

# Communes in Communist China

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Theme

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## PURPOSE

To simulate life in a commune so that students have some understanding of the positive effects of the system as well as why the system was inefficient and flawed.

## THEME STATEMENT

Institutions, Power & Government (IPG): Institutions and leaders control and influence individuals and culture.

## SUGGESTED TIME

Sixty minutes.

## KEY VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS

Free market versus planned market economies.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- sheets of paper with rice plant sketches (Student Handout #1)
- colored pencils
- scissors

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The teacher should read about communism and economic policy in communist China (including Teacher Background #1 and #2) as well as reading the simulation instructions. Familiarize yourself with the charts and timeline which supply background information about communes.

## INITIATION (Inquiry, Preview, Involvement)

Students should read background information (including Student Handouts #2 and #3). Excellent background readings are provided on Indiana University's East Asian Studies Center's web site in the workshop lessons on China for teachers. By looking for other relevant web sites, students could also research economics and recent events in Southeast and East Asia. Teachers may also want to adapt portions of an additional lesson (Supplemental Activity #1) to introduce students to rice from a comparative cultivation perspective.

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## SUMMARY

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Adaptable Levels  
Grades 6 - adult

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Related Themes  
PPE, TPDC

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Values  
Team work, industry, achievement

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Skills  
Decision-making,  
reading charts and timelines

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Integration  
Social studies, math, economics

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**DEVELOPMENT (Instruction, Data Collection, Organization)**

1. Divide the class into groups of 3-7 students and tell students that today they will be farming in communist China. It is important that the groups be different sizes; later students may comment that it was an advantage to be in a bigger family. This is an important point!
2. Give each group a basket into which they are to put their “farm products.” Explain their farming procedure which is to color the pictures of rice plants with colored pencils, then cut each plant out, and then put it in their group basket.
3. Tell students that you will be paying them production points at the end of each harvest round which will transfer into percentages of each “crop” and that in return for their production points, they can “buy” food to eat.
4. Quietly tell one group not to work too hard (or try to let this happen naturally) in order to simulate a “lazy” or less motivated family.
5. Have each round (“season”) be about 5-10 minutes and tell students they will be farming for several seasons (you can decide how many seasons). If anyone leaves the room (*e.g.*, goes to the bathroom), they will not be paid.
6. Start the timer for the first round and have each group get started while you slowly pass out materials such as colored pencils and scissors; you can later explain this as a “variation in fertilizer” for each group.
7. As you walk around, please note if “Comrade \_\_\_\_\_” is not working hard.
8. At the end of the round, collect baskets and distribute production points. All group/family baskets are combined into one giant class/village container for counting. All students who were present during the round and “worked the days” will receive production points which have 10% written on them (you could set up different payments as in the extension activity below). These points are redeemable immediately for candy pieces. The way to decide how much candy to give each student is to count out the rice plants and then count out an equal number of candy pieces. Next, each student gets a percentage of the candy crop. (The candy does not need to be their favorite consumer good!)
9. Conduct another round. This time at the end of the round, tell the class there was a drought and take away half of their crop. I would suggest, though, at the very end of the class period, that you might give them better candy as you say goodbye.
10. Be sure there is ample time for debriefing after the simulation. Discussion should focus on how the simulation reflects aspects of communes (see Key Questions below).

**EXTENSION/ENRICHMENT (Idea Articulation, Ownership, Experimentation)**

- An option during the activity is to assign students to simulate (1) workers who are injured (*e.g.*, a broken arm) or (2) parents and have to hold a baby while coloring and cutting their rice plants.
- Another extension to the simulation would be to pay girls less (women worked a ten-hour day for a production point and men worked an eight-hour day for a production point).
- You could also spend more time presenting information on rice and other East Asian staple crops. Rice is not grown in all regions of China.
- Another variation of the simulation would be to have students spend a portion of food each time on buying supplies and/or equipment like scissors that could mechanize the agriculture.

## ASSESSMENT OF ACHIEVEMENT

The debriefing and discussion should help you assess the level of student understanding. At the end of the period, you could have each student write a one-page diary entry describing the day of a worker in a commune.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- Did you find that your rice crop went up or down in size after the first season? What was the general work habit pattern among the workers? How did you feel about the “lazy family team”? Did others lose the incentive to work?
- Did you have any difficulties farming? If so, what were they? What would have made it easier or better for you to carry out your farming?
- Did you have a worker in your group that relaxed a bit? Have you ever experienced frustration working in a group because not everyone worked hard?
- How did you feel about the candy goods? Would you have worked harder if you could have acquired better candy for your own individual work? Did your own work improve as you became more experienced after each season?
- How did the girls feel about being paid less (if they were paid less)?
- How did you feel about running out of materials and getting fertilizer late?

