

Communists in china essay



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Why were the Communists able to come to power in China? The Communists were able to come to power principally because of the policies and actions used by the Guomindang of which the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) took advantage. However in addition to this, there were also significant factors such as the conditions during the beginning of the twentieth century complications in the republic China and the Japanese War (1937-45), which led to the vulnerability and insufficiency of the GMD during the Civil War. Their leader, Chiang Kai-shek, lost the support of the majority, mainly peasants and intellectuals, to the CCP, which contributed to their success in war, and he was no longer able to continue dictating China. In combination with GMD's actions, Mao Zedong, the communist leader was able to take over and declare, the by then already united nation, the Peoples Republic of China. The discontent in China was rooted in problems, which arose during the early twentieth century. In addition to this the CCP was able to use the situation in order to give people hope as well as help, which won the majority to the communist side. Until the early twentieth century, China's rule was based on dynasties, which followed the Confucian theories. The Chinese thought of their nation as Zhongguo'-the center of the world, disclaiming any interest in the west. The Qing dynasty, established in 1644, ruled China over 250 years.

Already during the nineteenth century, China had been weakened through foreign trade, war and influence. As the discontentment increased, the people wanted to alter the situation and showed concern about the outcome of the Boxer Rebellion'. This Rebellion and its aftermath prompted some reforms in China. However, it was a case of too little, too late'. The Qing

dynasty was seen to be failing the people of China. It had lost its right to the Mandate from Heaven. In 1908 the Dowager Empress, CiXi, died and her three year-old grand nephew, PuYi, was proclaimed emperor. The discontent grew even further, therefore several groups, such as the Tongmenghui, organized to overthrow the Qing. Surprisingly, the actual uprising developed on 10 October 1911 among a group of plotters in the army, which soon controlled the province of Wuchang. This action inspired others and due to the consequences of the Wuchang Uprising'.

On 1 January 1912 Sun Yatsen (a member of Tongmenghui) was announced the provincial president of the Republic of China. Still, he was forced to resign from the provisional presidency because of Yuan Shikai, who organized the abdication of the Qing emperor in return for his own appointment as president of the republic. Also in 1912, a new revolutionary party was formed. This party, called the Guomindang, believed in parliamentary democracy and the principle of electing the officials. Because Yuan disagreed with GMD's ideas, he outlawed it in 1913.

One year later WWI broke out in Europe and Japan took advantage of the outbreak. By 1915, they invaded Qingdao and confronted Yuan Shikai with a list of twenty one demands, to some extent controlling and influencing the economic situation on China. These demands were not only exceptionally harmful to the economy but they were also seen as extreme humiliations to the Chinese people.

In 1916, after Yuan's death, Sun Yatsen took over the nation. He promoted modernization and the revolt against obedience'.

When the First World War ended the Chinese assumed their allies would reward them. Due to rejection of the award, they developed a New Culture movement, which was pro democracy and education, but rejected Confucianism and old ways'. Furthermore, they declined the democratic systems of Great Britain and France. In 1919, when at Versailles the allies decided not to reward China, the people were outraged. A rebellion, called May 4th Movement took place, demanding a more Socialist system. At this stage, the Soviet regimes and their withdrawal from the war started to appear to the Chinese.

Two years after the signing of the Treaty, in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was set up in Beijing and Paris, with leaders Mao Zedong and Chou Enlan.

In sum, the Chinese had lived in insecure conditions, of which some are due to major problems and disruption after European penetration in early nineteenth century. Therefore, the people were looking for a government, which would bring solutions and put a final end to their struggle. In order for the Communists to come to power, they turned the mistakes of Guomindang's policies and actions into an even more positive view of themselves to the people. At the beginning the GMD sought to bring about a democratic revolution. Their socialist leader, Sun Yatsen, therefore introduced three principles, Nationalism, Democracy and People's livelihood. His idea of Nationalism consisted of a strong central government, which would have had to be able to expel foreign influence and restore independence of China. Democracy was sun's attempt to secure liberty and equality, in a country, which previously had a long history of imperial

dynastic rule. In addition to this he demanded a fair distribution of wealth such as land and reflection of people's livelihood. It became obvious that there was no harmony in the Chinese society. Mainly the warlords and foreigners increasingly contributed to the division of the country. In addition an opposition established of privileged classes.

