



**CHINESE
COMMUNIST
PARTY @100**



© BCL India | Balakrishna Consulting LLP & its affiliates

This document is a compilation of information publicly available on the Chinese Communist Party. We have, where necessary, added our comments to help improve reader experience.

Cover image from Freepik/fanjianhua

BCL India
Bangalore, India.
www.bclindia.in
pavan@bclindia.in

“

...we will never allow anyone to bully,
oppress, or subjugate [China].
Anyone who tries will find them on a
collision course with a steel wall
forged by 1.4 billion people.



- Xi Jinping, at a ceremony marking the centenary of the CCP in Beijing

PREAMBLE

On October 1st 1949, Mao Zedong, chairman of the CCP, proclaimed the establishment of the PRC

One hundred years ago, the Republic of China, as it was known then, had just emerged from over 5000 years of monarchy. The Kuomintang (KMT or Nationalist Party) was in charge, and its leader Sun Yat-sen had visions to transform China into a modern democratic state. At the same time, its neighbour in the North was in the midst of a communist revolution that led to the birth of the Soviet Union. The influence of Marxist Theory and Leninism was being felt not only in China, but all over the world. Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, eventual founders of the CCP, were considered to be the leading Chinese intellectuals of the time and also began to publicly support communist ideologies. With the assistance of the Bolsheviks, the CCP was established on the 1st of July 1921.

For the next 30 years the CCP was engaged in a long battle with the KMT for control of China. Until the 2nd World War, the KMT was undoubtedly the incumbent. The War forced an uneasy alliance between the two rivals in an effort to protect China against the imperial forces of Japan. China,

now briefly united under one common struggle, became one of the four major allies of World War 2.

The CCP used this temporary truce to expand its operations and create bases across the country in preparation for an inevitable civil war with the KMT once the world war came to an end. With the surrender of the Japanese in 1945, the CCP and the KMT resumed their conflict. While the KMT had three times as many troops as the CCP and was also backed by the US and Japan, the CCP prevailed thanks to the involvement of the masses and the assistance of the Soviet Union.

The KMT eventually retreated offshore to Taiwan and on October 1st 1949, Mao Zedong, chairman of the CCP, proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC)



MAO ZEDONG

The period of the land reforms was characterised by wide scale 'classicide'.

Since 1912, when China became Asia's first republic, the country was in a continuous state of political uncertainty. Regional warlords were in constant conflict with their counterparts and the country was ideologically divided. The vast majority of the Chinese people, however, were extremely poor.

One of the most consequential policies implemented by Mao was that of the land reforms. The most simplistic explanation of these reforms is that it was a mere redistribution of land in near equal measure amongst the country's farmers. The reality of the execution of this policy is quite a different story. It was not as simple as the government seizing land from rich farmers and simply allocating it amongst the country's peasants. Mao called upon the people to violently overthrow their landlords and seize the farmlands that according to communist philosophy had rightfully belonged to them. Mao believed that if the people took matters into their own hands, and actively participated in a violent revolution, then they would be intimately tied to the idea of a communist China for generations to come. He was right.



The period of the land reforms was one of the most violent in the country's modern history, and was characterised by wide scale 'classicide'. Landowners were purged and were either publicly executed or sent to labour camps where most of them died anyway.

Estimates range from anywhere between 200,000 to 5 million deaths during this period. At the end of it, the middle class grew to include 90% of the population and China became what was perhaps the most equal society in modern existence.

Ownership of farmlands before & after reforms				
Classification	No. of households (10,000)	Proportion of households	Proportion of cultivated land before reforms	Proportion of cultivated land after reforms
Poor Farmer	6,062	57.4%	14.2%	41.7%
Middle Peasants	3,081	29.2%	30.9%	44.3%
Rich Farmer	325	3.1%	13.7%	6.4%
Landlord	400	3.8%	38.2%	2.2%
Others	686	6.5%	2.8%	-
Total	10,554	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: CCP Surveys 1949-1979

The land reforms of the 1950s may well have been Mao’s most important contribution to the PRC. The remainder of his reign as the premier of his country consisted of severe economic problems. In 1958, Mao embarked on the ‘Great Leap Forward’. This was a part of the second of the country’s Five Year Plans and was to be characterised by increased grain production and rapid industrialisation.