Cooperative grouping and team goals are important and can help you complete a task, but it hurts the group to have people that do not work hard. The Chinese found it more efficient to allow people to divide up the land and then profit from whatever they grew. In this way, they had more of an incentive to work hard. Make sure that you discuss negatives about capitalism as well; note that students who experience a disaster are going to be in need of a supportive community. To learn more about China, have students watch the PBS video, *Born Under the Red Sun*.

## ALTERNATIVES

Try this as a similar lesson/simulation about factory workers.

## REFERENCES & RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Dudley, William, and Karin Swisher, eds. *China: Opposing Viewpoints*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1989. (ISBN: 0899084397)  
An excellent resource and addition to a library. Several chapters are devoted to the debates over Chinese economic development. The book develops critical thinking skills and enhances the ability to comprehend complex arguments.
- Brown, Christopher L., Project Editor. *East Asia in Transition*. Atlanta: Southern Center for International Studies, 1996.
- *Economic Choices: China After Mao*. Stanford: Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE); tel.: (800) 578-1114.  
A very readable and useful resource which examines free market and planned economic systems against China’s effort to develop. It introduces economic concepts using slides and student readings, and includes background materials for teachers. In addition, it introduces students to the use of statistics in understanding development.

- Hinton, Carma. *Small Happiness: Women of a Chinese Village*. New York: New Day Films. Produced by Richard Gordon, Kathy Kline, and Daniel Sipe; a production of the Long Bow Group, Ltd, Wayne, NJ. 1984. (58 min)  
A documentary which investigates the conditions of life for Chinese women from the past through the mid-1980s. (NOTE: As always it is important to **preview this video ahead of time** for appropriateness and so that you can prepare your students.)
- Hinton, William. *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*. (video)
- Mukai, Gary. *U.S.-Japan Relations: The View from Both Sides of the Pacific. Part II*. Stanford: Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), 1994; tel.: (800) 578-1114.
- *Rural Development in China*. Stanford: Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE); tel.: (800) 578-1114.  
Explores the role of agriculture in developing countries with specific focus on China's post-1949 rural development, including a look at the commune, the concept of redistribution and responsibility system.
- <http://www.askasia.com>  
The Asia Society's web site is a good place to start locating information and resources on China and other parts of Asia.
- <http://www.easc.indiana.edu>  
The East Asian Studies Center at Indiana University supports a web site with many different teaching resources useful for educators as well as students.
- [http://www.state.gov/www/background\\_notes/china\\_1196\\_bgn.html](http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/china_1196_bgn.html)  
The U.S. Department of State publishes Background Notes on the web which provide information on geographic entities and international organizations; they are updated periodically.

## SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIVITY #1:

### *Rice: The Global Crop*

*This unit provides an excellent supplemental activity to enhance the preceding simulation. Although it deals largely with rice as grown in Indonesia and California, a similar comparative lesson can be created for China and other East Asian countries. This mini-unit was developed by Nancy Van Ravenswaay. Only a portion of the unit is replicated here; the unit is available in its entirety on Asia Society's web site: <http://www.askasia.org/frclasrm/lessplan/1000008.htm>.*

#### Materials:

- Samples of different varieties of rice (example: long grain, short grain, brown, unmilled) in sets (laminated or in small resealable bags for student viewing).
- Unusual varieties can be ordered from: Rube's, St. Lawrence Market, 91 Front St. East, Toronto, Ontario MSE 1C3, Canada
- A sheet of paper, or cards, with descriptions of the rice samples (made by teacher to correspond to samples)
- Appropriate handouts (not all are reproduced here, but are available online)

#### Introduction:

Rice, a member of the grass family, along with wheat and corn, is one of the three crops on which the human species largely subsists. The distribution of people and the basic grain they consume is one of environmental determination, dating to the agricultural revolution of pre-history with redistributions in the last few centuries. Cultural universals, economic, political and religious, have been affected in many ways by the basic food source of the culture involved. "You are what you eat" might be translated into "a culture reflects what its people eat." Rice growing is also a contemporary issue, because of the need, in nations where "rice is life" to increase rice production to keep pace with population increases.

These materials are intended to give students an introduction to cultures other than their own, via a comparison of rice cultivation in Asia and in California, and how these cultures have been influenced by their grain crop.

