**Results of the Great Leap Forward**

Industry:

China’s Gross National Income increased by 8% in 1958 but fell by 30% in 1960. 600,000 backyard furnaces were built in 1958 and steel production more or less reached the target laid down by the government. However the steel produced by the backyard furnaces was of such poor quality that most of it could not be used. The program was therefore abandoned in 1959. The government had not taken into account factors such as availability of coal, iron ore and transport. In spite of the failure of the backyard furnace scheme, the Great Leap Forward marked the beginning of rural industrialization which became a very important feature of China’s economy in the long-term. The communes had considerable success in manufacturing agricultural tools, the production of chemical fertilizers and in uranium mining which also helped to accelerate China’s atomic program. The communes also contributed to large scale irrigation and hydroelectric projects. This model of labor-intensive development was to have considerable appeal to third world countries.

Agriculture:

The impact of the Great Leap Forward was much more disastrous on the countryside.

The 1958 harvest was good at 200 million tons of grain. However, the government published the inflated figure of 260 million tons and set wildly unrealistic targets for 1959. The 1959 and 1960 harvests were poor at only 170 million tons of grain in 1959 and 144 million tons of grain in 1960. China experienced a catastrophic famine: the death rate rose steeply in 1959 from 1.08% to 1.46% of the population and then hugely in 1960 to 2.54% of the population. The rate remained high in 1961 at 1.7%. Because of this, 1959-61 is known as the *Three Bitter Years* when possibly in excess of 20 million people died in the famine.

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| **Year** | **Grain Production** | **Deaths** |
| 1957 | 196 million tons | 7 million |
| 1958 | 200 million tons | 9.6 million |
| 1959 | 170 million tons | 17 million |
| 1960 | 144 million tons | 11 million |

**Reasons for Great Leap Forward Failure**

CCP officials were unable to deal with the huge challenges posed by the Great Leap Forward in particular; local cadres were totally unprepared for managing the vast size of the communes. The Great Leap Forward took off in 1958 with very little prior planning. In addition, mass mobilization- the intensive use of labor- could not, contrary to Mao’s philosophy, compensate for the lack of capital investment in technologically advanced processes such as steel production, hence the failure in the backyard furnace program.

In 1960 the Sino-Soviet split occurred and Khrushchev abruptly withdrew thousands of soviet advisors from China who was helping the Chinese on industrial projects. This, in part explains the slump in industrial production in 1960-61. Flawed agricultural reforms, derived from the ideas of the Russian agronomist, Lysenko, were imposed on the peasants. These included close planting, deep plowing and a campaign against the “Four Pests” (rats, sparrows, flies and mosquitos.) The sparrow population was all but wiped out, which allowed an explosion of caterpillars, which devastated crops.

Grain production fell partly because peasants were heavily involved in industrial projects and land reclamation. After the initial enthusiasm of 1958 wore off, many became exhausted by the demands being made of them. In the autumn of 1958, about 90 million people temporarily abandoned their normal occupation to get involved in steel production.

The withdrawal of material incentives contributed to falling levels of agricultural and industrial output. The peasants disliked the huge size of the communes and the regimented lifestyle and resented the loss of their private plots. In industry, the ending of higher wages for skilled workers and greater output, demotivated factory workers. China suffered abnormally bad weather in 1959-61, leading to serve drought in the North-East and flooding in the South. 60% of China’s arable land was affected.

Although the harvest were poor in 1959-60, they were not so disastrous that a famine should have ensued. Famine was more the product of the CCP’s refusal to admit to failure. Officials at both local and national level claimed a record harvest in 1959 and so the state took 28% of the peasant’s grain as opposed to 17% in 1957. Most of the blame for this failure by officials to report honestly must be laid at Mao’s door. He had by 1958, created a climate of fear in which almost no-one, even within the circle of top CCP leaders, dared criticize his policies. Early in 1959 Mao had begun to accept that there were serious problems with the Great Leap Forward and had agreed to reduce some of its most extravagant targets, but he reacted very badly to criticism made in July 1959, at a Central Committee meeting at Lushan, by his old comrade Marshal Peng Dehuai. Mao even threatened to engage in civil war if the Party did not back him, so the rest of the CCP leadership closed ranks behind Mao and Peng was dismissed as Defense Minister. Disastrously, Mao reaffirmed his faith in the Great Leap Forward, talking of China producing 1,000 million tons of grain and 650 million tons of steel by the end of the 20th century. So the Great Leap Forward was continued until late 1960 and the famine therefore intensified.