After Sun Yatsen's death in 1925, Chiang Kai-Shek (also a GMD member) took over GMD leadership, confronting his problems in a more aggressive way than Sun did. Chiang, being a general, set priorities, in which he had put the military unification first, whereas any other reforms were regarded of a minor importance. Already after two years of being a president, he dictated a massacre in the city of Shanghai where 6000 communists were ruthlessly killed. By expelling the Communists and left wing GMD members and coalition, of which the government existed, split. Therefore, Chiang organized his own nationalist government at Nanjing, in 1928. He couldn't fulfil Sun Yatsen's ideas of nationalism because he didn't prevent the Japanese from invading. He was unable to totally unite China also because of his desire to alienate the CCP and the peasants. He also allied with the landlords and the warlords making the concept of People's Livelihood a policy no longer profitable or even possible to be pursued. This was because the landlords and the warlords were cruelly taking advantage of the people, making their life miserable.

Democracy, which he never reached, was no issue for Chiang, due to lack of basics in such a political leadership. He never gave the people a right to demand their will, for example.

During the Sino- Japanese War of 1937-45, within 3 months Shanghai and Nanjing had fallen, showing GMD's useless leadership skills and lack of tactics and efficient battle experience, against Japanese harsh, better equipped and organized attacks.

The retreat of GMD's local officials to Chongqing exposed large areas of China to CCP influence. Chiang, being a military dictator, believed that China's unity could only be achieved by force of arms and overthrow of those, who resisted nationalist government, including primarily the communists and only later warlords and finally the Japanese.

To make up their economic losses and to lessen the inflation, the Guomindang introduced a system of taxes and credit in the countryside. These were extremely unfair and they contributed to the increase of discontent among the people. The land rent, which was to be paid by the peasants, made up 45% of their total harvest. If the rent was not paid, farmers were likely to wind up in prison because landlords were strongly supported by law. Also, when collecting the land taxes, the tax collector was often free to charge whatever the peasants could afford, because they did not know what the legal rate was. This reflects how distant Chiang's legal and financial and legal system was from the peasants, which made up 90% of the population. It can be concluded, that within the GMD government there was no, after Sun, no interest in a social revolution and those reforms were made, had little effect outside larger towns or the welfare of the majority of the population. Thus, initial support for GMD was alienated as the Chinese still looked for a solution not only to their social, political and economic problems but also to the expulsion of the Japanese invaders.

A very important factor in determining the success for the CCP was in fact their policies and actions they introduced during the Japanese war and in the areas they controlled. After WWI, the Chinese economy began to experience a crisis. The war time demand for Chinese products, currency manipulations (internationally in the 1920's) as well as the world depression in the 1930's, all contributed to the unbearable situation . Partly because of the weakened unstable central government, which was unable to solve these critical economic problems, the emergence of a significant movement, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was necessary.

In 1921, a few young radicals, including Mao Zedong, held the first congress of the CCP. He later said :” The communist ideological and social system alone is full of youth and vitality, sweeping the world with the momentum of an avalanche and the force of a thunderbolt” 1At that stage, the party was not considered to be able to ever rule China. Three years after their first congress, the Chinese Communists were advised to enter into a cooperative relationship with the GMD, by Michael Bordin - a Russian political advisor, who helped in the building up of Sun Yatsen's party.

By 1924, the CCP and GMD united in order to defeat the warlords, which were still partially ruling Chinese provinces. But after Sun's death, Chiang Kai-Shek took over (1925) and he was regarded as a super warlord'.

This coalition lasted until Chiang Kai-shek's leadership year (1927). By expelling the communists from the government and organizing the anti CCP, Shanghai massacre, Chiang destroyed the CCP-GMD alliance, declaring a rival government at Nanjing.

Therefore the communists were forced to set up their Red base areas', from where they could promote their influences into China. In contrast to the conservative GMD, the Communist Party grew rapidly, pushing policies such as land reform and labour unions. These differences made Chiang execute thousands of CCP and union members. Those, who were lucky enough to escape this bloody purge either took the hills or went underground in the cities. They began to abandon their urban preoccupations, because it was in the cities, where Chiang had the greatest power. The communists therefore realized that their opportunity lay in the suffering countryside and the peasantry.

