

Moving Towards *One China*: The Chinese Communist Party as an Organizing System

Overview

China has one of the longest histories of any countries in the world, but when we think of imperial China, we may often forget that imperial rule did not end until the year 1912, when the Qing dynasty was overthrown. The China that we know now, with its large national government, came to fruition following the rise of radical, Western philosophy; this resulted in Chinese intellectuals forming the Communist Party of China (CPC). The CPC targeted, and still targets, multiple facets of society in order to organize the country into *One China*, that is, a China that adheres to the CPC's ideology by creating a cultural and political monolith among its citizens. In this case study I will be classifying the CPC's organizational methods for creating this "One China" into five categories: political, economic, cultural, geographic/geopolitical, and technological.

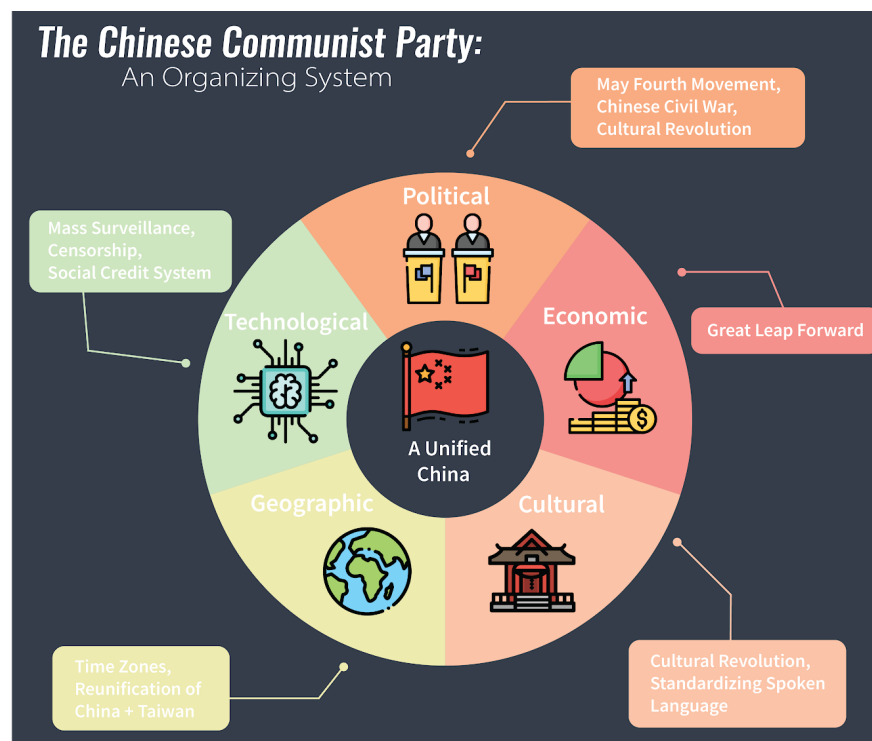


Figure 1: Different Facets of Society the CPC Organizes

What is being organized?

Following the complex political events that occurred during China's imperial history, especially during the 19th century (which will be discussed in the next section), the Chinese Communist Party targets multiple facets of Chinese society in order to organize the citizens into one single cultural and political monolith that entirely adheres to the CPC's ideology and history. The Communist Party does this by attempting to establish a uniform cultural, political, economic, and geo-political identity and ideology in order to unite its citizens under *One China*. Therefore, the things that are being organized are not just the Chinese people, but also the entire ideologies and configuration of the Communist Party, national government, and country as a whole.

The People's Republic of China (PRC), the official name for mainland China, is currently a multi-party state, with The Communist Party of China as the largest political party of the country, making up 71% of the legislature as of 2019. The CPC only permits eight other political parties to exist; however, the current power balance between the parties prevents these eight smaller parties from winning elections¹. The influence of the CPC, therefore, is quite widespread.

Why is it being organized?

The political climate of imperial China cultivated an environment in which communist ideas resonated with many intellectuals, scholars, and philosophers. The many events that transpired throughout Chinese history can be divided into internal and external issues.

Internal issues mostly stemmed from the unstable dynasty system and the corruption of local politics. The people that were most affected by this were working class peasants, which consisted of approximately eighty percent of the population; peasants were frequently oppressed and exploited by harsh rulers, monarchs, and elites that benefited from the dynastic system of rule². Furthermore, these dynasties offered peace and stability in the beginning, but always ended in turmoil before being overthrown and replaced with a new dynasty, which affected the working class the most during these transitions of power². In addition, the working class peasants became increasingly disillusioned with local politics during the 19th and early 20th centuries, as the relatively independent local governments were susceptible to

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_China

² Huang, Shu-min. *The Spiral Road: Change in a Chinese Village through the Eyes of a Communist Party Leader*. Waveland Press, 2014.

bureaucratic corruption, bribery, and exploitation³. Due to the independence of local politics, local governments ruled by the elites also became a facade for small-scale war and conflict between other local governments. The struggles of the peasants in imperial China helped to form the basis of the communist ideology that centered around a proletariat revolution and uplifting the working class.

