COMMUNISM UNDER MAO ZEDONG

- After taking control of China, the Communists began to tighten their hold. Like the Soviets, the Chinese Communists set up two parallel organizations, the Communist Party and the national government. Mao held both positions until 1959.

Mao’s Brand of Marxist Socialism

- Mao was determined to reshape China’s economy based on Marxist principles. Approximately 80 percent of Chinese people lived in rural areas. 10 percent of the population controlled 70 percent of the farmland.
- In 1950, Mao passed the Agrarian Reform Law. He seized the holdings of landlords and divided the land among peasants. Later, Mao forced the farmers to join collective farms. Each of these farms was comprised of 200 to 300 households.
- Mao also transformed industry. Gradually, private companies were nationalized, or brought under government control.
- In 1953, Mao launched a five-year plan that set high production goals for industry. By 1957, China’s output of coal, steel, and electricity had increased dramatically.
- Under Mao, women gained equal status and literacy grew with free education.

“Great Leap Forward”

- To expand the success of the first five-year plan, in 1958 Mao proclaimed the “Great Leap Forward”. This plan called for larger collective farms called communes. By the end of 1958, about 26,000 communes had been created. The average commune was 15,000 acres and supported over 25,000 people.
- Lifestyle on the communes was strictly controlled. Peasants worked the land together. They ate in communal dining rooms, slept in communal dormitories, and raised their children in communal nurseries. Peasants owned nothing. There was no incentive for hard work.
- The Great Leap Forward was a catastrophe. Poor planning and inefficient “backyard” industries hurt growth. Rural output especially suffered. The program has halted in 1961 after massive crops failures resulted in a famine that killed 20 million people.

The Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution

- After the failure of the Great Leap Forward, Mao reduced his role in government. Other leaders moved away from Mao’s strict socialist ideas. For example, farm families could live in their homes and could sell crops they grew on small private plots. Factory workers could compete for wage increases and promotions.
- Mao thought China’s new economic policies weakened the Communist goal of social equality. In 1966, he urged China’s young people to “learn revolution by making revolution”. Millions of high school and college students responded. They left their classrooms and formed units called Red Guards.
• The Red Guards led a major uprising known as the Cultural Revolution. Its goal was to establish a society of peasants and workers in which all were equal. The new hero was the peasant who worked with his hands. The Red Guard carried Mao’s “Little Red Book” as a symbol of the revolution.

• Intellectual and artistic activities were considered useless and dangerous. Red Guards shut down colleges and schools and targeted anyone who resisted the regime. Intellectuals had to “purify” themselves by doing hard labor in remote villages. Thousands were executed or imprisoned. Chaos threatened farm production and closed down factories. Civil war seemed possible. Mao ordered the army to put down the Red Guard.