By 1930, Mao together with other communist rebels established a rural base area in southeastern province Jiangxi. For success among the peasants they began to work out more equitable land policies, military tactics involving the local peasants and other doctrines.

In October 1934 about 100, 000 communists began the Long March', which covered over 6 thousand miles. This gave the communists an important strategic advantage, because although it was in effect a tactical defeat militarily - this came with beneficial psychological and organizational effects that included positive involvement of peasants along the route of the march. The CCP proclaimed that they were marching to fight Japan, at a time when people all over China became increasingly disturbed by Japanese incursions in the north. In the public mind, the CCP knew what their problems were and were, more importantly, prepared to do something about the situation.

Therefore, the Second World War was a useful opportunity, where they showed their efficient guerilla warfare under Mao's firm leadership. More and more peasants became actively resistant, because of the Japanese atrocities. As a result of the weakness or absence of local notables, the communists were able to place themselves at the head of this movement of popular patriotic resistance to the foreign invaders.

The CCP also included the status of women into their policies. As Mao said, 'Women hold up half the sky'. With these reforms the communists were able to free women from their husbands and other men, in the same way they freed the peasants from the landlords and the moneylenders. Therefore, it can be said that the communist policies and tactics appealed to the Chinese people, which were desperately searching for solutions. CCP gave different types of society a better status and chance to contribute to the nation's development, be it the Japanese war or just' social and economic improvement. For the CCP to replace the GMD, the requirement of masses, especially peasants and intellectuals was required. With more appealing policies and actions, they were able to achieve their aim, establishing the Peoples Republic of China.

Peasants, making up the majority of the Chinese population, were facing increasingly harsh conditions. They had to struggle on a limited crop producing area and with a growing population. Also inflation and Great Depression (1929) made their lives unbearable, due to the constantly increasing taxes, interest rates and high land rentals. Although Mao, the communist leader, did not initially believe that peasants could lead the revolution in China, he said later: "Peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like <https://assignbuster.com/communists-in-china-essay/>

a hurricane, a force so swift and violent, that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officers, local tyrants, and evil gentry into their graves.”

2Indeed, the communists have proven that their ability to take control of the country was a reasonable fact.

During the times of peace the key to winning over the peasants was land reforms, lower taxes, the abolition of debt and the creation of local self-government. The Red Army' (communist army), during the Japanese war as well as the civil war, proved to be courageous and careful not to offend peasants. They tried to fairly distribute the land, support the women, and encourage the people to join up, valuing education and prestige. Unlike the communists, the GMD had no support for the peasants to offer. They led them (peasants) to an absolute despair, during the quiet time but also used and mistreated them during the times of war.

Another important group of society were the intellectuals, whose approval traditionally mattered in China. From the GMD they were already alienated in the 1920's and 1930's, but the CCP found them to be a key class towards the revolution. This can be seen from two points of view. For the communists there was a fear that the intellectuals might not support their ideas. The more positive side was the desire to take advantage of the intellectuals' skills. To win these intellectuals, the CCP supported them by arranging the provision of salaries and other facilities. They also organized Party-controlled associations for each intellectual area. This way the CCP was able to see, how their ideas were taken and how they developed.

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The two key classes, intellectuals and peasants, were convinced by the CCP and considered the communist ideas as a solution to their problems. Thus, the CCP used this situation to persuade the people of China and therefore by receiving the support from the majority the communists were able to come to power.

Because of the foreign influences, such as Japanese and Western, the Chinese feared for the safety of their nation. “ If we do not promote nationalism and weld together these 400 million people into one strong race, China will face the tragedy of being destroyed as a nation and extinct as a race.”³ Even though Chiang tried to unify China he was not able to succeed, due to the control of warlords and also even more significantly, because of constant Japanese interference. Their troops occupied Manchuria in 1931, China’s rich northeastern region. One year later, the Japanese established a puppet state of Manchuko there, and during the next few years they pushed southward into the provinces around Beijing.