External issues that led to the rise of the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party revolve around the presence of colonial powers. This primarily refers to the Opium Wars, a set of two wars in the mid-1800s in which British imperialism targeted China during the Qing Dynasty, undermining the country and dynasty's political and economic power, and forcing it to trade with other colonial powers. Many philosophers, intellectuals, and radicals began questioning why China was unable to resist these colonial powers, and many attributed this problem due to something being inherently wrong or faulty with traditional Chinese culture². This formed a basis for one of the CPC's ideologies: a rejection of traditional cultural norms, practices, and beliefs, and exchanging tradition for modernity and progress; thousands of students eventually demonstrated this rejection of traditionality during the May Fourth Movement of 1919².

How Much is Being Organized?

As mentioned before, prior to the establishment of the PRC during the era of Chinese dynasties, politics were primarily centered around traditional, small, semi-autonomous communities. However, once the era of dynasties ended, these local governments were gradually replaced by a mass culture and political system centered around the national government. Therefore, the reforms and policies that the CPC implemented were made from a top-down to a grassroots level. The CPC targeted all facets of society in order to achieve its ideological goals.

³ van de Ven, Hans. "From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920-1927 by Hans J. Van De Ven." *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 26 Feb. 1992, www.goodreads.com/book/show/2267241.From_Friend_to_Comrade.

When is it Being Organized?

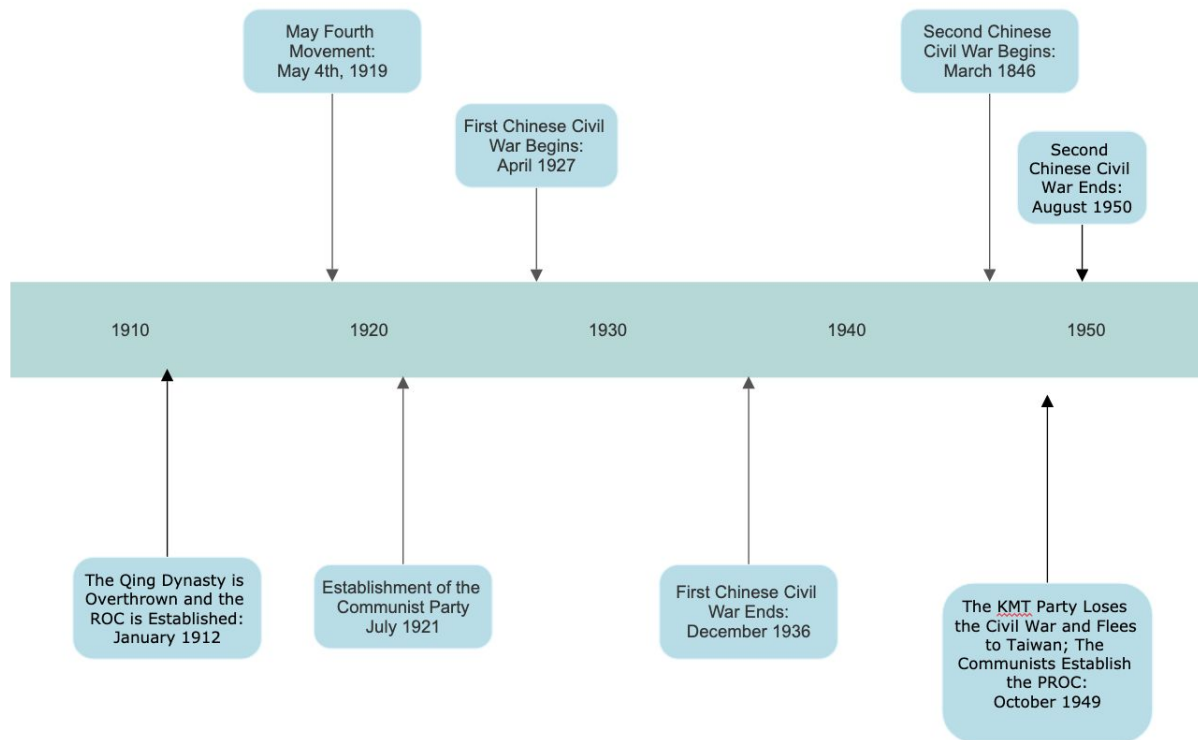


Figure 2: Important Events for Establishing the Chinese Communist Party

The Qing Dynasty was overthrown in 1912 and the Republic of China (ROC) was established, with the Kuomintang (KMT), or nationalist party, as the founding party. Many scholars trace the origins of the CPC, to the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Though organization officially began a century ago relative to today, the Communist Party continues its organizing even now. There are many significant events that have occurred since 1919 that allowed for the CPC to gain influence and political power.

