

8.1. DE-COLONISATION IN ASIA (CHINA)

Entry of the Western Powers

In the early part of the 19th century China kept itself aloof from the rest of the world. It maintained the traditional way of living peacefully since the Manchus took over in 1640s. But in the mid-19th century, the Europeans started knocking at doors of China for commercial privileges. The Portuguese first established themselves at Macao, then the Dutch at Formosa and the British at Canton. Taking advantage of the Opium Wars for long three years (1839-42), the British forced China to handover Hong Kong and compelled her to grant trade facilities at certain ports. Other Western Powers followed the path of Britain and gradually Chinese territories were parceled out among the European powers.

Taiping and Boxer Rebellion and Aftermath

During 1850-64, a movement known as **Taiping Rebellion** started and spread all over Southern China. It was partly a religious and partly a political reform movement. Ultimately the movement was suppressed by regional armies. This was the beginning of the process of asserting independence of the regional rulers from the Central government.

In 1894-95 China was defeated by Japan and was forced to surrender huge territories. The protest against foreign encroachment and exploitation was seen in **Boxer Rising (1898-1900)**. The Boxer rising became a violent anti-foreign movement but the Chinese were defeated by an international army. The foreigners then dictated the terms of the settlement. The Manchu Empress

Tzu had to pay huge compensation for the damage of the property of the foreigners. The Boxer movement thus offered a genuine attempt to save the integrity of China.

In the early years of the 20th Century, thousands of Chinese students went abroad for educational purposes. They came from abroad with radical ideas and wanted to westernize China by overthrowing the old, decadent Manchu dynasty. The lead was given by **Sun-Yat-Sen**, a **Doctor of Medicine**. He skillfully turned the anti-Manchu agitation into a Republican movement.

THE REVOLUTION OF 1911

The government responded to the call of the Radicals, called a National Assembly in 1910 and offered sweeping concessions including constitutional government of the Parliamentary type. But the supporters were not willing to compromise with the Manchu autocracy. In 1911 the supporters of Sun Yat-Sen revolted against the Manchus and captured Nanking which was then made the capital of the provisional Republic. They made Sun Yat-Sen the President of the Republic. In February 1912, the Manchu Emperor abdicated the throne and the Republic was proclaimed over the whole of China.

Rule of Yuan-Shi-Kai

Sun Yat-Sen resigned as President in favour of **Yuan-Shi-Kai**, an able general and a shrewd politician. With the support of the army, Yuan ruled as a military dictator upsetting the expectations of Sun Yat-Sen. He wanted to consolidate his position with the help of the foreign powers. Yuan started propaganda in favour of restoration of monarchy and establishment of a new dynasty. This led to protest and insurrection in the Southern provinces where Republican sentiment was strong. Matters were heading towards a crisis which was, however, averted by the sudden death of Yuan-Shi-kai in 1916.

Role of Japan

China had no direct relation in the First World War, but Japan declared **twenty one demands** in China, calculated to make China a Japanese protectorate. England, France and Russia signed a secret treaty with Japan and this compelled the Big Powers to accept Japan's claim on Chinese territories. In the Versailles Treaty, Shantung province of China which was then under German control, was given to Japan. This news produced violent explosion of popular feeling in China. Anti-Japan agitation thus flared up.

The Kuomintang Party and the Communists

The fate of China was then in the hands of the Kuomintang Party or National People's Party founded by Sun Yat-Sen. His ideas were influential but he had very little powers outside Canton area. Sun Yat-Sen wanted to reorganize KMT Party with Russian help. **Michael Borodin**, an able

Russian diplomat, transformed the KMT Party into a highly organized party of disciplined members. The membership of the party was now thrown open to all including the Communists provided they accepted the KMT principles. Sun Yat-Sen's main principles were nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood. Sun Yat gained enormous respect as an intellectual statesman and revolutionary leader. When he died in 1925, little progress had been done towards achieving those three principles.

Chiang-Kai-Shek Era

After Sun Yat-Sen's death in 1925, **Chiang-Kai-Shek** became the leader of the KMT Party. He completed his military education from Tokya Military College. He also went to Russia to study military development. During this time, new Soviet Russian government helped and guided the KMT Party in the hope that nationalist China would become friendly towards Russia. But though Chiang had close relation with Soviet Russia, he was not a Communist. During 1927, Chiang felt that the Communists became very popular inside KMT Party. The pro-Communist nationalist army set up a parallel government at Hankow and captured Nanking. Chiang now decided to get rid of the Communists and started purification movement. Thus he purged the KMT of the Communists and the Radicals in course of which the Communists were massacred. He then cut off all relations with the Russian Communists in 1927 and set up a Nationalist government at Nanking.