#### Objectives:

Through these activities, students will be able to:

- Observe differences in rice varieties.
- Understand the uniqueness of the rice plant and how it grows.
- Compare rice growing in Indonesia and California, observing the steps common to the process everywhere.
- Learn the terms land, labor, and capital.
- Comprehend the concepts labor-intensive and capital-intensive.

Teaching Time: 2-3 class periods

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## Procedure:

## Introductory Activity:

1. Divide class into groups of four. Give one set of rice samples and sample descriptions to each group. Have the students match the samples to the descriptions.
2. Brainstorm with the students everything they know about rice. Record responses on the chalkboard (varieties, food dishes, where grown, how grown).

## Activity 1:

1. Give students *The Rice Plant* (Handout #1; available online). Use the transparencies of the rice growing process and introduce the parts of the rice plants and the growing process. Have students label the parts of the rice plant on their papers. Ask students for differences between how rice grows and how other garden or house plants grow (the amount of water). Where would be good places to grow rice? (near rivers or in rainy climates)
2. On a world map or globe locate the rice growing regions in the United States (along the Mississippi River and gulf coast into Texas, and in California). Also locate the rice growing areas of Asia (Japan, southern China into India, Southeast Asia). In Southeast Asia identify the country of Indonesia, and specifically, the Island of Java. Discuss the physical and climatic reasons for rice growing in these areas.

## Activity 2:

1. The students read *At Work in the Rice Fields* (Handout #2; see next page) as an introduction to rice growing and culture in Indonesia on the Island of Java. Before reading, review the vocabulary words. After reading, discuss similarities and differences between students and Ali's experiences with plant growing.
2. Compare the way rice is grown in Indonesia and in California. To half the groups give a set of *Indonesia Rice Growing* pictures and a set of descriptions (Handout #3a; pictures available online), to the other half give the California picture set and descriptions (Handout #3b; pictures available online).
3. Have each group match the pictures to the descriptions and put them into a logical sequence.
4. Have the Indonesia groups and California groups meet to compare and discuss picture sequences and make a final determination of order. One representative from each side meets with the teacher to verify sequence. If the sequence is incorrect, point out discrepancies.
5. Once the sequences are correct, have the students return to their original groups.
6. Pair Indonesia groups with California groups to have each group show its picture sequences and explain rice growing in its country to the other group.
7. From the class, elicit and list the important steps of rice growing common to both Indonesia and California.
8. Make a list of the differences in the way rice is grown.
9. Discuss the differences between rice growing in Indonesia and California and the meaning of labor-intensive and capital-intensive production. Examine land as a natural resource, noting the amount of labor required in each instance, and consider the cost of investing in the machinery used in rice growing in California. The terms technology and "appropriate technology" can be introduced as well.

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Focus Questions:

- What is the major, single difference between them? (Machines)
- What is necessary for farmers to acquire machines? (Money, Capital)
- In which areas are there more people to be seen? (Labor)
- What problems would occur if the Indonesians would begin using heavy machinery? (Paddies too small, people unemployed, raising capital to purchase the machines).

10. Culmination: To demonstrate understanding, the students write a story about rice growing from the perspective of a child living in a rice-growing family in either Indonesia or California. In this story they must tell about their role in caring for the rice plants during the growing process, and why that role is important to the growth of the plants.

[A teacher resource of information: "Facts About U.S. Rice" from the Rice Council, P.O. Box 740123, Houston, Texas 77274. Telephone: (713) 270-6699.]

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*The Sutomos in the Village of Salam, Java* (Handout #2)  
by Kathryn Glazier

VOCABULARY:

- *kampung* = village
- *paddy fields* = English term for wet (flooded) rice field
- *sawah* = Indonesian term for wet (flooded) rice field
- *selamatan* = celebratory feast

At Work in the Rice Field

It is 6:30 a.m., and the sun throws all its light on the roadway for Ali Sutomo and his sister Fatmawati to find their way to work. Ali rides his bicycle past the *kampung* of Salam to the paddy fields that lie banked and terraced in patchwork patterns right up to the slopes of Mt. Merapi. Ali is seventeen and feels happy today when he sees the young shoots of rice shine so green in their watery fields in perfect harmony with nature. The tiny rice plants had been set out in groups of three and tied upright in the wet *sawah* by the women. This crop, from a new variety of high-yield dwarf rice that his father and the other owner-farmers planted, is an experiment. The *kampung* could not feed itself from the normal yield of rice and this imported variety promises three times the yield but requires expensive nitrogen fertilizers, chemical insecticides, and multiple cropping. It took many evenings of discussion before the farmers reached a consensus and agreed to cooperate in growing the new miracle rice at the second planting this dry season.