To realise this goal, ‘people’s communes’ were established across the country. These were meant to be the highest of the administrative levels in rural China and were responsible

for the production and accounting of grain, amongst other social, political, and economic functions. The local officials who were in charge of these communes routinely reported surpluses in production to the higher central authorities out of fear as they did not want to be branded as a 'rightist'. Anti-rightist campaigns were well underway in China at this point as Mao wanted to get rid of any individuals whose point of view differed from the principles of the CCP.

Local officials feared that if they reported the actual amount of grain production, which was well below Mao's claims to the international community, then they might be accused of undermining the revolution and thus risk being classified as a rightist. These false surpluses that were reported led to the largest famine ever recorded in human history. The Great Chinese Famine of 1959-61 resulted in the deaths of between 15 and 55 million people. At the time, surplus grains were to be deposited with the central government for safekeeping in the event of a famine, which was not an uncommon occurrence in China.

The problem was that the surpluses in many cases were all that was produced to begin with, which left many of the farmers to starve as they had no grain left to feed themselves. China also had export agreements with the Soviet Union to supply grain which it had to deliver on. Mao was more interested in maintaining a positive public image with the rest of the world in an effort to prove that the communist experiment was working, and as such millions of people in the country were left abandoned. Retrospective analysis shows that the Great Leap Forward



was a massive failure in policy as industrialisation did not result in increased economic growth and the famine itself was a monumental disaster. This led to Mao stepping down as the head of the country but he continued on as the chairman of the CCP.



Great Chinese Famine of 1959-61

Chinese communism became extremely vulnerable by the mid-1960s as it had failed to produce economic prosperity. Between 1950 and 1973, China grew at a modest 2.9% annually. As a result, alternative ideologies revolving around capitalism and right-wing thought began to gain prominence. In order to regain complete control over the

country, Mao launched the 'Cultural Revolution' in 1966. The aim of this movement was to eradicate Chinese society of any capitalist or traditionalist elements.

State-sponsored violence over the next decade led to the deaths of anything between a few hundred thousand and 20 million people over the following decade. Anyone suspected of being a part of the bourgeois, especially if they were in government, were executed. The 'Red Guards' were formed and was comprised mainly of students who were a part of the Mao personality cult and carried out the purge on the ground level by means of violence. One of the most horrifying massacres that took place was in the region of Guangxi.

Some 150,000 people were murdered and the methods of killing included beheading, live burial, drowning, boiling, and disemboweling. The most disturbing feature of this massacre, however, was the prevalence of widespread cannibalism. Numerous accounts of the events state that cannibalism occurred routinely and was done so out of a ritualistic compulsion. Historically, cases of cannibalism have been reported as a result of famine i.e, desperation. This was not the case in Guangxi. It was a matter of total and utter domination of one's enemy.

The Cultural Revolution, along with the land reforms of the 1950s, mark two of the most violent episodes in not only Chinese but also world history. During the latter years of the revolution Mao's health began to deteriorate sharply and in 1976, he passed away. His chosen successor was a man



named Hua Guofeng who was a devoted Maoist, but over the next two years Deng Xiaoping, who was one of the targets of the Cultural Revolution, wrestled away control from Guofeng and became the leader of the PRC in 1978.



DENG XIAOPING

The 'Architect of Modern China'.

Deng Xiaoping took control of a country that was in desperate need of reform. The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution had left the Chinese people disenchanted with communism. Deng embarked on a series of social, cultural, and economic reforms that would go on to transform China into the country that it is today. He supported the one-child policy and introduced compulsory education until the 9th grade across the country.