**The Great Leap Terminated: 1961**

By the end of 1960, China was in a state of crisis, suffering its worst ever famine. In some provinces, such as Sichuan and Anhui, a quarter of the population starved to death. Armed rebellion by desperate peasants broke out in four western provinces and in Tibet; the PLA had to be deployed to restore order. In the face of this, the CCP turned to Liu Shaoqi (PRC Chairman) and Deng Xiaoping (CCP General Secretary) to restore the economy and grain supplies. The Great Leap was quietly abandoned under the direction if Liu and Deng. These pragmatists emphasized the need to pursue economic policies that worked, rather than placing strict adherence to communist principles above all else. In 1962, Deng famously quoted an old Sichuanese saying: “it doesn’t matter if the Cat is black or white; so long as it catches the mouse, it is a good cat.” Nonetheless, it took five years for agricultural production to recover fully form the damage inflicted by the Great Leap. Industrial output revived much more quickly and, aided by the discovery of a huge oil and gas fields, in Daqing, it doubled by 1965.

**Economic Recovery in the Early 1960s: Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping**

The CCP revered to highly centralized economic planning returning power to the state planning officials in the central bureaucracy. 25 million unemployed urban workers were then forced to move back to the countryside. Material incentives including wage differentials for skilled and unskilled workers were reintroduced. Private plots and markets were encouraged in the countryside, although most arable land remained under the control of communes. By late 1961, CCP local cadres in some provinces were introducing “household responsibility” schemes whereby individual families contracted to farmland on their own.

China imported huge amounts of grain from Australia and Canada throughout the 1960s. in 1961, 6 million tons were imported. Also in 1961 the communes were subdivide, reducing them in size by as much as two-thirds. The much smaller unit, the “production team”, became the principal unit of rural organization and comprised just one village. This marked a major retreat from the radical collectivization of the late 1950s

Most importantly, Mao retired to the “Second Front.” Since the early 1950s, Mao had been planning to step back from the day-to day- running of the government and Party and, as he put it retire to the second front where he would concentrate on strategic thinking and planning, leaving younger colleagues to take over the reins. In accordance with this, Mao gave up his position as the PRC Chairman in 1959. This came before the CCP officially declared the Great Leap to have failed. But because of the disasters of the Great Leap Forward Mao was forced further into the political background than he had anticipated, treated in his words as a “dead ancestor.” However, historians disagree about the extent to which Mao’s influence was limited in the early 1960s. Philip Short argues that even in 1961-62 Liu and Deng were considerably constrained in what they did by a need to maintain Mao’s approval for their policies.

**The CCP Leadership Divides 1962-65**

From 1962, serious divisions emerged between radical communist including Mao himself and the pragmatist or modernizers who supported Liu and Deng’s more ideological flexible economic policies. Mao became alarmed about the direction of Deng and Liu’s economic reforms. Up until 1962, Mao seems to have continued to regard Liu Shaoqi as his most likely successor. However, in January 1962 Mao began to have serious doubts about Liu after the latter had, at the ‘7,000 cadre big conference’ openly supported the “ household responsibility” system which CCP officials had experimented with in some areas. Mao saw this system as tantamount to abandoning socialism and he was horrified to see it extended so that by the summer of 1962 20% of arable land was being farmed individually. From 1962 onwards, therefore, Mao sought to restore his influence over the CCP. He was desperate to prevent the Party becoming, in his eyes, increasingly “revisionist” and going further down the capitalist road.