Today Ali will work at breaking up the large chunks of volcanic soil in a section of field being prepared for flooding and planting. He parks his bicycle on a high ridge of ground; speaks briefly with his father Pak Yusuf; and adjusts his plaited, conical hat as he steps barefoot into the warm, sticky field. The brilliant sun will soon wet his sweatshirt and shorts as he works his

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hoe in a lift and chop rhythm. But work will end early this special day. The government rural development office in Yogyakarta is sending a field officer to advise the farmers to try rotation of soybeans with rice. After that the *kampung* will hold a *selamatan* to celebrate the event.

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**PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS: RICE GROWING IN INDONESIA (Handout #3a):**

[Pictures are available at: <http://www.askasia.org/image/photos/tab107.htm> ]

**PICTURE 1: PREPARING THE SAWAH (wet rice field or paddy)**

Using mattocks (heavy hoe-like implements), the men break up the mostly volcanic soil into large clods which will soften and dissolve in the water.

**PICTURE 2: CULTIVATING THE SAWAH**

The water buffalo pulls a harrow through the flooded *sawah* (Indonesian name for wet rice field or paddy). The harrow levels the soil surface and makes a smooth bed for rice seedlings to be planted and makes water depth the same throughout the *sawah*.

**PICTURE 3: THE SAWAH READY FOR PLANTING**

Small bundles of green seedlings, lined up along one edge of the *sawah*, are being transplanted from specially fertilized beds. Notice the slight rise in elevation between each *sawah* from foreground to back. Looking closely, you can see water trickling from a *sawah* to the one in front.

**PICTURE 4: PLANTING THE RICE SEEDLINGS**

Women plant the seedlings one at a time, spacing them a hand span apart. (A hand span is the distance from the thumb to little finger when the fingers are spread apart). These women worked for four days to plant this single *sawah*. A few days later, a man will walk through the fields casting handfuls of fertilizer to cover the fields. As weeds begin to grow, men will go through the paddy pulling them up and burying them beneath the mud, where they also act as fertilizer as they decay.

**PICTURE 5: THE RICE GROWS AND MATURES**

Shown here in terraces, the rice has grown and branched out (called tillering), developed seed heads, and soon will be ready for harvesting. Lower on the hillside are several *sawahs* that are flooded and waiting to be planted. In some countries, like Bali, the rice is planted first in the highest fields. After the water is used it is allowed to flow downhill where the lower terraces then use it.

**PICTURE 6: HARVESTING THE RICE**

A woman holds a small knife (called *ani-ani*) in her right hand, concealed to not frighten the rice plant. Each stalk is cut individually and transferred to her left hand. When enough has been cut to make a small bundle, it is stacked for later threshing. Traditionally, the person doing the threshing received one stalk from each bundle.

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**PICTURE 7: THRESHING THE RICE**

The rice seeds are separated from their stalks and husks (chaff) by being ground underfoot. (Sometimes the bundles are beaten by hand). Next the rice will be tossed in a wide, flat basket to let the wind blow away the light-weight chaff.

**PICTURE 8: DRYING THE RICE**

Rice is spread out on canvas along a village street to evaporate remaining moisture (about 20 percent of its weight).

**PICTURE 9: POUNDING THE RICE**

A woman pounds the unhulled, dried rice with a log from a palm tree (as a pestle) in a stone bowl (mortar). This wears off the brown hull so the rice may be cooked and eaten. If pounded more, rice flour is produced. Sometimes several women pound rice in a log trough side by side.

**PICTURE 10: SELLING RICE**

Although most rice is stored unhulled in the household or village until needed for food, some rice is sold in the open market. Baskets of rice, in various stages of hulling, are offered for sale.

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***PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS: RICE GROWING IN CALIFORNIA (Handout #3b)***

*[Pictures are available at: <http://www.askasia.org/image/photos/tab25.htm> ]*

**PICTURE 1: PREPARING THE CHECK (rice field)**

A tractor pulls a moldboard plow (its shape turns the soil over) to turn under a crop of vetch, a crop planted after the last rice crop. It will compost and act as fertilizer, adding nitrogen to the soil. The rice field is called a "check" and can be either rectangular or follow the contour of the land. Rice grows best in clay soil, which softens under water but doesn't let more water drain through once it is saturated. This keeps water on the surface for the rice plant to grow in.

**PICTURE 2: LEVELING THE RICE CHECK**

Tractors and dirt loaders are used to level the surface of the rice check so the water will cover the surface to the same depth over all. The tractors are controlled by a separate machine which uses a laser to find high and low spots. Each check is tilted slightly so water will flow continuously through the field, assuring that oxygen is present in the water around the plants. Although this machinery is very expensive, the job needs to be done only about every five years.

