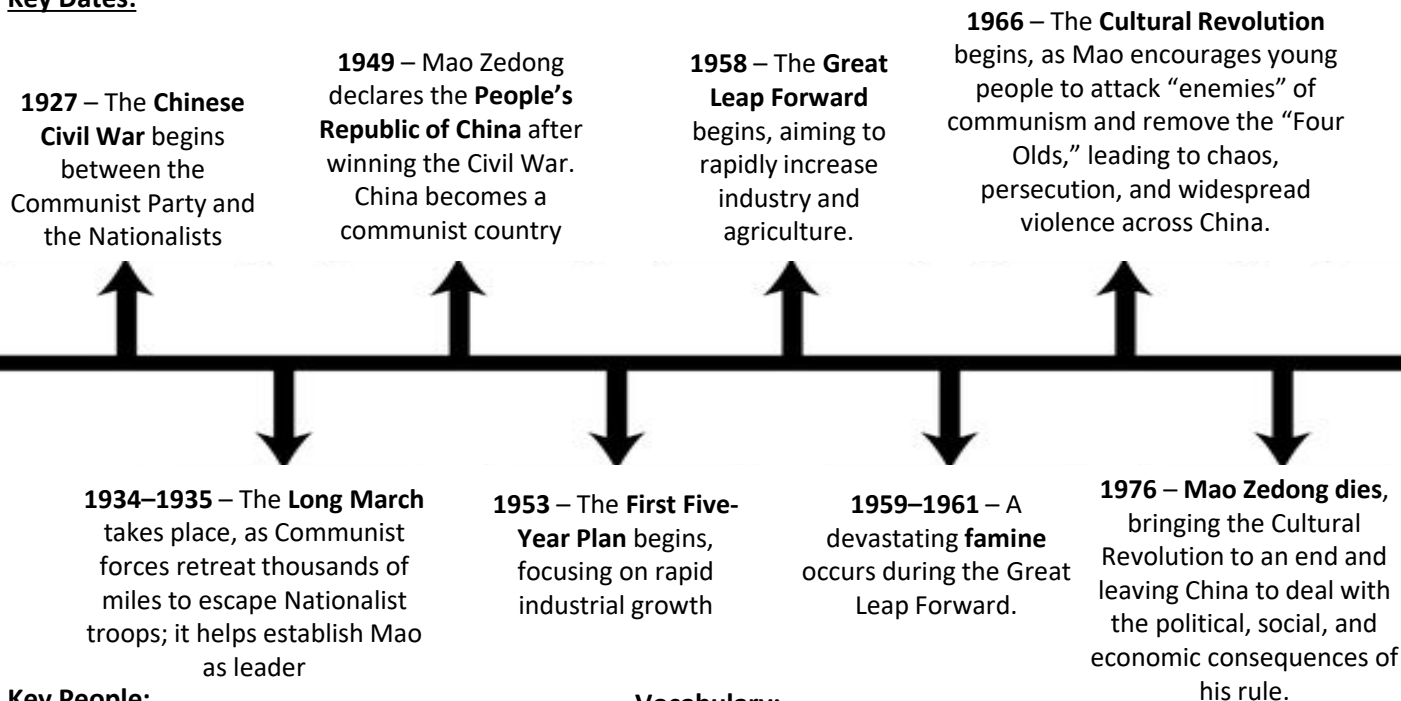


Knowledge organiser: How did Mao's policies impact life in China after 1949?

Topic Summary:














In this unit, we will study the impact that Mao's economic, political and social policies had on different groups in China during his reign from 1949-1976. Students will understand the consequences of communism and dictatorship spreading to China and how this period of Chinese history continues to impact China today

Key Dates:



Key People:

Vocabulary:

<p>Mao Zedong</p> 	<p>Mao was the leader of the Chinese Communist Party who founded the People's Republic of China in 1949 after winning the Civil War. He ruled as a dictator until 1976 and launched major campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which transformed China but caused widespread suffering.</p>	<p>Civil War</p> 	<p>A conflict fought between two groups within the same country</p>
<p>Deng Xiaoping</p> 	<p>Deng Xiaoping became China's most powerful leader after Mao's death in 1976. He introduced economic reforms that moved China away from strict communism and towards a more market-based economy, helping modernise the country.</p>	<p>Communism</p> 	<p>A system where property, land, and industry are owned by the state and shared among the people rather than controlled by individuals</p>
<p>Jung Chang</p> 	<p>Jung Chang is a Chinese-born writer who experienced Mao's rule as a child and young adult during the Cultural Revolution. She later wrote <i>Wild Swans</i>, a memoir describing how Mao's policies affected three generations of women in her family.</p>	<p>Collectivisation</p> 	<p>Taking land away from individual farmers and merging it into large, shared farms</p>
		<p>Revolution</p> 	<p>A sudden and dramatic change in political and social systems</p>
		<p>Consequence</p> 	<p>A consequence is the result or impact of a historical event, person or period</p>
		<p>Reeducation camp</p> 	<p>People were forced to do hard labour and study Communist ideas in order to change their beliefs.</p>
		<p>Legacy</p> 	<p>The lasting impact and reputation left behind by a person, event or time period</p>
		<p>Dictator</p> 	<p>A leader with total power who did not allow opposition or free elections</p>
		<p>Famine</p> 	<p>A period of extreme food scarcity in which many people die from starvation</p>
		<p>Commune</p> 	<p>Where thousands of people live and work together and do not own their own property or business</p>