In order to reassert his control, Mao typically turned to mass mobilization and rectification in the shape of the *Socialist Education Movement*. The *Socialist Education* movement was an attempt to re-educate the masses politically and bring about a fundamental change in a way the Chinese masses saw the world so that they took on a new socialist attitude. Mao intended that CCP officials should undergo self-criticism and subject themselves by the masses. However, throughout 1962-63, Deng and Liu obstructed Mao’s attempt to mobilize the masses. They issued directions which fundamentally altered the Socialist Education Movement; rather than mass mobilization, the CCP leadership organized work teams to go into schools and factories in order to educate the people and with the objective of identifying and removing corrupt local officials. It would take Mao until 1966 to get a mass campaign off the ground; this became known as the Cultural Revolution.

**The Cultural Revolution 1966-76**

**Mao’s Power Base:**

Mao was able to rely on the unswerving loyalty of Lin Biao, the Defense Minister from 1959. Lin encouraged a cult of Mao within the Peoples Liberation Army. In 1963 Lin Published Mao’s *Little Red Book*, which became daily study for the PLA and the population who as a whole were encouraged to read it as their “bible.” A fictional work (presented as fact) called the ***Diary of Lei Feng*** about a lorry driver whose every action was inspired by Mao, was also published in 1963. Both ***The Thoughts of Chairman Mao* (Mao’s Little Red Book)** and the *Diary of Lei Feng* became school set texts.

Mao’s wife Jiang Qing and a group of radicals known as the **Shanghai Forum**, promoted the idea of a total transformation of the arts in China, so that all the pre 1949 art and literature and all western culture were rejected. In 1965-66 the Shanghai Forum, led by Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan, staged a campaign against Wu Han’s play *The Dismissal of Hai Rai from Office*. This was not just an argument about culture because they believed that the play was a thinly veiled attack on Mao’s dismissal of Marshal Peng in 1959. Hai Rai had been a virtuous medieval official unfairly fired for criticizing a corrupt emperor. The radicals were not just trying to silence one intellectual because Wu Han was also Vice-Mayor of Beijing and his boss of and patron, Peng Zhen, Mayor of Beijing, was a close associate of Liu Shaoqi. In June of 1966, the Cultural Revolution Committee (a subcommittee of the Politburo), dominated by radical Maoist, purged the so called Group of Five, including Peng Zhen who were moderates trying to reconcile the radicals and Pragmatists (Deng and Liu’s supporters.)

In 1966, Mao initiated the Cultural Revolution, which caused the greatest disorder in modern Chinese history. Although Mao intended a huge upheaval, it seems clear that events got too far out of the Party’s control, even for Mao’s liking, and by 1969 the worst of the disruption was halted by action by the CCP and the PLA. However, officially the Cultural Revolution did not end until Mao’s death in 1976.

**Mao’s motives for embarking on the Cultural Revolution:**

Mao sought to reassert his authority over the CCP, ending Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xioping’s influence. Mao felt the CCP was moving towards developing an elite of officials and managers and was desperate to stop it. He wanted to change cultural values and sought to attack bourgeois western and traditional Chinese values. Mao was 73 in 1966 and, conscious of his own mortality, he sought to remold the mentality and outlook of the Chinese people. Mao intended to restore the CCP’s revolutionary zeal. Mao was looking to provide China’s young generation with a revolutionary challenge. They were China’s future but they had not been through the crucible of the Long March and the Civil War.

**The Revolution Begins**

From May 1966 there was growing unrest in the universities, encouraged by visiting members of the Cultural Revolution Group. As the Struggle between radical Maoists and the pragmatists intensified, Liu Shaoqi sent work teams into schools and universities to try to prevent the radicals using them to cause disruption. The work teams tried to focus students’ criticism on selected targets. However, this time Mao’s efforts to launch a radical mass campaign were not to be thwarted. High school students in Beijing began to organize themselves in to the Red Guard units, dedicated to carrying out Mao’s will. In July 1966 Mao staged his ***Great Swim*** in the Yangzi River in order to demonstrate his virility and that he was back.