Long March of the Communists

To purge the Communists, he carried out five expeditions against them between 1930 and 1934. **Mao-Zedong** now became the leader of the Communists. Being chased by Chiang, the Communist members took shelter in the mountains between Hunan and Kiangsi provinces and concentrated in building up the Red Army. Very soon the base was surrounded by KMT army for final destruction of the Communists and the leaders. Mao then realized that only chance of survival was to break through Chiang's defence. With all the Communists forces, Mao started the **memorable and historical Long March** of more than 6,000 miles to join the other Communist forces of North West. They had to cross 18 mountain ranges, 24 rivers and had to proceed through heavy fighting. Thousands thus perished on the way and finally 20,000 survivors reached the province of Yen-an where a new base was organized. This Long March is one of the epics of history and proved to be a brilliant piece of Communist propaganda.

Retreat of Chiang Kai-Shek

In 1937 Japan's attack temporarily unified both the Communists and the KMT Party. They jointly offered resistance against Japan. But with the collapse of Japan in the Second World War, quarrel came to a head. In this long struggle between the Nationalists KMT and the Communists, the Communists compelled the KMT and its supporters to leave the mainland of China and to

take refuge at Formosa, a place protected by the United States of America. The victorious Communist Party then proclaimed China as the People's Republic of China on 1 October, 1949, with Mao Zedong as the Chairman of the Republic.



Chiang Kai-shek



Mao Zedong

Causes of the Communist Victory

1. The KMT and the Nationalist army faced the main attack of Japanese invasion and the strain of long resistance. As a result, the government became weak, army weaker. The depletion of the effective military power led to a consequent increase in the relative strength of the Communists.
2. Chiang Kai-Shek and the KMT Party were discredited for corruption and inefficiency of its officialdom. There was widespread bribery and the top-ranking officials adopted all means which would benefit them. Chiang was not prepared to offend his supporters in any way.
3. The KMT Party depended more and more on the support of the landlords and the propertied class. They looked after the interests of the industrialists, bankers and land owners and took no initiative to organize mass support.
4. On the other side, the Communists won the hearts of the people by their zeal and sincerity for a clean government. Their troops were orderly, disciplined and never looted the properties of the civilians nor outraged women. Naturally, the people were convinced that the Communists were sincerely concerned for the welfare of the people. Thus the success of the Communists was due to the weakness of the KMT. This led to the growing popularity of the Communists.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC AND ITS INITIAL PROBLEMS

After the Communist victory over the KMT in 1949, Mao-Zedong set about rebuilding the shattered China. The problems facing the new government were numerous and complex. The country was devastated after the long civil war and the war with Japan. Roads, railways, canals and dykes had been destroyed and there were chronic food shortage. The industry was backward; agriculture was inefficient and incapable of feeding the poverty-stricken masses. Inflation was out of control. Mao got the support of the peasants and a section of the middle class who were disgusted by the miserable performance of the KMT Party. It was really very difficult to manage such a vast country like China. He began experiments, by a process of trial and error, to find which would work in China and where a special Chinese approach was necessary. He first wanted to introduce reforms in agricultural field.

Agrarian Policy

Lands were thus taken from the big landowners and redistributed among the peasants, no doubt with violence in places. The peasants were persuaded to join together in cooperative farms. By 1956, about 95 percent peasants were in cooperatives with joint ownership of the farm and equipments.

Industrial Policy

In the next step, the Communist government nationalized most of the business. In 1953 the government undertook a scheme of **Five Year Plan** for the development of heavy industries like iron, steel, chemicals etc. The Russians came forward to help the new government with cash, equipments and advisers. There was no doubt that under Mao, the country gradually recovered from the ravages of wars. Very soon, inflation came under control and country became wealthier. Side by side, smaller factories were set up in the countryside to provide tools to the peasantry.