<p>Lesson 1:</p> <p>What is communism?</p>	<p>You will explore the core principles of communism through the case study of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Communism was examined as a political ideology based on equality, shared ownership of land and industry, and the removal of class divisions. The unequal structure of Tsarist Russia helped explain why workers and peasants supported revolution and why communism appealed to societies experiencing poverty and injustice. The Russian Revolution provides important context for understanding the later spread of communism to China.</p>
<p>Lesson 2:</p> <p>Why did China become communist in 1949?</p>	<p>By 1949, China had experienced decades of war, poverty, and political weakness. Many peasants lived in extreme hardship while landowners and elites held power, creating anger and inequality across the country. The Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao Zedong, gained support by promising land reform, greater equality, and a fresh start for ordinary people. Events such as the Long March strengthened Mao's reputation as a determined leader, while the Japanese invasion during the Second World War weakened the Nationalist government. After winning the Civil War in 1949, Mao declared the People's Republic of China and established a communist state.</p>
<p>Lesson 3:</p> <p>What was Mao's great leap forward?</p>	<p>In 1958, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward, an ambitious plan to rapidly transform China from a farming nation into a powerful industrial country. Land was reorganised into large communes, private ownership was removed, and millions of people were expected to increase food and steel production at the same time. Mao believed enthusiasm and hard work could help China compete with Western powers and the Soviet Union. However, poor planning, unrealistic targets, and disruption to farming led to widespread famine between 1959 and 1961, causing millions of deaths. Although the policy aimed to create equality and strengthen communism, its consequences brought suffering and raised doubts about Mao's leadership.</p>
<p>Lesson 4:</p> <p>What were the consequences the Great Leap forward?</p>	<p>The Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) had devastating social, economic, and political consequences for China. Mao's attempt to rapidly industrialise through communes, collectivisation, backyard furnaces, and unrealistic production targets disrupted farming and led to a catastrophic famine, in which up to 50 million people are estimated to have died. Despite the scale of suffering, the government used propaganda, censorship, and exaggerated statistics to hide the crisis and protect Mao's authority. Critics were punished or sent to re-education camps, and the disaster was blamed on "natural disasters" rather than poor planning. Although some recovery began in the early 1960s, the Great Leap Forward is widely considered a major failure that caused long-term damage to China's population and economy.</p>



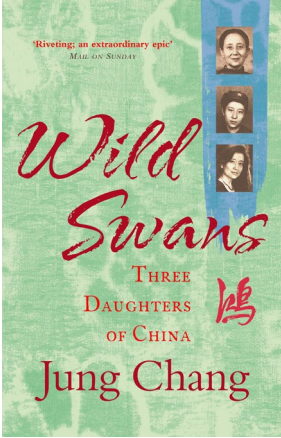


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Core Knowledge:

Lesson 5: How did the cultural revolution impact China?	In 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution after the failure of the Great Leap Forward had damaged his authority. Fearing that he was losing power and that China was moving away from his revolutionary ideals, Mao mobilised young people, known as the Red Guards, to remove opposition and destroy the “Four Olds”: old customs, culture, habits, and ideas. Schools closed, teachers and officials were publicly humiliated in struggle sessions, and millions were persecuted or sent for re-education. The campaign created a decade of political chaos, social division, and violence, deeply affecting families, education, and trust within society. Although Mao regained control, the Cultural Revolution left long-term scars on China that continued even after his death in 1976.
Lesson 6: How were the women of ‘Wild Swans’ impacted by the cultural revolution?	<i>Wild Swans</i> explores the lives of three generations of women living through Mao’s rule, revealing how his policies affected individuals in different ways. Before 1949, women were restricted by Confucian beliefs, arranged marriages, and limited rights, but Mao promised equality, declaring that “women hold up half the sky.” For Yu-fang, life was shaped mainly by traditional oppression; for De-hong, communism initially brought hope before political campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution caused fear and persecution; and for Jung Chang, Mao’s rule disrupted education, family life, and trust within society. Although Mao claimed to improve women’s status, the experiences of the ‘Wild Swans’ show that his policies often replaced traditional inequality with political control, instability, and long-term emotional impact.
Lesson 7: What is the legacy of Mao on China today?	Following Mao’s death in 1976, China saw some huge changes in the way that it was run. Deng Xiaoping became the new leader and transformed China into a modern society that was focused on profit and modernisation. China is now one of the most wealthy and modern countries in the World, but inequality in wealth and power still exists. Legacies can sometimes be physical, but they can also be emotional or reflected in people’s attitudes. Many people living in China now for example, can still remember the trauma caused by the cultural revolution in the 1960s. Mao is viewed today as a controversial leader, responsible for both revolution and devastation in China.

What do historians say?

‘Wild Swans’ by Jung Chang 	Description <i>Wild Swans is a memoir written by Jung Chang that tells the story of three generations of women in her family. Through their experiences, the book explores life in China during the Communist Revolution and under the rule of Mao Zedong.</i> <i>Rather than focusing on political leaders, Wild Swans shows how government policies affected ordinary people’s everyday lives. We use Wild Swans in this unit because it helps us understand the impact of Mao’s policies on different groups, including women, families and party members.</i> <i>As a personal account, it provides detailed evidence of social, economic and political change, while also reminding us that it represents one perspective and must be used alongside other sources.</i>	BBC Bitesize – The Rise of Mao Zedong  Youtube – The Real Story of Mao Zedong (Documentary) 
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