**PICTURE 3: SEEDS ARE READIED FOR PLANTING**

Rice seeds are soaked in large bins so they will sprout soon after planting. Sometimes the seeds are coated with fungicides (to prevent the growth of fungus) or coated with elements to improve the acid level of the soil. In the background are white tanks holding fuel to run the machines used in rice growing.

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**PICTURES 4a & 4b: SOWING THE RICE**

The rice checks have been flooded through a system of canals which bring water from a nearby river. The rice is seeded from an airplane, which sows a thirty-foot wide swath before returning for reloading from a funnel moved into position by a truck. Two planes alternate in the landing-refilling-taking off process, which takes three minutes.

**PICTURE 5: CARE OF GROWING RICE**

The growing rice is treated periodically with pesticides and herbicides to kill insects and weeds. The rice is kept flooded with 6-8 inches of water until just before harvest, when the clay soil of the check dries very quickly.

**PICTURE 6: HARVESTING AND THRESHING**

A harvester (or combine) both cuts and threshes the rice. It cuts a 20-foot wide swath of rice, then separates the rice kernels from the stems (straw), and the husks from the kernels (chaff). The combine feeds the rice into a tractor pulled carrier, which will take the rice to a truck on a nearby roadway. The combine also chops up the rice straw and deposits it onto the field behind it. Later the straw will either be burned off or ploughed under before the next harvest.

**PICTURE 7: DRYING THE RICE**

Rice is put into wide, shallow bins, which move up, over, and down a height of three stories as hot air is blown over them. When harvested, rice contains 18-26 percent moisture. It is dried to about 14% moisture, to help it keep for storage.

**PICTURE 8: RICE STORAGE**

After being dried, the rice is loaded into bins on a truck to be moved into the tall silos of a warehouse. In the warehouse it will be kept at a controlled temperature to maintain its quality.

**PICTURE 9: MILLING THE RICE**

The rice is milled in a storage warehouse and rice mill, where machinery controlled by computers removes the brown hulls from the rice. The large building shown in the picture is owned by a cooperative of rice farmers who share the cost of operating it.

**PICTURE 10: SHIPPING THE RICE**

About 55 percent of California rice is sold in the U.S. and its territories, where it is mostly used for food. The remainder is sold on the world market. Short grain rice, preferred in Asian markets, grows well in California. The ship is loading rice at the Port of Sacramento into a Korean merchant ship.

## TEACHER BACKGROUND #1:

*Economy of China*

*[From section ten of China: A Teaching Workbook developed by the East Asian Curriculum Project at Columbia University. The workbook in its entirety is available at the East Asian Studies Center's web site: <http://www.easc.indiana.edu>]*

China is a developing country, with a small amount of arable land and an extremely large population. The goal of Chinese leaders has been to reverse the ratio of employment in agriculture to employment in the urban sector (currently 4:1). At the start of reforms, in 1978, approximately 800 million people were employed in agriculture while only 200 million were employed in urban areas. This means that if successful in the twenty-first century, 80% of China's population will be employed in industry and services.

In order to achieve economic modernization, the Chinese government after 1949 has sought to find a way to squeeze surplus out of the countryside (where 80% of the population live), and turn it into investment for industry. Leaving it to the market was thought to be slow, inefficient, and inequitable, so the commune system of collectivized agriculture was implemented in the 1950s as one solution to the problem. Although the commune system did allow the state to extract the maximum surplus from the countryside, it was ultimately judged inefficient, with major disincentive effects, and abandoned; at times it was disastrous with widespread famine occurring, such as during the years 1959-62 at the end of the Great Leap Forward. Mao Zedong laid great stress on the need to adapt Marxism, a Western ideology, to the Chinese context; this led to the development of "Maoism" or "Mao Zedong thought."

China today continues in its effort to maximize agricultural output while controlling population—China feeds approximately 1/5 of the human race on only 7% of the world's arable land; with a population five (5) times that of the United States, it has only 1/2 as much land suitable for farming as does the U.S. Under agriculture reforms instituted in the 1980s, farming is now contracted to individual peasant families who are encouraged to increase their output through market incentives. The simultaneous expansion of rural industry is designed to absorb agricultural labor, which is rendered unnecessary by more efficient techniques of production, and to provide additional sources of income, while individuals are encouraged to farm larger and larger tracts of land. Emphasis on strict control of population growth is closely related to these policies. The new agricultural policies have been successful in raising output, but the return to family farming works against population control.