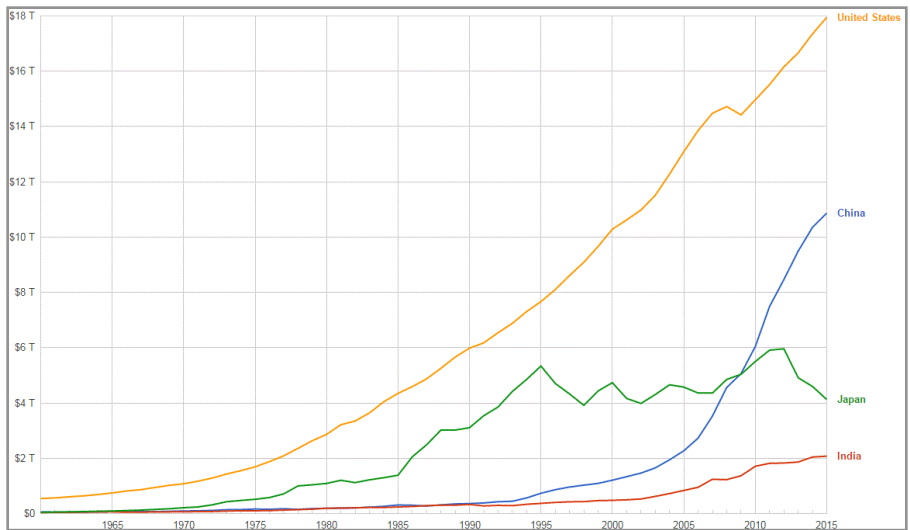
He also took the bold step of opening up China to the world, embracing a significant amount of capitalist principles. Individuals were allowed to start their own businesses and private farming was once again allowed. Foreign investment was accepted and the gradual privatisation of industry began during the late 1980's. Between 1978 and 2013, the PRC grew at an unprecedented 9.5% every year and Deng Xiaoping is rightfully known as the 'Architect of Modern China'.

Over the following decades, the CCP committed itself to Deng's vision for a modern, capitalistic China that retained only some of the values of its original chairman. This period also witnessed little to no violence or death, except of



course for the incident at Tienanmen Square in 1989, when student protests were brutally squashed by the military. As China's economy was changing, there was concern amongst its people about issues like rising inequality and inflation, and serious questions were asked about whether the one-party system is best suited for such an economy.

The incident remains to this day a black mark on the recent history of the CCP. Still, economic growth continued to accelerate and the average Chinese citizen had few complaints.



GDP of China vs Rest of the World. Source: World Bank

Transition of power from one leader to the next was peaceful, and China's image in the international forum gradually began to improve. In 2008, the CCP officials gathered in Beijing to decide on a successor. While Xi Jinping was not the original choice, he managed to convince his colleagues within the CCP that he was the best choice. How he managed to do this remains unclear as the inner workings of the CCP notoriously lack transparency.

Xi was elevated to the level of Vice President and in early 2013, he began his reign as China's newest leader.

