

## Topic 8.4: Spread of Communism After 1900 (China & Global Redistribution Movements)

### Standards Table

Theme	Learning Objective	Key Concept(s)	Education Standards Met
Economic Systems (ECN) / Social Interactions and Organization (SIO)	<b>Unit 8: Learning Objective D</b> — Explain the causes and consequences of China’s adoption of communism. <b>Unit 8: Learning Objective E</b> — Explain the causes and effects of movements to redistribute economic resources.	<b>KC-6.2.I.i</b> Chinese communists seized power due to internal tensions and Japanese aggression. <b>KC-6.3.I.A.ii</b> The Great Leap Forward reshaped China’s economy with negative consequences. <b>KC-6.2.II.D.i</b> Redistribution movements emerged across Afro-Eurasia and Latin America.	AP World History: Modern— causation, comparison, argumentation, and evidence use.

### Learning Objectives

- Explain why communism emerged in China in the early 20th century.
- Describe the economic and social consequences of communist policies in China.
- Analyze how governments attempted to redistribute land and resources.
- Compare communist and socialist redistribution movements across regions.
- Develop a historical argument using evidence (LEQ preparation).

### Lesson Overview

The spread of communism after 1900 was driven by a combination of political instability, economic inequality, and external pressures. In China, internal conflict, dissatisfaction with existing leadership, and foreign invasion created conditions for a communist revolution. Once in power, the Chinese Communist Party implemented policies such as land redistribution and the Great Leap Forward, which aimed to transform the economy but often caused widespread hardship. Similar movements to redistribute wealth and resources appeared across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reflecting global concerns about inequality and development. This lesson focuses on understanding the causes and consequences of these movements and prepares students to construct a strong LEQ argument.

## Essential Vocabulary

- **land redistribution** — the transfer of land from wealthy owners to peasants or the state
- **collectivization** — the consolidation of private farms into collective, state-controlled farms
- **command economy** — an economic system where the government controls production and distribution
- **revolutionary movement** — an organized effort to overthrow an existing government or system
- **peasant mobilization** — the political organization of rural populations to support change

## Background Reading

The rise of communism in China was rooted in both internal and external challenges. In the early 20th century, China faced political instability following the fall of the Qing Dynasty, along with economic inequality and weak central governance. The Nationalist government struggled to unify the country, while the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gained support by appealing to peasants and promising land reform. Japanese invasion during the 1930s further weakened the Nationalists and strengthened the CCP, which organized resistance and expanded its influence. By 1949, Mao Zedong and the CCP successfully established the People's Republic of China.

After gaining power, the Chinese Communist Party sought to transform the economy and society. One major effort was land redistribution, where land was taken from wealthy landowners and redistributed to peasants. This policy gained support among rural populations but also involved violence and coercion. The government later introduced collectivization, grouping farms into large, state-controlled units. These changes were intended to increase efficiency and production, but they often disrupted traditional farming practices and local economies.

The Great Leap Forward, launched in 1958, was an ambitious attempt to rapidly industrialize China and increase agricultural output. The government encouraged communes to produce both agricultural goods and industrial materials, such as steel. However, unrealistic production goals, poor planning, and lack of local knowledge led to severe economic disruption. Agricultural output declined, and a widespread famine resulted, causing millions of deaths. This demonstrates how government control over the economy could produce unintended and devastating consequences.

Beyond China, movements to redistribute wealth and resources appeared in many parts of the world. In countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, leaders and movements sought to address inequality by promoting socialism or communism. These

movements often aimed to reduce the gap between rich and poor, expand access to land, and increase state control over key industries. However, their outcomes varied widely, with some achieving limited reforms and others facing economic challenges or political resistance. These developments show how global concerns about inequality shaped political and economic systems during the Cold War era.

## Primary Sources

### Primary Source 1: Mao Zedong, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,” 1927

**Document:** Mao Zedong Report

**Link:** [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_2.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm)

In a very short time, in China’s central, southern, and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation.

They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants, and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide.

### Primary Source 2: Mao Zedong, Speech on the Great Leap Forward, 1958

**Document:** Mao Speech (compiled speeches)

**Link:** <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/index.htm>

Our objective is to surpass Britain and catch up with America in steel production and other major industrial outputs. We must mobilize the masses and rely on their collective strength.

The people’s communes are the best form of organization for achieving this goal, combining agriculture and industry, and allowing for the rapid transformation of society.

## Key Tables / Charts / Diagrams

### Causes of Communism in China

Cause	Explanation
Political instability	Weak central government after Qing collapse
Economic inequality	Large gap between landowners and peasants
Foreign invasion	Japanese aggression weakened Nationalists
Peasant support	CCP mobilized rural populations

## Effects of Communist Policies

Policy	Effect
Land redistribution	Increased support but caused violence
Collectivization	Reduced individual control
Great Leap Forward	Economic failure and famine

## Change / Continuity / Comparison Section

### Change over time:

China experienced a major transformation from a fragmented, semi-colonial state to a centralized communist government. Economic systems shifted from private land ownership to state control. These changes represented a dramatic restructuring of Chinese society and governance.

### Continuity over time:

Despite these changes, many underlying challenges remained, including rural poverty and the need to maintain political control. Governments continued to rely on strong authority to implement policies and manage populations.

### Comparison:

China's communist revolution shared similarities with other global movements in its focus on redistributing resources and empowering lower classes. However, the scale and intensity of China's policies, especially during the Great Leap Forward, were more extreme than in many other regions.

## Key Takeaways

- Communism in China developed due to internal instability and external pressures.
- Mao gained support by appealing to peasants and promising reform.
- Economic policies aimed at rapid growth often had negative consequences.
- Redistribution movements appeared globally with varying success.
- Understanding these developments is key for building historical arguments.

## LEQ Practice Activity

### Prompt (AP-style):

Evaluate the extent to which economic inequality and political instability contributed to the rise of communist movements in the period 1900–1975.

**Student Task:**

- Write a full thesis statement
- Outline your argument using:
  - **at least 2 specific examples from China**
  - **at least 1 example from another region**
- Identify:
  - one counterargument
  - one piece of outside evidence