One of the reasons that China's economic reforms of the 1980s have been so successful in raising output is the almost instantaneous re-emergence of the traditional Chinese market system. Local periodic markets, free markets, the use of brokers, local forms of credit, networks of "merchants" and handicraft producers have all re-established themselves beside the large-scale state-run industries, the smaller rural cooperative industries, and the dynamic, fast growing sector of small private enterprises. Even local towns are growing and becoming more prosperous as the government once again permits rural people to move to urban places, or at least to small urban places. (Permanent migration to large cities is still prohibited because the government fears loss of agricultural work force and difficulties in feeding a large urban population, though there has emerged an extremely large (50 million people) floating population who live in the cities illegally. In the mid-1970s, Zhou Enlai argued that the keys to China's modernization were the development of agriculture, industry, defense and science/technology referred to as the "Four modernizations."

In the mid-1980s, China moved the reform effort from the rural areas to the urban areas. Following the thrust of reforms in the countryside (decentralization of decision-making power), the government sought to introduce market mechanisms (such as the use of supply and demand to determine prices, and measures of efficiency such as profit) to guide decisions in the large factories. They even went so far as to enact a bankruptcy law in China.

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But industrial reforms have proven more difficult than agricultural reforms. Since the establishment of the PRC there has been very strict central control over industry, but now the government is experimenting with loosening some of that control.

State control of industrial development and state regulation of prices are supported by the structure of Chinese economic and political life which are difficult to change. State control of prices impedes the workings of the free market reforms, however. Artificial prices are set for agricultural products to keep food prices in cities low. This discourages farmers from growing more crops. It also helps create a dual economy, one in which some goods are available for less in state stores, but one in which farmers also sell some goods independently on the streets, at a price the market will bear. This also applies to raw materials, and it is not hard to imagine how local officials with contacts to getting cheap raw materials, resell them at higher prices to industries desperate for these materials. At the same time, fear of taxation by the rural populace in an environment in which the central government has devolved power to the local level leaves the local government, as in the past, without regular and adequate funding. These factors are partly the reason for the rising corruption in China today.

The partial nature of decentralization in the urban areas, meant to give more autonomy to the enterprise in making business decisions, has contributed to the growing corruption and confusion over the nature of the Chinese system as it rests uneasily between a fully planned system and a fully free one.

The persistence of the ideal of state management of society presents a potential obstacle to development. Government in China is still viewed today as responsible for people's welfare and for solving people's problems. Mao's concern with grain production and grain procurement, to ensure adequate supplies of staple grains to feed the entire population, was in part responsible for economic dislocation and famines in the 1960s. (Forcing regions to be self-sufficient in grain means even areas less suited to grain grow it and areas suited to commercial crops do not grow commercial crops.) As in the past, a fear of grain shortage in the late 1980s created constant pressure for maintenance of state grain quotas and demands for regional self-sufficiency.

The result is an unsatisfactory stalemate between the local levels and the center, with a reduced ability by the Chinese Communist Party to control the development of China using macro-economic levers. But, at the same time China does not have any real market mechanisms to control development. In addition, the desire to "catch up with the West," places special pressure on the government to continue the economic reforms, even in a period of political uncertainty.

## TEACHER BACKGROUND #2:

*Communes of China*

*[From section ten of China: A Teaching Workbook developed by the East Asian Curriculum Project at Columbia University. The workbook in its entirety is available at the East Asian Studies Center's web site: <http://www.easc.indiana.edu>]*

## INTRODUCTION:

Communes were designed to fill a myriad of functions: to give rural communities the opportunity, through the pooling and organization of labor and income, to accomplish large water conservation projects; to establish small factories and produce goods that would increase general income; to support hospitals and schools; to care for the elderly and disabled within the community. Well-organized human labor was seen as the key to development as China did not have and could not afford machines. Although the commune system did allow the state to extract the maximum surplus from the countryside, it was ultimately judged inefficient, with major disincentive effects, and abandoned; at times it was disastrous with widespread famine occurring, such as during the years 1959-62, at the end of the Great Leap Forward.

## ORGANIZATION OF A COMMUNE:

*[This discussion refers to Chart #1 (Commune Organization) and Chart #2 (Stages of Rural Collectivization) which follow.]*

The structure of the commune was such that families were organized into teams, then teams formed brigades, and brigades formed the commune. Each level of organization was responsible for certain activities: the team for organizing farm labor, the brigade for establishing small workshops and elementary schools, the commune for large-scale land reclamation projects, a hospital, a high school, small factories, and other side-line industries, as well as a welfare fund to aid the poor at communities within the commune.