In August 1966 Mao publicly expressed his support for the Red Guard movement in Beijing; this led to Red Guard units being set up all over China. Also in August, Mao in a wall-poster called on students to bombard the CCP headquarters- to seek out and destroy all those who were taking the “capitalist road within the CCP. The resulting wave of revolutionary enthusiasm was supposedly spontaneous but was orchestrated to considerable degree from above.



Also in August 1966 the first huge Maoist rally of over 1 million Red Guards took place in Tiananmen Square. The People’s Liberation Army took over the railway network on behalf of the radical Maoist and young people were given free transport to Beijing. There, they attended hysterical mass rallies before returning to their homes to seek out those in authority who were taking the capitalist road.

**Development of the Cultural Revolution**

Deng and Liu were dismissed in October 1966. Liu died in prison in 1969. Widespread purges were carried out by the Red Guards. Mao proclaimed “it is right to rebel” and urged the Red Guards to attack *“The Four Olds:”* old thought, old culture, old practices and old customs. The Red Guards launched violent attacks on “bad elements” –many CCP officials, teachers, intellectuals and former bourgeoisie were subjected to terrifying psychological and physical assaults. The security Minister, Xie Fuzhi instructed the police not to intervene to prevent Red Guard violence and Kang Sheng, the head of the secret police, helped Red Guards to identify targets within the Party. Although the Cultural Revolution originated with organized activism, once started it proved very difficult to control. Because of this schools and universities closed down.

Once the Cultural Revolution started, Mao withdrew to a large degree to central China, leaving Lin Biao and Jiang Qing to direct affairs. Soon clashes developed between Red Guard factions and between workers and students. In 1966-67 a democratic workers’ movement emerged in Shanghai, which set up the People’s Commune. Mao and others party leaders became worried that China was on the verge of civil war. Thousands were killed at Wuzhou in southern China in clashes between rival Red Guard units. In Guangxi province, ceremonial cannibalism of “Rightists” by Red Guards appears to have occurred.

Zhou Enlai and other moderate Maoists insisted on the restoration of order. In September 1967 Zhou called on the Red Guards to stop the violence and return home. When Red Guard violence did not stop, the PLA sent into restore order. In 1967/68 the PLA was given the key role on new Revolutionary Committees, which were set up in each province. It took a long time to turn of the revolutionary violence, but, by late 1968, the Revolutionary Committees had restored order in most places. In December 1968 Mao called on the Red Guards to leave the cities and go into countryside. 12 million did over the next four years.

**Mao’s Retreat from Radicalism**

The purges and violence went much further than Mao had intended. In addition the emergence of the Shanghai People’s Commune threatened the CCP’s monopoly of power in China. The Cultural Revolution was causing chaos, at a time when the CCP leadership was increasingly worried by the prospect of war with the USSR. And finally a number of military commanders, but not Lin Biao, became worried about the purges of the Cultural Revolution might be extended to the People’s Liberation Army. All of the factors contributed to Mao’s slow policy retreat.

**Results of the Cultural Revolution**

The most impactful result of the Cultural Revolution was the defeat of Liu Shaoqi, Deng Zianping and the “revisionists.” However, Deng would be rehabilitated in 1973 and helped shape China’s economic policies from then on (with the exception of 1976 when he was temporarily disgraced).

The Cult of Mao reached its height. In 1969, a new constitution defined “Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Zedong Thought” as the guiding line of the CCP. “May 7th Schools” were set up to re-educate Party officials each year in Maoist thought and by working in the fields. Education, particularly higher education, was disastrously disrupted. During the Cultural Revolution admission to university was based on “political consciousnesses” rather than academic qualifications. Chinese art and literature became very sterile and Jiang Qing imposed strict controls on what could be displayed, performed and published. The Red Guards destroyed a lot of ancient Chinese art, including Buddhist temples.

The People’s Republic became increasing isolated internationally. Westerners were attacked in China and in August 1967 the British embassy was sacked by a mob. Additionally, about 500,000 people died (some estimates suggest millions.) The main victims were intellectuals and officials, not peasants as in the Great Leap Forward. The prison camp system (Laogai) also expanded.

