

World History - Teaching Support Kit
U.S.- China Relationship: Nixon and Chairman Mao
By
Dr. Jack Liu

1. Who is Chairman Mao

Mao Zedong (1893 – 1976), also translated as Mao Tse-tung, was named Chairman Mao in China because he was the Chairman of the People’s Republic of China from its establishment in 1949. Mao Zedong was born on December 26, 1893, to a peasant family in Hunan Province, in the southern part China.

Mao’s father was a peasant who became a prosperous grain dealer. At age 8, Mao began studying at the village elementary school, but he left school at 13 to work for his father on the family farm. He often quarreled with his bad-tempered father and later left him to continue his studies at a secondary school in Changsha city, the capital of Hunan province.

In 1911, when Mao was 18 years old, Sun Yat-sen’s revolution (1866 – 1925) began in Wuchang which was very close to Changsha city. Sun’s revolution of 1911 overthrew the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912), and Mao joined the Revolutionary Army as a soldier in Hunan province.

In 1912, China’s last emperor, who was a six-year-old boy named Pu Yi (1906-1967), was forced to give up his throne. Without the emperor, there were two ideologies that the Chinese people could adopt: Capitalism or Communism.

Which one was suitable for Chinese people? All the intellectual people thought about this question, including Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong. In the spring of 1912, Mao left the army to continue his schooling and thinking.

Sun Yat-sen led China to capitalism and the Republic of China was founded. The new Republic of China was weak and needed international recognition and support, particularly financial support to fight the remaining warlords of the former Qing Dynasty.

However, Sun was defeated in a battle by Chen JiongMing, a warlord in Guangdong Province. The United States, the United Kingdom and other European countries rejected Sun Yat-

sen's request for support against the warlords. He had no choice but cooperate with neighboring Russia, because Russia agreed to provide financial support with the condition that Russia be allowed to set up a Communist Party in China.

Geographically, Russia was an ideal ally because it shared a border with China. At the time, China was heavily influenced by Japan and the United States, but the closeness of Russia allowed the Communist Party to exert great influence.

In 1918, Mao graduated from the First Provincial Teachers' School of Hunan Province, when he was 25 years old. If there had been no war, Mao Zedong would have been a teacher of K-12 students, like his classmates.

2. Chairman Mao and Karl Marx

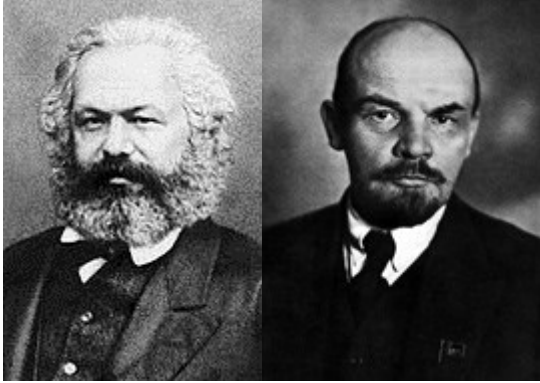
In 1919, Mao traveled with Professor Yang Changji, later his father-in-law, to Peking University, where Mao worked as an assistant librarian at the University Library. He registered as a part-time student at Peking University and studied Karl Marx's (1818 – 1883) Communist Theory and Vladimir Lenin's (1870-1924) Russian Revolution.

According to Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) class struggle between the ruling class (rich people) and the class being ruled (poor people) was the process that moved history. Marx lived during the Industrial Revolution when there was a conflict between capitalists and factory workers. One of the Communist Party's goals was to eliminate the class of rich people in order to set up a communist utopia in which the power would belong to the majority or the poor population.

However, Marx said little about how to eliminate the class of rich people and seize the power.

The violent revolution led by Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) with oil worker, textile workers and railroad workers was a successful way to overthrow the Russian Provisional Government and gave power to the Communist Party.

Mao Zedong applied Karl Marx's Communist theory and Vladimir Lenin's successful violent revolutionary tactics to China. Mao believed that revolution in China would be based on the huge population of poor peasants, because there were not many industrial workers in China like there were in Russia.