Since China was a poor country, the central and provincial governments are unable to assist poor communities. The aim was for rural communities to improve their lot through "self-reliance." Cooperation through the commune organization was the key to this.

Would a small village, whose land was poor, be able to afford a school or a healthcare station? The answer was no. However, by joining with other villages and sending one or more of its members to work on joint projects, the village could contribute to the general development of the larger community from which it then benefits.

If there were flaws in the system, what were they? Perhaps most particularly there was the problem of incentive. The peasants became less enthusiastic over time about working as hard as they could for the general welfare of the group—especially if they saw a neighbor who was not working, but was benefiting as well as they were from group achievements. The "responsibility system" has been designed to provide greater individual incentive for hard work.

## EVOLUTION OF A COMMUNE:

*Land Reform:* This was the first and most dramatic stage of China's revolution, when the land of the landlords was taken and distributed to the peasants.

*Lower-Stage Cooperative:* (formed 1954-1955) Peasants pooled their land to create larger fields that could yield greater output and shared farm implements. Peasants still received their return, however, on the amount and quality of the land and tools they could contribute—benefiting middle-class peasants but not poor peasants.

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*Higher-Stage Cooperatives:* (formed 1955-1956) Peasants received their return primarily on the basis of their labor, making everyone more equal and benefiting poor peasants.

*Commune:* (formed 1958-1959) The communes attempted to equalize income among cooperatives by joining several cooperatives (now called brigades) together, so that a cooperative community with poor land might benefit from the wealth of a cooperative community with very fertile land.

There were approximately 53,000 communes in China, 170,000 peasant households in the communes, and 90,000,000 acres of arable land under control of communes at their height of existence, but they have now largely disappeared and been replaced by the household responsibility system where each family is responsible for managing plots of land it alone has contracted to farm for long periods of time.

#### CHART #1: COMMUNE ORGANIZATION

There are approximately 53,000 communes in China; 170,000 peasant households in the communes; and 90,000,000 acres of arable land under control of communes.

COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION	TRADITIONAL DIVISIONS
county (hsien)	county (hsien)
(district)	(district)
commune: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• population 10,000-80,000 (labor force 1/3)</li> <li>• 2,000-20,000 households</li> <li>• 10-30 brigades</li> </ul>	hsiang: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• large market town with market network</li> </ul>
brigade: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• population 1,000-2,000</li> <li>• 200-400 households</li> <li>• 10-20 teams</li> </ul> team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• population 100-200 (labor force 1/3)</li> <li>• 20-40 households</li> </ul>	natural village: (In some cases, a natural village corresponds to a team, in others to a brigade, depending on the size of the village.)
households	households

(Continued...)

CHART #2: STAGES OF RURAL COLLECTIVIZATION

1950-52	Land Reform	Land was redistributed, and those without land acquired some. Labor exchanges were developed.
1954-56	Collectivization into Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives (APCs) in two stages	Land was pooled.
1955	(a) Lower APCs	Peasants retained ownership of land: produce was divided, with 70% on the basis of labor and 30% interest on land, animals, or tools contributed.
1956	(b) Higher APCs	Land was owned collectively at village level: produce was divided on basis of labor alone.
1958-60	Communes (Great Leap Forward)	APCs amalgamated to form larger administrative organizations called communes. Ownership of land transferred to commune level. Produce divided on basis of 60% "free supply" or equal division of all goods among members. 40% by labor. Private plots and private markets eliminated. Labor reorganized to create work crews for large projects—water conservation (irrigation) or local industry. Accumulated funds at commune level used to support education, healthcare, etc.
1960-65	Reorganization of communes ("retreat")	Land ownership reverted to team level: produce divided at least 60% by labor, some by need. Private plots and markets reinstated. Commune remains important as unit within which to organize cooperation for larger projects (irrigation), support of rural industry, and purchase of major machinery (tractors).
1965-80	Search for best balance that will raise agricultural output while promoting egalitarian distribution in countryside and rural development	Urban youth sent-down to countryside to provide new skills: local rural industry encouraged (cement, electric power, farm machinery, fertilizers, iron and steel) as well as brick-making, canning, powdered milk, other small-scale enterprises. Proper balance between collective enterprise and private plots sought. Goal of raising level of ownership from team to brigade remains the ideal. As of December 1978, state will pay 20% more to communes for grain purchased under quota; 30% more for grain purchased over quota. Agricultural tax and quota of grain that must be sold to the state will be based on 1975 levies: prices on farm machinery, chemical fertilizers, and insecticides will be cut by 10-15% in 1979-80. Market price for food in cities will be kept stable to raise standard of living in rural areas without taxing urban dwellers. Drive for mechanization of all grain production by 1980 abandoned: targeted mechanization promoted instead.
1981	Responsibility System	<p>The cultivation of land, for which the production team was responsible, is now subcontracted to a) groups of families, b) single families, or c) individuals depending on the circumstances of the particular team. (The richer the team, the larger the group given the subcontract.) The subcontractor is responsible for meeting a certain production quota and is paid accordingly for the work. Subcontractors are also well paid for over-fulfilling the quota in an effort to raise agricultural output. Although the land is still owned in common, this new system has been called "the second land reform."</p> <p>In addition, 15% of all team land is allocated for private plots and divided among individual households which are free to consume or sell the produce as they choose. Sideline production, such as raising of pigs and chickens, is also encouraged and private markets are open where peasants can sell this private production independently.</p> <p>Emphasis is now placed on the diversification of agriculture to produce a more diversified diet. While this means a less exclusive emphasis on grain than in the past, there is still concern that grain product remain adequate to feed the vast population.</p>