The period 1968-70 saw a massive transfer of 20 to 30 million urban inhabitants to the countryside. This interestingly enough contributed to the fact that the economy was not severely damaged. There was some disruption to industry but by 1970 industrial output had risen to record levels. However, much of the state’s investment in 1964-71 was in the “Third Front”, military industrial development in North-West and South-West China. This was another waste of resources.

**Assessing the Cultural Revolution**

Mao saw the Cultural Revolution as over by 1970, having defeated his revisionist opponents. However, the period of Maoist indoctrination and domination, which the Cultural Revolution represents, did not end until 1976 with Mao’s death.

The Cultural Revolution can be viewed as the escalation of certain features present in the People’s Republic since 1949 – namely, public denunciation, struggle sessions and mass mobilization. It had essentially been an urban phenomenon and the countryside had suffered much less disruption than towns.

**Mao’s last years 1971-1976**

**The Rise and Fall of Lin Biao**

Initially Lin Biao seemed to have emerged from the Cultural Revolution in a very strong position. In 1969 he was officially confirmed as Mao’s successor and in the same year 10 of the 16 Politburo members were members of the armed forces. However, only 3 of these 10 were supporters of Lin, and Mao was already having doubts about Lin. In September 1971 Lin mysteriously disappeared; the CCP claimed that he had been planning a coup and an assassination attempt on Mao, and had fled by plane to Russia but had died in a crash over Mongolia.

Lin seems to have been purged by Mao because he was opposed to closer links with the United States. Zhou En-lai pushed for a rapprochement with the USA because of the very strained relations between China and the USSR- in 1969 there had been military clashes along the Sino-Soviet boarder and the CCP leadership had been alarmed at the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Also China needed Western investment to boost its economy. In 1971 the United States Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger secretly visited China and in 1972 the world was stunned by President Nixon’s visit to China. The USA withdrew its opposition to the People’s Republic entering the United Nation. However, full diplomatic relations were not officially restored until 1979.

**Faction Struggles Continues (1971-76): Radicals vs. Pragmatists**

From 1971 Zhou Enlai and Mao were effectively running the Party but both were aging and in 1972 Zhou was diagnosed with cancer. Deng Ziaoping was allowed back to Beijing in 1973 and appointed as Vice-Premier. It was not clear whether the radicals or pragmatists would secure control of the Party on Mao’s death. There was an ongoing debate in the 1970s about the direction of economic policy; the radicals argued for maintaining centralized controls and emphasized the importance of mass mobilization and production focused on quantity and speed. The modernizers, led by Deng and, up to 1976, Zhou Enlai, stressed gradualism, quality production and the expansion of incentives and wage differentials. In 1975-6 this debate centered around Deng and Zhou’s proposed *Four Modernizations.*

The radicals were still a force in the Party, particularly Jiang Qing, Zhan Chunquiao, Yan Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen. In 1973 three of them were appointed to the Politburo and Wang Hongwen, a radical Shanghai trade union leader, was presented as Mao’s successor. In order to balance the radicals, Mao decided that Deng Xiaoping should be rehabilitated and restored to the Central Committee in 1973. In 1973 the radicals launched a propaganda attack on Zhou and his revisionist policies in the so-called “Criticize Confucius and Lin Biao” campaign.

In January 1976 Zhou Enlai died and Mao backed the relatively obscure Hua Guofeng as the new Premier. He was essentially a compromise candidate, a moderate Maoist. In April 1976 Deng was sacked as Vice-Premier, following demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in Zhou Enlai’s memory. At this point, Hua Guofeng sided with the radicals against Deng Xiaoping.

In September 1976 Mao died and, within weeks, Hua Guofeng ordered the arrest of the radicals who were dubbed “the Gang of Four.” They were accused of planning a coup and were eventually put on trial in 1980. Jiang Qing was sentenced to death but this was commuted to life imprisonment; she died in 1991.

In 1977 Deng was appointed as number three in Party hierarchy as the CCP Secretary and he increasingly shaped China’s economic policies. From the late 1970s, through his death in 1997, Deng was the dominant figure in the CCP. He was a modernizer, seeking trade with the USA and Japan and introduced reforms such as increased incentives and decentralization.