

Industrialization and urbanization in china history essay



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The Great Leap Forward of China (Peoples Republic of China) was a social and economic crusade with the aim to develop industry and agriculture by then ruling Communist Party of China (CPC). It was adopted in 1958 as an ambitious five year plan intended to utilize the huge population of China to rapidly transform her economy from an agrarian one to a modernized one such that the economy of China would rival that of United States by the year 1988 (Bachman, 1991). However, the plan was discontinued in 1961 when they realized that it was not feasible. The leader, Mao Zedong, aimed to achieve the Great Leap Forward plan by developing agriculture and industries chiefly through the process of collectivization (Kataoka, 1968). The leader believed that these two sectors had to be developed first to let other key sectors to develop too; industries could only flourish if the workers were well fed, whilst the agricultural work force required industries to produce new, modern equipments and machineries necessary for modernization. To achieve this, Peoples Republic of China was reformed into enormous communes, and in less than a year, approximately nine hundred million Chinese peasants were mobilized to work in these collective forms (Kataoka, 1968). Many communist strategies and policies were adopted to ensure the implementation of the plans; the Great Leap Forward was an intensification of the Soviet-type industrialization strategy.

The Great Forward Leap had a lot of similarities with the soviet-type industrialization strategy; it was based on the oppressive communist principles. Kataoka (1968) explains that many transformations occurred in the lives of the Chinese peasants living in rural areas; agricultural collectivization was introduced and gradually made compulsory for all.

Private ownership of land and farming was banned, and those who engaged in it were punished severely for being counter revolutionaries. The administration was done through party members and communes leaders; restriction control of rural inhabitants was imposed through social pressure, propaganda and public struggle sessions. They utilized force, coercion and systematic violence to ensure that the peasants obeyed the rules.

Regardless of the great mobilization of the rural peasants and the ambitious plans of the leaders, the Great Leap Forward did not achieve the anticipated massive developments. Poor decisions and mistakes by the party leaders characterized and contributed, in part, to its failure. Eventually, The Great Leap culminated in devastation, with consequential death of the people in tens of millions; approximates show a range from eighteen to forty-six million individuals (Dikötter, 2010).

After the first five year plan, Mao Zedong alarmed by various events and uprisings in Europe concluded that communism was the best way for China to go. The next five year plan was the Great Forward Leap which created the communes; they were large enough consisting of large collective farms each composed of about five thousand families (Dikötter, 2010). Just like in the Soviet Union, they had comprehended that this system would be unpopular with the peasants, thus; they brought them under Party control (Kataoka, 1968). They executed the working in the collective farms by convening meetings and then ensuring that the peasants stayed for long periods until they had no choice but to join the communes. Apart from the economic changes, the party also instituted key social changes in the rural areas including the expulsion of all spiritual and religious institutions and

ceremonies and substituted them with party meetings and propaganda sessions. They introduced internal passports banning travel without appropriate authorization and dictated what was to be planted. For instance, they replaced the farming of opium with rice. Peasants in the rural areas worked in communes owned by the state and the grain they produced was for cities and export, to earn foreign exchange.

Families in a communes relinquished individual possession and tenure of farm equipments and animals such that all were owned by the commune; they now labored and toiled for the state-owned commune and not for themselves as individuals. Nearly all aspects of the life of the peasants in the commune were controlled by the commune; education facilities were offered by the communes so that all grownups could work. Health care services were given by the communes and the aged were taken into establishment ironically named houses of happiness in order that they could be cared for. Moreover, individuals could work hard and not have to be troubled about leaving their aged family members back at home. The communes made available all that the peasants required - including entertainment. Peasants toiled alongside the soldiers. The populace in a commune was sub-grouped; dozen families formed a work team, a dozen work teams composed a brigade. Every sub-division was assigned a particular work to complete. The communist party members supervised the work and running of a commune to make sure those decisions executed were in line with party policies.

The state adopted all strategies it could to fluff up enthusiasm and passion for the communes. Propaganda was used in all places - to the extent that there were public address systems out in the fields through which thousands

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of the peasant workforces could listen to political speeches as they toil. Propaganda posters were widely used to spread the ideologies of the party. Everyone engaged in communes was urged not only to work hard to achieve set targets but to surpass them. If the machines were deficient or inadequate in the communes, the workforce used their bare hands. Major buildings and structures were constructed in record time - although the strength of most of them was doubtful. The local leaders in the communes were forced into falsifying information and spreading propaganda from senior party leaders. For instance, they had at times to report ever-higher grain production records to their political seniors (Wei & Yang, 2005). People attending political meetings talk of production quantities being exaggerated up to ten times of the real production quantities as the pursuit to thrill superiors and win praise intensified. The government was later on capable of compelling, many production groups to put up for sale higher quantities of grain than they were capable based on these embellished production quantities.

Bachman (2011) depicts the state-owned communes as a type of discrimination system for Chinese peasant families. The commune system adopted in the great forward leaped was intended at exploiting rural peasants to produce for cities and urban areas and building industrial units, offices, educational facilities, and social insurance structures for elite cadres and officials residing in towns. The peasants in the countryside who condemned the plan were classified as dangerous, counter revolutionaries. Running away was also very hard, mostly even impossible, and those who tried were faced with severe repercussions that sometimes resulted in death.

Apart from agriculture projects, state-owned communes also participated in various medium scale industries and building projects. The prohibition of private ownership of property devastated the life of the peasants at its most basic level, according to Bachman (1991). Rural populace were incapable of securing sufficient food to support a decent living, since the customary ways of leasing out, selling, or using their properties as collateral for credit were dispossessed of them by the commune system. In some villages, after the commune systems were adopted, the Party leader and his men took immediate inhumane actions, commanding peasants to spend nights toiling and laboring for intolerable hours, and ordering them to march, starved, to far-flung additional projects (Bachman, 1991).

Yang (2008) notes that local party officials were unmoved regardless of the great number of peasants dying while working, as their main concern was the production of grain, which the state needed to utilize in settling the billions of loans from the Soviet Union. The Communist Party was aware of the fact that their strategies were responsible for causing the starvation. In some provinces such as Xinyang; peasants succumbed to starvation at the entrances of grain warehouses (Yang, 2008). Senior party leaders even acknowledged that the deaths were a price the country has to pay; downplaying the deaths as a minor thing. As yang (2008) notes, in a covert gathering in Shanghai in 1959, Mao ordered the procurement of a third of all grain by the state to provision the urban areas and foreign clients, and he remarks that if the state does not pass above that quota, citizens will not rebel. He further comments that as there is not sufficient food to feed all citizens and some will have to starve, then the best way is to let half of them

to starve so that the rest can have enough. Like in the Soviet Union, through the starvation of 1932-1933, peasants were incarcerated to their starved villages by a scheme of registration of households, and the nastiest results of the food shortage were aimed at opponents of the regime (Yang, 2008).

Yang (2008) further explains how those tagged as being religious leaders, activists and rich peasants were given the last priority in the allotment of foodstuff, and consequently, died in the record numbers.