STUDENT HANDOUT #1:



## STUDENT HANDOUT #2:

*Quotations from Chairman Mao on Being a Communist in China*

[From section nine of *China: A Teaching Workbook* developed by the East Asian Curriculum Project at Columbia University. The workbook in its entirety is available on the East Asian Studies Center's web site: <http://www.easc.indiana.edu>]

“At no time and in no circumstances should a Communist place his personal interests first; he should subordinate them to the interests of the nation and of the masses. Hence, selfishness, slacking, corruption, seeking the limelight, and so on, are most contemptible, while selflessness, working with all one’s energy, whole-hearted devotion to public duty, and quiet hard work will command respect.”

(*The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War*, October 1938.)

“Communists should set an example in being practical as well as far-sighted. For only by being practical can they fulfill the appointed tasks, and only far-sightedness can prevent them from losing their bearings in the march forward.”

(*The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War*, October 1938.)

“Communists should be the most far-sighted, the most self-sacrificing, the most resolute, and the least prejudiced in sizing up situations, and should rely on the majority of the masses and win their support.”

(*The Tasks of the Chinese Communist Party in the Period of Resistance to Japan*, May 3, 1937.)

[Above quotes originally taken from: *The Little Red Book: Quotations From Chairman Mao*. Beijing Foreign Languages Press, 1972.]

## STUDENT HANDOUT #3:

*Deng Xiaoping: The Economic Reformer*

*[From section nine of China: A Teaching Workbook developed by the East Asian Curriculum Project at Columbia University. The workbook in its entirety is available on the East Asian Studies Center's web site: <http://www.easc.indiana.edu>]*

Deng Xiaoping came to power shortly after the death of Mao in 1976. His goal was to set China back on the course of economic development that had been badly interrupted during the final years of Mao's leadership. Deng's rallying cry became the "Four Modernizations" articulated by Zhou Enlai in 1975, which entailed the development of industry, agriculture, defense, and science and technology. He set the course of reform by dismantling the communes set up under Mao and replaced them with the Household Responsibility System (HRS), within which each household must be held accountable to the state for only what it agrees to produce, and is free to keep surplus output for private use. In addition to this program, which was an incentive for households to produce more, Deng encouraged farmers to engage in private entrepreneurship and sideline businesses in order to supplement their incomes.

Deng Xiaoping said that "practice is the sole criterion of truth" and believed that only by experimenting with alternative forms of production and entrepreneurial activity would China find the best path for economic development. Thus began China's experiments with capitalist methods of production. As Deng said, "It does not matter if a cat is black or white so long as it catches the mouse;" it no longer matters if an economic policy is capitalist or socialist, in other words, as long as it results in economic growth.

Deng also wanted to set up an arrangement whereby leadership succession would take place according to legal guidelines rather than personality struggles. In general, he hoped to establish a social and political order governed by "rule by law, not by man." Even after he had retired from his formal positions, Deng encouraged his aging comrades to follow this example. Deng's commitment to replacing the aging leaders suffered a setback, however. When faced with demands for political reforms by students and citizens throughout China in 1989, Deng ordered the military to move in and clear Tiananmen square, where they were demonstrating for greater freedom of speech and press, and greater accountability on the party of government. Pro-reform leaders like Zhao Ziyang were removed from office and many of the retired leaders, many of whom did not support Zhao's reform effort, returned to power after June 4, 1989.

Economically, China has entered a very difficult period characterized by unemployment and general uncertainty. Also unclear is how history will view the role and achievements of Deng Xiaoping in light of the events at Tiananmen square.

[Composed by Catherine H. Keyser]