

## THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR: WHY DID THE COMMUNISTS WIN?



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This Chinese painting shows Mao Zedong proclaiming the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. Behind him stand Communist Party leaders. As leaders fell in and out of favor over the years, the painting was redone three times.

FROM 1911 TO 1949, CHINA EXPERIENCED A REVOLUTION, A STRUGGLE AGAINST WARLORDS, A FOREIGN INVASION, AND FINALLY A CIVIL WAR BETWEEN NATIONALISTS AND COMMUNISTS. THE COMMUNISTS WON THE CIVIL WAR AND RADICALLY CHANGED CHINA.

In 1911, Sun Yat-sen led a revolution that ended thousands of years of rule by imperial dynasties and established the Republic of China. Sun aimed to unify his country and create a European-style elected parliament.

His “Three Principles of the People” envisioned a New China based on nationalism, democracy, and the well-being of the people. In 1919, Sun founded the Kuomintang (KMT), the Chinese National People's Party, to put his principles into practice.

Sun attempted to unify China by defeating a number of regional warlords, each of whom wanted to become master of China. He sought aid from Western countries, but they ignored him. He then turned to the

Soviet Union, which had been formed after the 1917 Russian Communist Revolution. Joseph Stalin, emerging as dictator, agreed to provide Soviet aid to Sun on condition he form a “united front” with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) against the warlords. Sun agreed, and his Nationalist KMT party joined with the CCP in this effort.

A small group of radical Chinese revolutionaries had organized the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921. One of its leaders, Mao Zedong, adapted the Communist theories of Karl Marx to conditions in China. Marx had written that industrial city workers would be the ones to lead the Communist revolution. Mao, the son of a prosperous peasant, believed that a Chinese Communist revolution had to be led by poor peasants, who made up the vast majority of the country's population. Many of these peasants ▶

### WAR AND THE MILITARY

This edition of *Bill of Rights in Action* looks at issues related to war and the military. The first article examines the Chinese Civil War and how the Mao Zedong's Communists defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists. The second article explores the Cold War, the struggle between Western democracies and the Soviet Union and its Communist allies following World War II. The last article looks at the current issue of women and their role in the U.S. armed services.

**World History:** The Chinese Civil War: Why Did the Communists Win?

**U.S. History:** The Cold War: How Did It Start? How Did It End?

**U.S. Government:** Women in the Military

### WORLD HISTORY



Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek reviews his troops.

barely eked out a living, going into debt to rent land from rich landlords.

Sun died in 1925 before achieving his New China. He was replaced by one of his chief military leaders, Chiang Kai-shek, who became the Nationalist president of China. Chiang completed Sun's campaign to defeat the warlords in 1927.

Chiang then turned against the Communists, whom he believed to be loyal to the Soviet Union and a threat to his government. Starting with a massacre of Communists in Shanghai, Chiang's Nationalist forces succeeded in driving them into the countryside of southern China where Mao preached his ideas of a peasant revolution.

Chiang's armies crushed Communist revolts in several areas of southern China. Mao then led a 6,000-mile Communist retreat to northern China, a trek known as the Long March. By 1934, with most of his rivals killed off by the Nationalists, Mao became the unquestioned leader of the Communists in China.

### The Anti-Japanese War

In 1931, the Japanese invaded and occupied Manchuria, the homeland of the last imperial dynasty in northeast China. Because Chiang's priority was destroying the Communists, he did little to oppose the Japanese takeover of this part of China.

In 1936, a group of Chiang's officers, fed up with his reluctance to fight

the Japanese, kidnapped him and forced him to agree to another "united front" with the Communists. But before the Nationalist and Communist forces could accomplish much, the Japanese invaded the rest of China.

During the Anti-Japanese War in China, Chiang's armies did most of the fighting. They were considerably weakened by Japan's superior occupying forces. Mao's armed forces were guerilla fighters who mostly harassed the Japanese, but did not suffer great losses as did Chiang's military.

Since the Japanese mainly occupied eastern Chinese cities, ports, and provinces, Mao was relatively free to expand Communist influence in much of northern China. He had established his capital there after the Long March.

At first, Mao ordered his cadres (Communist political workers) to confiscate landlord properties and distribute them to the peasants. But to gain the widest support during the Anti-Japanese War, he pulled back from this policy and only forced landlords to reduce their peasant land rents.

In the last days of the war, the Soviet Union temporarily occupied Manchuria. Stalin then enabled Mao to establish bases there. Stalin also turned over large quantities of captured Japanese weapons and military equipment to Mao's forces.

In September 1945, a month after Japan surrendered, the U.S. began to

land troops in China, south of Manchuria. The U.S. then airlifted Chiang's troops into Manchuria to take over as the Soviets withdrew. The Manchurian people soon grew hostile to Nationalist military rule, corruption, and support of the landlords.