THE HUNDRED FLOWERS CAMPAIGN, 1957

The industrialization had created a new class of technicians and engineers in the country. The party cadres started to believe that this new class of experts would threaten their authority. The government now decided that open discussion regarding the problem might improve relations between the party cadres and the experts or the intellectuals. 'Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend', said Mao and he called for constructive criticism. But he got more than he had anticipated. The critics then attacked the cadres for incompetence and over-enthusiasm, the government for over-centralization and the Communist Party for being undemocratic; some even suggested that opposition parties should be allowed. Now Mao called off the campaign and clamped down his critics. He now insisted that his policies were right.¹

1. Norman Lowe-Mastering Modern World History, P.359.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

After the defeat of the KMT Party, the Communist Party under Mao captured China which became People's Republic in 1949. The Constitution of 1950 was finally adopted in 1954. The new Constitution provided the National People's Congress, the final authority for legislation. The members of this body were elected for four years by the people over 18 years. The State Council and the Chairman of the Republic were to be elected by the Congress. Their function was to see that the laws were carried out and the administration of the country went ahead. The State Council chose the Political Bureau (Politburo) which took all the important decisions. The system was dominated by the Communist Party whose members could contest any election. For the first time, China got a strong Central Government and this system more or less remained unchanged.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

After the Communist victory over KMT Party, Mao-Zedong started rebuilding the country with all efforts. In the late 50s, China's relation with Russia cooled down and naturally Russian economic aid was gradually reduced. Mao Zedong now introduced the '**Great Leap Forward**' programme by which Communism was adopted to meet the Chinese condition and situation with an idea of decentralization of power.

THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD

The first step was the introduction of Communes where people ran their own collective farms and performed the function of the local government under an elected Council. In the Commune, each family received a share of profits from the sale of produced.

In the second step, emphasis on the big industries was reduced. Instead, small factories were set up to supply tools and machinery to the agriculturists. Under the management of the Communists, different public works like building of roads, construction of dams, reservoirs and others were undertaken.

In the initial stage, it appeared to be a failure for many reasons. But in the long run, it became successful because both agriculture and industrial production increased substantially. It was decided that China would remain an agricultural and the economy would be labour-oriented to enable the country to avoid the growing unemployment problem.

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, 1966-69

Mao Zedong always tried to keep the revolution and the Great Leap on a pure Marxist-Leninist course. But there were a number of leaders who wanted an expert managerial class to push forward industrialization on the Russian model, instead of relying on the cadres. But Mao never agreed with this view and condemned the Russian policy for a number of reasons. Thus there was a great public debate about what course to be followed. He launched a campaign to save the revolution. In this Great Cultural Revolution, Mao appealed to the masses. In 1964 Mao

claimed that literary and artistic circles had behaved for the last 15 years as arrogant bureaucrats, had not been identified with the workers and peasants and had not reflected socialist revolution and socialist construction. In 1965 he also criticized bourgeois authorities in the universities. In 1966, certain party leaders of Peking and their journals were attacked for their pro-capitalist views.

In this movement, the Red Guards (mostly students) played an important role. They were offered free rail transport to move anywhere in the country, free food and free lodging in schools and colleges. They toured the country arguing Mao's case, while schools and later factories were closed down. It was an incredible propaganda exercise in which Mao tried to renew revolutionary fervour. Unfortunately it brought chaos and something close to civil war. The student masses physically attacked anybody in authority, not just critics of Mao. Teachers, professionals, local party officials and others were their targets. As a result, millions of people were disgraced and ruined. By 1967 the extremists among the Red Guards were out of control and Mao had to call the army to restore order. Many were arrested and even executed for committing excesses. At the Party Conference in April, 1969, the Cultural Revolution was declared to be ended. The Cultural Revolution thus caused great disruption, ruined millions of lives and probably held up China's economic development by ten years.

CONTRIBUTION OF MAO ZEDONG

The contribution of Mao Zedong was great in Chinese history. A scattered China became united by his great efforts. The famous Red Army of China was the creation of Mao. His policy of Five Year Plan and the Great Leap Forward Policy placed China on a stable economic and financial condition. He realized that blind imitation of Russian policy would not help the Chinese people. Hence, Mao decided to implement communist ideal according to the need of China and became very successful. By his efforts, China gradually became a powerful state in world politics.

Answer the following:

1. Mention the causes for the victory of the Communists.
2. Discuss the cultural Revolution of 1966-69 of China.
3. Mention any two contributions of Mao Zedong.