Following the success of the [October Revolution](#) in the former Russian Empire, in which Marxists took power, Mao came under the theoretical influence of [Karl Marx](#) (left) and [Vladimir Lenin](#) (right).

Likely due to poor language skills, Mao never learned to speak Mandarin. Speaking only the Xiang dialect, he turned down an opportunity to study abroad in France.

In 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in a boat in Shanghai, China. On July 23, 1921, Mao, age 27, attended the first meeting of the National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Shanghai with 11 other delegate members, representing a total of 50 community party members in China. He became one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, which was inspired by the Russian Revolution.

Mao Zedong became a hero in China because of the “Long March” (1934 – 1935) where 85,000 army soldiers marched for 6,000 miles running away from the nationalist forces. Only 7,000 soldiers survived. Mao led the Communist resistance against the Japanese during World War II in Asia. When World War II was over in Europe, China continued two wars: civil war (1945-1949) and the Korean War (1950 – 1953).

The 4-year civil war (1945-1949) between the Communist Party of China led by Mao Zedong and the Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek, resulted in the Communist Party driving the Nationalist Party to the island of Taiwan.

Chairman Mao’s picture was hung on the gate of the Forbidden City, where the last emperor Pu Yi’s house became Chairman Mao’s house. Chairman Mao has been referred as the “Red Sun in Our Hearts” , the “Savior of the People” and the “Greatest Leader.”

Traditional Confucian philosophy and traditions were replaced by Chairman Mao’s revolution thoughts.

3. Nuclear Weapon and Hero Mother

In 1945, the U.S. Army dropped two nuclear bombs in Japan in World War II (1939-1945). Everyone knew the power of nuclear weapons. Then, the Soviet Union designed nuclear inter-continental ballistic missiles and launched a rocket to outer space. The U.S. had to change its education system to enhance American kids' skills in mathematics, chemistry and physics. Everyone in the world worried about the two competitive superpowers and whether they would fight each other or attack other countries, which could have caused World War III at that time.

The question raised in the Chinese government was how would China survive under the threat of nuclear war from two competing superpowers?

Chairman Mao, the president of communist China used two tactics: first, China should have its own nuclear weapon to mitigate the threat. In the event of a nuclear attack, China could launch back its own nuclear missiles.

Second, China should have more people in order to survive nuclear war. In the long run; even if only one person were left, no doubt, it should be Chairman Mao. He could still fight.

Mao got Chinese scientists to work on developing their own bomb. He also set up the "hero mothers" policy by encouraging birth. After implementation of the policy, China had its own Baby Boom.

China's population increased from 551 million in 1950 to 602 million¹ in 1954. In 8 years, the Chinese population skyrocketed from 1 billion to 11 billion people (1981 to 1989). China increases by 100 million people on average every 6-8 years.

In 1964, China successfully tested its own nuclear bomb, making China the second communist country to have nuclear weapons technology. After Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger visited China in 1972, Chairman Mao determined that the possibility of World War III occurring was remote.

¹ Almanac of China's population (1991). Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Science, p 425.

4. Richard Nixon Visiting China

In the mid 1960s, the United States deployed combat troops into Vietnam. The U.S did not want Vietnam to become communist like China. China supported Vietnam by providing food and weapons to fight against the United States.

To get the support of China against the Soviet Union, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger knew that they needed to engage Chairman Mao. Prior to the Nixon-Kissinger visit, the United States did not have any diplomatic ties to the communist government.

When the communists first took power in 1949, the relationship between the U.S. and China dissolved. Since U.S. had a cooperative relationship with China throughout World War II, the U.S. Congress asked the question, “Why did the United States lose China to communism?” Nobody could answer this question.

A worse situation occurred when the United States sent troops to liberate South Korea from occupying North Korean soldiers. The war was fought close to Chinese territory, so Chairman Mao secretly sent Chinese troops wearing North Korean uniforms to fight General MacArthur, the commander of the U.S. army. After the Korean War, the U.S. and China became hostile towards one another.

In April 1971, the Chinese table tennis team invited the American table tennis team to attend a competition for a week in China. It was called Ping Pong Diplomacy.