### The Chinese Civil War

When Japan surrendered, Chiang's troops in Manchuria and the rest of China greatly outnumbered Mao's guerilla fighters. The Nationalists mainly held the cities throughout China while the Communists dominated the peasant countryside in Manchuria and parts of northern China. In these Communist "liberated" areas, Mao's cadres were once again distributing land to the peasants.

Although Stalin had helped Mao build up his military strength in Manchuria, the Soviet leader doubted Mao's revision of Marxism that called for a peasant-led Communist revolution in China. Nor did Stalin believe that Mao's Chinese Communist Party was ready or strong enough to rule China. A better strategy, Stalin advised Mao, was to accept a compromise peace agreement with the Nationalists and then follow Marx's roadmap for a worker revolution.

Nevertheless, armed conflict soon resumed in China between the Nationalists and Communists. U.S. President Harry Truman made several attempts to mediate the conflict, which included arranging a meeting between Chiang and Mao in the fall of 1945. Mao assured the Americans he was interested only in land reform and not the violent overthrow of Chiang's Nationalist government.

The U.S. pressed for a ceasefire and a new government that involved both the Nationalists and Communists. They agreed to a ceasefire, but that quickly fell apart when both sides violated it. In the end, neither Chiang nor Mao was interested in a compromise settlement.

In the summer of 1946, Chiang made a fateful decision. He ordered his armies into northern China and Manchuria to crush the Communists

once and for all. The Chinese Civil War had begun.

President Truman withdrew most American troops from China in early 1947. But the U.S. provided Chiang's Nationalist government with financial aid, weapons, military equipment, and training for his armies.

Chiang's military offensive against the Communists in northern China and Manchuria was at first successful. His armies captured Mao's capital and forced the Communists to retreat. But his armies soon became overextended, as his troop supply system broke down. Mao's small guerilla forces attacked at will.

The military tide turned in favor of the Communists in 1948. Mao's reorganized People's Liberation Army defeated the Nationalists in Manchuria and then moved relentlessly southward. Nationalist leaders pleaded with the U.S. for more help as their armies collapsed. In April 1948, Congress and President Truman approved more economic and military aid, but this proved to be too late.

The decisive battles of the war occurred at the end of 1948 just north of the Yangzi River, which separates northern and southern China. Nearly 2 million soldiers from both sides fought a series of battles, all won by the Communists. The Communists went on to capture with little resistance the Nationalist capital of Nanjing. The speed of Communist advances stunned both Chiang and Mao.

Chiang turned over his authority as president to his vice president in order to gather resources for a counter-offensive. The acting president called for peace negotiations. But Mao sensed total military victory and refused to consider a meaningful peace agreement. In early 1949, President Truman concluded that Chiang's cause was lost and suspended all aid to the Nationalist government.

The Nationalists surrendered Beijing, the capital of old imperial China, without a shot being fired. A month later, Communist soldiers, many with captured U.S. weapons and equip-

## Two Critics

*Below are the opinions of a Chinese city newspaper editor about the Nationalist government and a Christian missionary's account of how rural landlords were being treated by the Communists. Based on these excerpts, what criticisms did the writers make of the Nationalists and Communists?*

In general, everything is for the Government itself; this regime has no interest in anything that is not of direct benefit to it. . . . The people have nothing to eat, does it care? It does not. The people have no clothes to wear. Does it care? It does not. They have no houses in which to live. Does it care? It does not care. The Government only protects the wealthy and cares nothing for the poor.

– Ch'u An-p'ing, newspaper editor, May 1, 1948

We are still in the middle of land reform, and they [the Communists] are busy dealing with the landlords. They are hung by their toes and by their thumbs, they are whipped with thorns, their arms and legs are broken, and there are other tortures. All of this is to make them declare everything they own and where it is hidden. Land, houses, and everything they own are taken from them, and many die as a result of the torture.

– Bergljot Borgen, Christian missionary, early 1948

ment, marched into the city. On October 1, Mao proclaimed the People's Republic of China in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Aided by Stalin, Mao then set out to establish a "people's democratic dictatorship."

In December 1949, Chiang and his supporters fled the mainland to establish a new Nationalist headquarters on the large Chinese island of Taiwan. A month later, President Truman declared the U.S. would not send armed forces or military aid to assist Chiang retake mainland China.

Chiang never returned to the mainland. No formal surrender or peace treaty was ever signed between the Nationalists and the Communists. Historians estimate that up to 6 million soldiers and civilians died in the Chinese Civil War between 1946 and 1949.

## Why Did the Communists Win?

Many Nationalist failures began with Chiang Kai-shek's government. Controlled entirely by his Kuomintang Party, it failed to carry out the reforms promised by Sun Yat-sen.

Chiang's government was filled with incompetent and corrupt officials. The people especially hated the tax collectors, who were commonly called "blood-sucking devils." Chiang himself held dictatorial powers, but his orders were often ignored. He had little success in rallying Chinese nationalism to win an unpopular war against the Communists.

Chiang's decision to go to war against the Communists in 1946 came at the cost of postponing the economic reconstruction of China. This meant diverting tax revenues, investment, and other resources to the war effort rather than to the needs of the people. Heavy taxes, a huge government debt, inflation, unemployment, and food shortages caused many, especially in the cities, to lose faith in the Nationalist government.

Economic discontent in the cities led to thousands of labor strikes. Students, newspaper editors, and intellectuals protested against Chiang's Nationalist government. They demanded an end to the civil war and the creation of a government that included the Communists. The Nationalists responded with censorship, beatings, mass arrests, and even assassinations. This repression drove many to the Communist cause.

The Nationalist government seemed to care only for city business interests and rural landlords while ignoring the suffering of the peasants. In Communist areas captured by the Nationalists during the early part of the civil war, corrupt government administrators helped landlords take back lands that the Communists had handed over to the peasants. The government often punished peasants for participating in Mao's land-distribution programs.

Chiang's army had more soldiers than Mao's, but it was poorly led. Chiang's military was not coordinated by a central command. Generals tended to head independent armies and even competed with one another for food and ammunition. Many officers were corrupt, sometimes selling for personal profit the rice intended for their troops. Chiang's military supply system was inadequate, unreliable, and crippled by corruption.

More important, few volunteered to join Chiang's armies. Most soldiers were drafted against their will or even kidnapped by army "recruiting squads." Soldiers were poorly trained, clothed, and fed. Officers enforced discipline by beating them. Some were roped together on marches to prevent them from deserting.

Communist propaganda took full advantage of all the Nationalist failings. Mao focused on winning over the peasants to gain their support in the civil war. "The battle for China," he said, "is a battle for the hearts and minds of the peasants."

Whenever the Communists secured an area during the civil war, Mao's cadres went to work, organizing village "struggle meetings." Peasants and laborers, who owned little or no land, met to force wealthy landlords to confess their bad treatment of the poor. This sometimes included torturing, beating, or even killing landlords as "enemies of the people."

The cadres then cancelled all debts owed to the landlords and distributed their land and other property to the poor peasants and laborers. What they received became their own private property.

As more peasants and laborers acquired land, more of them had a stake in the success of the Communists. If the Nationalists won the civil war, the new landowners understood they would lose everything the Communists had handed over to them. As a result, they increasingly supported Mao's army with food, labor, transportation, and soldier recruits. Most of these people were not dedicated

Communists, but now they had something to fight for.

Mao had an even greater reason to confiscate and re-distribute land from the landlords to the poor peasants and laborers. In doing so, he destroyed the traditional landlord power structure in the villages and replaced it with new peasant leadership under the control of the Chinese Communist Party.

Land reform built Mao's peasant revolution to transform China into a Communist society. As he kept reminding his cadres, land reform was "the mother of all other work."

Unlike Chiang's numerous independent armies, Mao's People's Liberation Army (PLA) was unified under a tightly controlled central command. Mao's generals, dedicated to the Communist cause, were superior military leaders. They transformed small guerilla bands into a modern conventional army capable of moving quickly to take advantage of the much larger but uncoordinated Nationalist armies.

PLA officers treated ordinary soldiers with more respect than the soldiers got in Chiang's armies. PLA soldiers were also more motivated than Chiang's troops. During the civil war, hundreds of thousands of individual Nationalist soldiers deserted, surrendered, or defected to the Communists.

### The Aftermath

Chiang established a new Kuomintang government on Taiwan, but claimed he was still the president of all China. Likewise, Mao declared that Taiwan was part of the People's Republic of China. This political conflict over Taiwan's status remains unresolved to this day.

As the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao possessed absolute power. To purify the Communist revolution in China, he ordered political purges, mass imprisonment, and executions of "enemies of the people."

By 1955, Mao had forced the peasants to give up their privately owned plots of land to form state-owned collective farms. The peasants

then worked for the government. A few years later, Mao ordered the peasants to work on even larger communes. Food production plummeted, and many Chinese starved.

Mao's political persecutions and failed economic policies killed many millions of people.

Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975, and Mao Zedong died the next year. Following Mao's death, China began to adopt free-market reforms that introduced elements of capitalism into its economy. As a result, the People's Republic of China today has greatly improved the standard of living of the people. The Chinese Communist Party, however, still holds a monopoly of power. It does not tolerate political dissent or anyone who questions its right to rule.

## DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. In what ways were Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong similar?
2. Why did Mao carry out his land-reform ideas during the Chinese Civil War?
3. Should the U.S. have intervened with armed force to prevent the Communists from winning the Chinese Civil War? Why or why not?