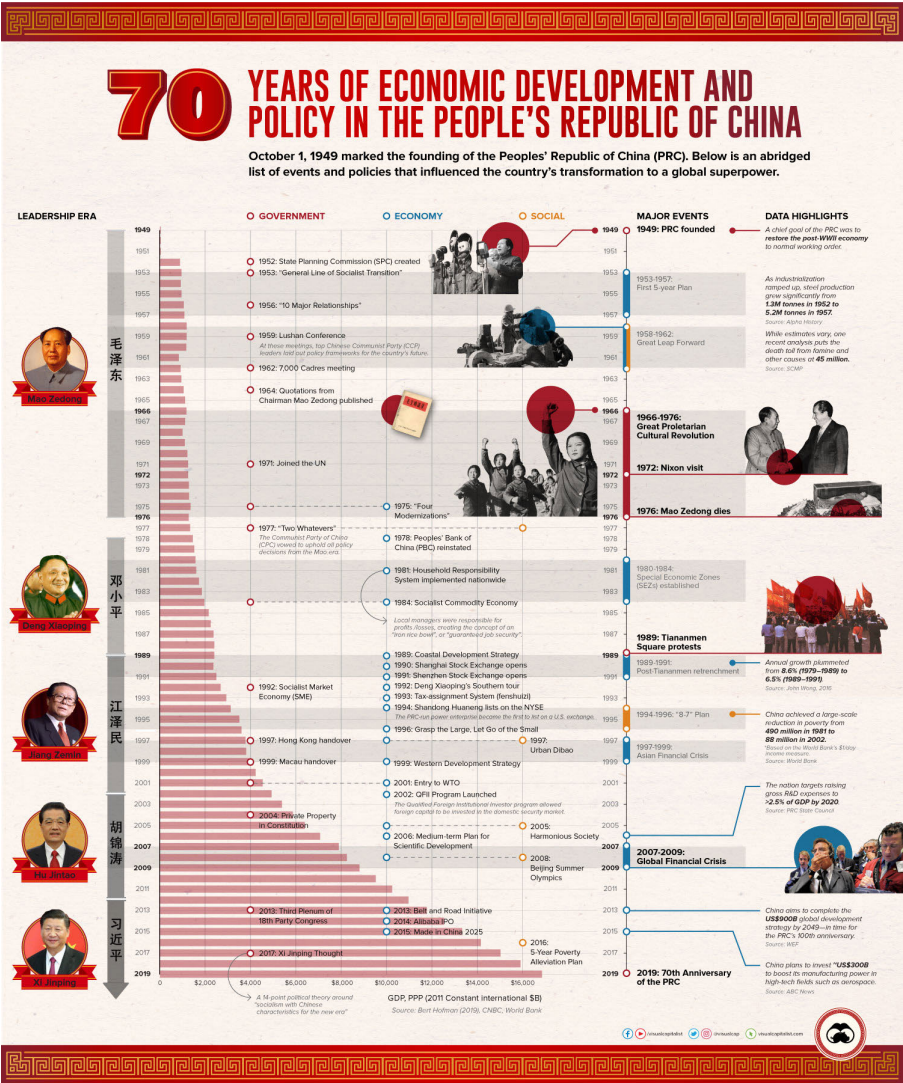
XI JINPING

Xi made extraordinary amendments to the Chinese constitution in 2018.

Xi's reign thus far has been particularly conspicuous. He began his presidency with an anti-corruption campaign meant to root out all corrupt elements from the CCP. As it turned out, almost all of Xi's political rivals were expelled and the ones who remained are those who are loyal to Xi. He also made an extraordinary amendment to the Chinese constitution in 2018 wherein the 2-term limit for the president was removed, meaning that Xi could potentially remain in his position until the end of his life. He is currently 68.

Xi Jinping has been compared to Mao Zedong because of the manner in which he has gone about his rule over China. He has eliminated those who disagree with him and has given himself free rein to remain in power for as long as he pleases. He is currently amongst the most powerful men in the world thanks to reforms and amendments that he has introduced. Considering that for the last two decades the CCP leadership has made an effort to move away from the influence of Mao, it is surprising to see a man like Xi be in power now.

Still, China remains one of the fastest growing economies in the world and it is increasing its influence around the world through its Belt and Road Initiative, one of the largest infrastructure projects ever attempted.



He has largely continued to work towards growing China's economy but at the same time has made it clear that the private sector will only flourish if the CCP is respected. Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba, criticised the Chinese leadership and paid the price when Xi subsequently stopped the launch of his IPO.

While Xi's predecessors favoured more freedom for the private sector, Xi himself has grown wary of the implications of such freedoms for the CCP. The Chinese tech industry has been doing particularly well in recent years. Xi, however, understands the kind of influence the tech industry can have on national proceedings based on evidence from the US, UK, India, and so on over the last few years. He has ordered an anti-monopoly crackdown on the leading tech firms and has sought to rein them in wherever possible. The message is clear, at the end of the day no entity can be bigger or more powerful than the CCP, and Xi understands that this is critical for the continued success of his party.