From July 7 to 11, in 1971, Henry Kissinger made a secret visit to Chairman Mao. It was announced that President Richard Nixon had been invited to visit mainland China before May.

On February 21, 1972, Richard Nixon visited Beijing, beginning the process of normalization of the U.S.-China relationship. When President Nixon first visited China, his name was translated into Chinese as Ni Ke Song (“Pine Tree named xon”), which was a very positive image, signifying bravery and strength.

According to Kissinger, President Nixon “knew that when his old friend John Foster Dulles had refused to shake the hand of Zhou Enlai in Geneva in 1954, Premier Zhou had felt insulted. Nixon knew that American television cameras would be at the Beijing airport to film his arrival. A dozen times on the way to Peking, Nixon told Kissinger and Secretary of State William Rogers that they were to stay on the plane until he had descended the gangway and shaken Zhou Enlai's

hand. As added insurance, a Secret Service agent blocked the aisle of Air Force One to make sure the president emerged alone.”²



Zhou shakes hands with President Nixon

In 1972, after President Nixon’s visit, Chinese people were allowed to study English rather than Russian. Chairman Mao was the first person to start learning English. It was a signal that Chairman Mao would cooperate with the United States. The U.S. withdrew its troops from Taiwan a few years later. This is the reason why there is no longer a U.S. military base in Taiwan.

However, when President Nixon went back from China, Nixon resigned in 1974 due to his involvement in the Watergate scandal. On August 9, 1974, after addressing the nation on television the previous evening, Nixon resigned from the office of the presidency. The resignation speech was delivered on August 8, 1974, at 9:01 p.m. Eastern time from the Oval Office of the White House. When Chairman Mao heard the news of Nixon’s resignation, he was shocked.

5. Watergate Hotel and Culture Revolution

There was a hotel called Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. The political term Watergate has come to encompass an array of illegal and secret activities undertaken by the Nixon Administration. The activities came to light in the aftermath of five men being caught breaking into Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. on June 17, 1972.

² Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, (Little, Brown and Co., 1979) p. 1054.

Two years later, in 1976, Chairman Mao died. All the people in China cried. Even though I was just 3 years old, I cried too. I was scared by the sorrowful environment.

People had to say “Long live Chairman Mao” for superstitious reasons so that we wouldn’t jinx his life. Zun, my eldest sister cried even harder than she had cried at our grandfather’s funeral. She was confused about the situation, “Mom, long live Chairman Mao. Why did he die?”

Later, his body was preserved with mercury and kept in a crystal coffin in a memorial building located in the middle of Tiananmen Square.

Due to the Watergate political scandal and President Nixon’s early resignation, the U.S. and China were delayed in establishing diplomatic relations until 1979. Soon after, China established an embassy in Washington D.C., and the U.S. established an embassy in Beijing.

Without the Watergate political issue, China’s Cultural Revolution would have ended 5 - 10 years earlier, maybe even as early as 1973, the year I was born. If the Cultural Revolution had ended that early, Chinese people would have had the opportunity to travel to the U.S. and learn about western countries.

I wish time could heal peoples’ bad memories of losing their family members. These events destroyed Chinese trust, friendship, order of society, and led to great sorrow. I hoped that another 10 or 20 years into the future could replace the 10 years of the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976) and that people could recover and forget their sorrows when they entered a new century.

In fact, it was a naïve idea. Although the Cultural Revolution historically finished in 1976, its negative influences in many areas, particularly in education and peoples’ relationships, still exist in contemporary Chinese society.



A large portrait of Mao by [Zhang Zhenshi](#) at [Tiananmen](#)

From 1949 to 1975, Chairman Mao did not allow the birth of more children in China.

Two years after I was born, Chairman Mao's oral policy became the formally documented policy named "One Child Policy."

He wanted to stop the increasing population, but it was too late; by the time I was born in the middle of the 1970s, China had become the world's largest population with almost 1 billion people. China was facing the world's most dramatic "population bomb" in its history.

6. Activities:

Response Questions

Research Projects/oral Presentations

Work in small groups to complete the following projects

Essay topics

Write an essay on one of the following topics: