these areas to be a part of China, they launched invasions they termed 'reunification campaigns' to seize power there.
- The Communist Party launched campaigns of terror against their opponents. The Party encouraged the Chinese people themselves to identify and purge so-called 'class enemies' such as nationalist sympathisers, corrupt businessmen and anyone who had links with the West, such as Christian missionaries.
- The regime built a vast new network of prison camps, the *laogai*. Termed 'reform through labour' camps, enemies of the regime were imprisoned in brutal conditions and made to work while being subjected to communist propaganda. Many were tortured and died.
- In 1950 communist North Korea invaded capitalist South Korea. When the United Nations forces repelled the invasion, China entered the Korean War to help its communist ally.
- Mao used the Korean War as an excuse to round up enemies on the pretence of them being spies or enemy saboteurs.
- During the war Mao launched a campaign to generate a sense of patriotism. The 'Resist America, Aid Korea' campaign encouraged the Chinese people to donate money and resources to help the war effort. It helped to create a sense of national identity.
- The Korean War greatly increased Mao's personal prestige. By fighting the joint forces of the United Nations to a standstill, he had proved that the imperialists were, in his words, a 'Paper Tiger'. Communist parties in Asian nations began to look to China, not the Soviet Union, for inspiration.
- The Korean War isolated China internationally. The West was convinced that the PRC was an aggressive nation dedicated to communist revolution. As a result, China was forced to become more dependent on the Soviet Union.