## ACTIVITY

### Why Did the Communists Win the Chinese Civil War?

1. Students will each choose two main reasons why they think the Communists won the Chinese Civil War.
2. Students will then support their reasons in an essay based on the information and evidence provided in the article.
3. Next, students will participate in a class discussion to explain and defend their reasons why the Communists won the Chinese Civil War.
4. Finally, the class will vote to choose which two reasons they have discussed provide the best answers to the question.

## Standards

### Chinese Civil War

**Common Core Standard RH.9-10.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

**Common Core Standard WHST.9-10.9:** Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Common Core Standard SL.9-10.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (a.) Come to discussions prepared having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

**National High School World History Standard 38:** Understands reform, revolution, and social change in the world economy of the early 20th century. (7) Understands events and ideas that led to China's revolutionary movements in the early 20th century (e.g., social and cultural conditions in China that led to the New Culture, or May Fourth movement; the four points of Sun Yat-sen's Manifesto for the Revolutionary Alliance [Tong Meng Hui] and to whom these revolutionary goals appealed).

**National High School World History Standard 40:** Understands the search for peace and stability throughout the world in the 1920s and 1930s. (9) Understands elements of social and political change in China in the early 20th century (e.g., which populations supported the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, and how the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s changed viewpoints regarding these two parties; how Mao Zedong adapted Marxism to Chinese needs and how he viewed the peasantry as a revolutionary force; the goals and outcomes of the three major revolutions in China in the first half of the century).

**National High School World History Standard 43:** Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up. (6) Understands factors that influenced political conditions in China after World War II (e.g., how much of the Communist success in the Chinese civil war was the result of Mao Zedong's leadership or Jiang Jieshi's lack of leadership, why rifts developed in the relationships between the U.S.S.R. and China in spite of the common bond of Communist-led government).

**California History-Social Science Standard 10.4:** Students analyze patterns of global change in the era of New Imperialism in at least two of the following regions or countries: Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, Latin America, and the Philippines. (4) Describe the independence struggles of the colonized regions of the world, including the roles of leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen in China, and the roles of ideology and religion.

**California History-Social Science Standard 10.9:** Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world. (4) Analyze the Chinese Civil War, the rise of Mao Zedong, and the subsequent political and economic upheavals in China . . .

### Cold War

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.1:** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text . . .

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.3:** Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**National High School U.S. History Standard 27:** Understands how the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics. (1) Understands U. S. foreign policy from the Truman administration to the Johnson administration (e.g., . . . Kennedy's response to the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis; how the Korean War affected the premises of U. S. foreign policy; . . . (4) Understands factors that contributed to the development of the Cold War . . .

**National High School U.S. History Standard 30:** Understands developments in foreign policy and domestic politics between the Nixon and Clinton presidencies. (3) Understands the impact of the Reagan presidency on relations with other countries (e.g., . . . Reagan's view of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and how that shaped defense policy). . . . (5) Understands the influence of U.S. foreign policy on international events from Nixon to Clinton . . .).

**California History-Social Science Standard 10.9:** Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world. (1) Compare the economic and military power shifts caused by the war, including the Yalta Pact, the development of nuclear weapons, Soviet control over Eastern European nations . . . (2) Analyze the causes of the Cold War, with the free world on one side and Soviet client states on the other . . . (3) Understand the importance of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which established the pattern for America's postwar policy of supplying economic and military aid to prevent the spread of Communism and the resulting economic and political competition in arenas such as Southeast Asia (i.e., the Korean War, Vietnam War), Cuba, and Africa. (7) Analyze the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union . . .

**California History-Social Science Standard 11.9:** Students analyze U. S. foreign policy since World War II. (2) Understand the role of military alliances, including NATO . . . , in deterring communist aggression and maintaining security during the Cold War. (3) Trace the origins and geopolitical consequences . . . of the Cold War and containment policy, including the following: . . . The Truman Doctrine, The Berlin Blockade, The Korean War, The Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis, . . . The Vietnam War. . . (5) Analyze the role of the Reagan administration and other factors in the victory of the West in the Cold War.

### Women in the Military

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

**Common Core Standard SL.11-12.4:** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning . . .

**Common Core Standard RH.11-12.3:** Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**Common Core Standard W.11-12.9:** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**National High School U.S. History Standard 29:** Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties. (2) Understands conflicting perspectives on different issues addressed by the women's rights movement. . . .

**National High School U.S. History Standard 31:** Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States. (5) Understands major contemporary social issues and the groups involved. . . .

**National High School Civics Standard 21:** Understands the formation and implementation of public policy. (4) Understands why agreement may be difficult or impossible on issues . . . because of conflicts about values, principles, and interests.

**California History-Social Science Standard 11.10:** Students Analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights. (7) Analyze . . . differing perspectives on the roles of women.

**California History-Social Science Standard 11.11:** Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

**California History-Social Science Standard 12.2:** Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.

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