CHINA:
FROM THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD TO TIANANMEN SQUARE
MAO ZEDONG’S COMMUNIST CHINA

- Mao Zedong and the communists defeated the nationalists of China in 1949 and established the People’s Republic of China
- Their main ally and source of arms was the communist Soviet Union
Unlike the Soviet Union’s communism which favored the industrial working class, Communist China favored the peasantry.

This and other factors led to a divergence of communism politics in China and the Soviet Union.
SO WHAT WAS THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD?

• The Great Leap Forward was an economic campaign initiated by Mao Zedong to push China into the ranks of world industrial powers

• The ideas behind the Leap were to:
  • maximize the production of small-scale industries
  • Institute a mass consolidation in agriculture

_A propaganda poster for the Great Leap Forward_
Essentially, Zedong’s plan consisted of this:

- Peasants are put into small, village-like communities.
- These communities combine the farmland of all individual peasant farms and produce food for all through mass agriculture.
- Peasants produce building materials like steel and iron through outside furnaces.

Peasants producing building materials in furnaces.
AND DID IT ACTUALLY WORK?

- The untested ideas of Zedong led to the Great Leap Forward backfiring massively.

- Some flaws included:
  - The unskilled, unknowledgeable peasants had absolutely no idea how to make quality building materials (like iron).
  - The unpredictability of weather made strong harvests few and far between: an estimated 20-30 million deaths due to famine during the Great Leap Forward lead many to categorize it as a genocide.
• After Zedong’s death, the Chinese communist government began economic reforms
  • Relaxed state control
  • Allowed initiative and individual accumulation of wealth

• China’s new leader Deng Xiaoping permitted foreign investment for the first time since communists attained power
DID ANY OF THIS WORK?

- In 24 years (1979-2005), foreign direct investment in China grew to over $600 billion.

- By 2010, China became a major industrial power and the world’s most important exporting nation.
CHINESE POLITICS DURING ECONOMIC GROWTH

• Xiaoping balanced continuity (communist government) and change (economic growth)

• This was to avoid repercussions experienced by socialist countries like Russia that abruptly embraced democracy and capitalism
Despite lucrative economic growth, mass worldwide movements in favor of democracy led to protests by Chinese students and intellectuals.

- They protested for more democracy and an end to corruption.

This movement culminated in Tiananmen Square in the heart of Beijing.

- Hundreds of protesters gathered and refused to leave.
- Weeks of standoff led to tanks pushing into the crowd, killing hundreds and arresting thousands.