CONCLUSION

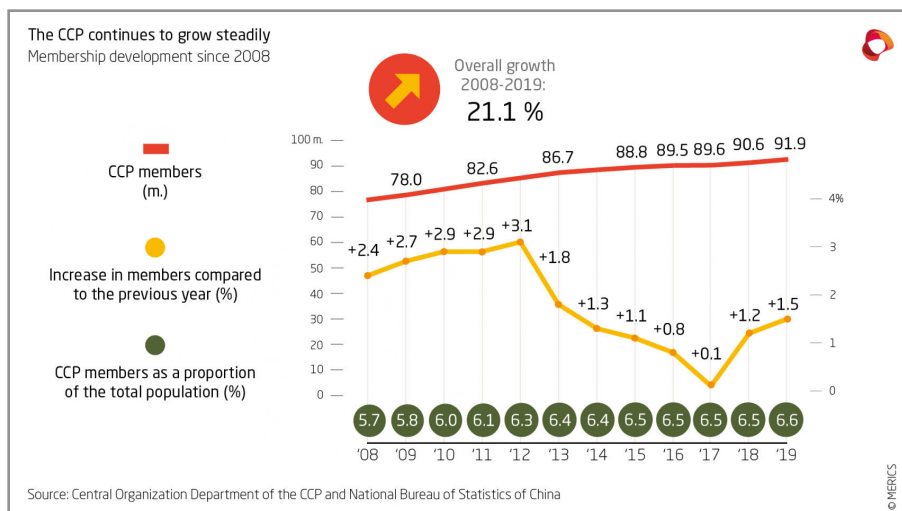
Why do the Chinese, unquestioningly, accept the rule of CCP?

This concludes the story of China over the last one hundred years, but what explains the endurance of the CCP over such a long period when other similar political institutions have fallen? There are a number of answers. The early establishment of the CCP, headed by Mao Zedong certainly played a vital role.

It was mentioned before how Mao got the peasants involved in the revolution process with respect to the land reforms, wherein the people themselves conducted the killing of the landlords and the taking back of the farmlands. This decision ensured that the poor of China, who formed the vast majority of the population, became personally attached to the CCP and the PRC. When a person goes to the extent of killing another individual, it becomes something that stays with that person for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, it gets passed down through the generations.

The killings themselves were sanctioned by the state and it is the state that guarantees protection to the killers. This creates a certain bond between the millions and millions of

peasants and poor farmers who were engaged in these activities and the government, which in this case of course is the CCP. With one audacious decision, Mao won the loyalty of his country for generations to come.



Deng Xiaoping was in many ways even more important to the success of the CCP as a political institution as he created economic prosperity for the country. He also did so by moving away from the communist principles of his predecessor. While the CCP terms its economic policies as 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', it is clear to the outside world that the correct terminology revolves around the word capitalism. Deng famously said that, "It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, if it catches mice it is a good cat." While the people may have been loyal to the CCP, they were not necessarily loyal to the idea of communism.

It had become clear by the time that Deng had taken over that communism as it was being practiced under Mao was not working. The wisdom in Deng's leadership was his ability to adapt. The evidence from China provides a valuable lesson for any society, which is that it does not matter what philosophy or ideology one subscribes to, what matters is the prosperity of the people. If Deng's policies had not lifted 150 million people out of poverty in the short space of a decade, if it had not turned China into the global superpower that is today, then there would undoubtedly be discontentment.

Why do the Chinese accept the CCP as their rulers? It is because the CCP has taken care of them. It has certainly committed unimaginable horrors on its own people, but the CCP has acknowledged that it was wrong and subsequently expressed regret. It has not unflinchingly stood by its actions of the past, it has condemned. Is that enough? To many observers, probably not. At the end of the day not everyone who committed crimes during the Cultural Revolution and the land reform period were brought to justice. Many were prosecuted and sent to jail, but many were let off with mere demotions or salary cuts. The Chinese people, however, have accepted a compromise of economic prosperity to make up for the horrors of the past.

This does not mean that the CCP will forever be here to stay. It has to remain vigilant to the demands of its people and it must continue to deliver economic success. Discontentment is always just around the corner, but it is up to the government to ensure good governance.

The 100th anniversary of the CCP is an event, however, which will serve as an emblematic reminder of the party's continued durability.

