

The Methods of Mao



Mao Zedong

In 1949, Mao Zedong (*MOW dzuh dahng*) became the leader of China's government. His title was Chairman. Mao immediately started using the ideas of communism to try to solve the problems faced by China's people. He began with a series of "Five Year Plans."

The First Five Year Plan

Mao's first Five Year Plan set up a centralized government. It established the idea that government controlled all business. One part of this plan was called, "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom." The goal of this plan was to convince the educated upper class that communism was right for China. It encouraged open discussion about the benefits and challenges of communism. Unfortunately, the plan backfired. There were so many complaints about communism that Mao had to stop this plan. He started an "Anti-Rightist Campaign," which labeled those who criticized his ideas as "Rightists." A person labeled as a Rightist often lost his or her job. Rightists were sometimes sent to jail or to labor camps, where they would be forced to work at difficult tasks for several years. These consequences caused most Chinese people to stop criticizing Mao and his ideas, and established a climate of fear. It also allowed Mao to implement other ideas more freely.

The Great Leap Forward

Mao then addressed the problem of land. China had always had an upper class of landowners, who controlled most of the farmland in the country. In his second Five Year Plan, called, "The Great Leap Forward," Mao *collectivized* thousands of small farms. This means that the farms were taken away from the landowners and combined into large government-owned farms called *communes*. The goal of this plan was to have the peasants work together to raise more food. In this way, they could feed both themselves and the people of China who lived in urban areas. Unfortunately, the idea did not work out as planned. There were too many people on these farms to manage. The government could not organize such large farms well, and food production decreased. Then floods and droughts decreased food production even more. Peasants began starving. It is estimated that millions of Chinese people died of starvation and malnourishment between 1959 and 1961.

The Cultural Revolution

Eventually, the commune system was improved. Farms were made smaller, so that they could be better managed. Food production increased. However, many people were greatly disturbed by the deaths. Many people did not trust the new ways, and tried to keep their ancient Chinese

traditions. Mao was upset by this. He wanted people to only follow his ideas and his ways of life. He started a "Cultural Revolution" in 1966 to gain more support for his ideas. He encouraged the young people of China, mostly high school and college students, to travel throughout China sharing the ideas he recorded in his book, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*. This was also called the "Little Red Book," and his young followers became known as the "Red Guard." His goal in the Cultural Revolution was to get rid of the "olds" – old traditions, old culture, and old thinking. The Red Guards took this very seriously. They began to attack anyone who disagreed with Mao's ideas. They closed schools and factories that did not follow Mao's ideas. They destroyed religious and historic sites. Many teachers were put in jail. In an attempt to get rid of social classes, many other teachers, along with businessmen, were sent to work on the communes as farmers. Eventually, Mao stopped the students because they were causing too many problems.

Throughout his rule, Mao's goal was to improve China. However, he believed that he was the only one who knew what was best for the country. Anyone who disagreed with his plans was removed, and China grew only in the direction that Mao wanted.

Sources: "China in the Twentieth Century, 1911-1996." *DISCovering World History*. Online ed. Detroit: Gale, 2003. Student Resource Center - Gold. Gale. BCPS. 17 June 2009 <http://find.galegroup.com>
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