By 1937, they mobilized a full-scale invasion, which resulted in Japanese occupation of all the major cities, from Beijing in the north to Canton in the south. “ With their official slogan “ Kill all, destroy all, burn all”, the Japanese troops behaved with terrible cruelty.”⁴ Through such brutality the Chinese lost their best troops in the first weeks of the war. The loss of the cities was a major disaster for Chiang, whose economic lifeline was the cities. As he was not only fighting against the Japanese but also he was confronting the Communists.

“ The Japanese are a disease of the skin, but the Communists are a disease of the heart.”⁵ With this comment, he clearly state the hate he has towards the Communist, which turns out to be greater than the one against the Japanese. Still, to fight both he needed to be able to fund modern armies. Money for these came mostly from taxes. Although, agriculture was the largest sector of the economy, the landowners were not taxed, because GMD needed their political support. However, because of the Japanese occupation, many conservative local leaders fled, removing the direct influence and consequently their usefulness to the GMD.

These Nationalists' difficulties bought the Communists a chance to prove themselves and take advantage of the situation. They were able to practice guerrilla warfare and Japanese atrocities played into their hands by driving millions of peasants into active resistance.

In the Japanese war the GMD had no chance, because their troops were badly organized and maintained and showed latter respect towards the peasants as well as their own soldiers. This made the people form China realise that in their situation, the Communist regime was the only one at that time, able to lead the nation towards improvement. Therefore it can be said, that the Japanese War was the perfect opportunity for the Communists to get the majority on their side and make them reject the GMD. Another major contribution to Communist takeover of China was the Civil War, which lasted from 1946 to 89.

By autumn of 1946 the fighting between the Nationalists and the Communists was out of control. To the majority it appeared as if the GMD

was in an appropriate position and therefore had a chance to win the Civil War. This was because they had a big stockpile of US weapons and their army outnumbered the CCP's by 3 to 1.

The PLA (People's Liberation Army) took control of the countryside, while Chiang occupied nearly all cities even Yanan. During the Civil War the Nationalists managed to clear all communist units from central and south China, which did not contribute to the increase of power for their armies. There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, the Communists avoided large-scale battles; therefore the Nationalist advance did not imply the destruction of communist military forces. Secondly, the Nationalists were not able to consolidate their hold on lines of communication, e. g. railways and roads. This way their units had problems with receiving supplies or even being cut off completely. Finally the drastic increase of CCP forces, caused by peasants, which joined to fight on the side of the Communists.

When the Civil War began the GMD was advantaged by their military manpower, three times privileged in weaponry. But still, they were unable to convert these into a secure victory, due to their weak leadership qualities and the condition of the rank-and-file soldiers. GMD officers were known to be brutal and unfair, beating their men and swindle them of their pay and food. For families of those soldiers, who had fallen during the Civil War, there was no support scheme, even though they lost their labour and faced harsh economic circumstances. As mentioned above, in contrast, communist armies had major strengths, which compensated for the early disadvantages regarding manpower and equipment. Even their officers were prepared to cooperate in regional strategies, without taking personal advantage. They

fairly supplied the army with arms, medical services and food. Unlike the Nationalists, Communists also gave the rank and file regular political training, creating an understanding of the purpose of the war as well as the intentions of the party in promotion of reform for conquered areas and in support of their families. Due to their previously (during the Japanese war) learned experience, the Communists were qualified to fight with flexible tactics against their enemy, which lacked these abilities. The decisive battle took place in Xuzhou, the main defense point for denying the Communists access to the lower Yangzi region from the north. With half a million deaths on each side the battle lasting two months, summited in a total Communist victory by 10 January 1949, with over 300 000 Nationalist troops taken prisoner.

Therefore it can be concluded that the Communist victory resulted from their military strengths and socio-political programs, as well as the opposite status and position of their enemy, the military weaknesses and other features of the GMD.

Overall, it can be disclosed that the Communists came to power in China mainly because of their useful methods, in which the mistakes of the Guomindang were taken advantage of. Besides, the CCP was able to fight more efficiently in the Civil and Japanese War, protecting the majority instead of ignoring it. The Communist leader, Mao Zedong, was finally able to take over the nation and proclaim it the Peoples Republic of China.

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