

Lesson 164: Chinese Communist Revolution Notes World History

The Chinese Communist Revolution was the key defining period of modern China, and therefore one of the most important grouping of events of the 20th Century. By establishing a Communist regime under Mao Zedong in mainland China, and a rump Nationalist regime under Chiang Kai-Shek on Taiwan, the Revolution had ramifications that continue to define the modern world.

Misconceptions

The Chinese Communist Revolution is often confused with the larger Chinese Civil War. The latter was a much larger struggle which began in 1927, and continued until at least 1950. The Chinese Communist Revolution refers specifically to the latter stages of that contest.

By some reckonings, the Chinese Civil War did not end until the Republic of China (Taiwan) unilaterally declared it over in 1991, but as the People's Republic of China never acknowledged this and there has never been a peace treaty of any kind, strictly speaking the Chinese Civil War could be considered as dormant, but not over.

Time Frame

The Communist Revolution began with the 1946 resumption of open war between the Communist Party of China and the Kuomintang (KMT), or Chinese Nationalists, after the end of the Second World War. It concluded with the effective victory of the Communists and the expulsion of Nationalist forces to the island of Taiwan.

History

With the end of the Second World War, the energies of the Communists and the KMT were no longer focused on fighting the Japanese. The 1946 breakdown of peace talks led to the resumption of hostilities, with the Soviet Union providing Mao Zedong's Communists with support, and the KMT of Chiang Kai-Shek backed by the United States.

Initially the KMT sought to make the frontline of the war in Manchuria, however it was an unequal struggle. The KMT forces had borne the brunt of the conflict with the Japanese, and were largely exhausted by the effort. Contrary to later claims made by Maoists propagandists, the Communists did very little to expel the Japanese from China and were content to save their strength for a later

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resumption of the civil war. The Nationalists were also hamstrung by their own corruption and the failure of their economic management, which made them deeply unpopular across China.

The Communists suffered defeats and setbacks in 1946 and 1947, but learned from their errors and by 1948 had turned the tables on the KMT, defeating them in battle and capturing large amounts of demoralized troops and their equipment. Beijing fell in 1949 with hardly a shot fired in its defense. Mao Zedong formally proclaimed the People's Republic of China a reality in October 1949. Chian Kai-Shek retreated with the remainder of his army and roughly two million refugees to Taiwan, and subsequently repelled from outlying islands at the Battle of Kuningtou, but the Communists captured Hainan Island in 1950. With the capture of Hainan, the lines ossified and the Chinese Communist Revolution ended.

Effects

For more than twenty years after the Communist Revolution, the West blocked any change in the UN Security Council that would allow the Communist People's Republic of China to replace the Nationalist Republic of China as the veto-wielding permanent member. This did not change until Nixon and his famous rapprochement with the Communist Chinese.

Less than one year after the end of the Chinese Communist Revolution, Chinese troops would be battling UN forces in the Korean War. Communist victory in the world's most populous country also fanned the anti-communist hysteria of 1950s America, and the question "who lost China?" would figure prominently in the accusations of Senator Joseph McCarthy and others.

Significance

The Chinese Revolution was among the first hot conflicts of the Cold War, and its ramifications were certainly among the most far reaching. The most important long-term effect was to create a Communist state with the size and power to stand as a rival to the Soviet Union within the Communist world. The Soviets and Chinese were initially allies, but eventually split apart, and fought bloody border conflicts in the 1960s. The Sino-Soviet split forced many Communist states to choose sides, with China even invading pro-Soviet Vietnam in 1979.