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 was a movement organized by student protestors in response to China's passivity towards the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I and allowed Japan to keep its territories in Shandong Province that Germany had originally surrendered⁴. These protestors adopted western ideas of liberalism, anarchism, socialism,

⁴ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "May Fourth Movement." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 14 Feb. 2019, www.britannica.com/event/May-Fourth-Movement.

nationalism, and democracy, which eventually formed a basis for the communist party. The Communist Party of China was officially established in July of 1921⁵.

From the years 1927-1950, two civil wars broke out in China between the two political parties: the CPC, led by Mao Zedong, and the KMT, led by Chiang Kai-shek⁶. Eventually, the Communist Party would win the war, forcing the nationalist party, which had established the Republic of China, to flee to Taiwan; the communists, which stayed in mainland China, established a single-party state named the People's Republic of China (PRC)⁶.

In summary, communist philosophies began surfacing in the early twentieth century, allowing for the establishment of the Communist Party of China. The communists began their journey of creating a cultural and political monolith as the two Chinese Civil Wars raged on, eventually expelling the only other competing party, the nationalists, out of their own country. The CPC was the sole governing party during the establishment of the PRC, and even when China became a multi-party state, the CPC remains as the largest political party of China. Because of this, the communists were able to, and continue to, implement reforms and policies with little to no opposition.

How is it Being Organized?

As mentioned before, the CPC targets multiple facets of society in order to organize the country into *One China*.

Economic

- 1. Great Leap Forward (1958-1960):** This was a campaign that attempted to organize China's vast rural population into communes in order to resolve China's agricultural and industrial problems through rapid industrialization and collectivization of resources⁷. Communes were created in order to maximize the production of steel and other metals, and citizens were prohibited from engaging in regular activities in order to participate in these communes. This program was hastily implemented across the country with little to no infrastructure; therefore, much of the steel produced was valueless. Another

⁵ http://www.chinatoday.com/org/cpc/cpc_1st_congress_standing_polibureau.htm

⁶ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Chinese Civil War." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 16 Feb. 2018, www.britannica.com/event/Chinese-Civil-War.

⁷ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Great Leap Forward." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 26 Apr. 2018, www.britannica.com/event/Great-Leap-Forward.

policy of the Great Leap Forward was the elimination of private farming and cooking, leading to widespread famine in which tens of millions of people died⁸.

Political

1. **May Fourth Movement:** The May Fourth Movement formed the basis for the creation of the Chinese Communist Party.
2. **Chinese Civil Wars:** The Chinese Civil Wars resulted in the expulsion of the largest competing political party, and established a single-party state governed entirely by the CPC.
3. **Cultural Revolution (1966-1976):** Though the Cultural Revolution has the word “cultural” in it, it was also a political movement in which the leader of the party, Mao Zedong, attempted to purify the party by removing government officials and citizens who did not align with his ideals⁹. As a result of the failures of the Great Leap Forward, the CPC was moving towards a revisionist direction, which Mao Zedong disagreed with. Therefore, he implemented the revolution to retain the original ideology of the party and re-assert his authority. Over 1.5 million people were killed as a result of this political and ideological purification, and millions of others were imprisoned, tortured, or had their property seized.

Cultural

1. **Cultural Revolution (1966-1976):** Mao Zedong attempted to retain the original philosophies of the early 20th century communist party, which centered around the rejection of traditional Chinese culture. Traditional arts, philosophies, and traditional customs and practices were prohibited and publicly attacked, most commonly through propaganda¹⁰. Shrines, cultural monuments and buildings, books, and paintings were destroyed.

⁸ Jisheng, Yang "Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958–1962". Book Review. *New York Times*. Dec, 2012. 3 March 2013.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/09/books/review/tombstone-the-great-chinese-famine-1958-1962-by-yang-jisheng.html>

⁹ Editors, History.com. “Cultural Revolution.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 9 Nov. 2009, www.history.com/topics/china/cultural-revolution.

¹⁰ Lu, Xing. “Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.” *Google Books*, 2004, books.google.com/books/about/Rhetoric_of_the_Chinese_Cultural_Revolut.html?id=GO5HrrJC_aMC.

- 2. Establishment of *P ŭtōnghuà* (Standard Mandarin):** After the Chinese Civil War, in the year 1956, the government declared *P ŭtōnghuà*, or “standard speech,” as the official language of the PRC. In the early 1950s, only 41% of the people could speak standard Mandarin, and it is highly speculated that this was implemented in order to eliminate regional, traditional dialects and promote national unity¹¹. To this day, one-third of Chinese people are still unable to speak standard Mandarin,¹² and the average distance between any two Chinese dialects is approximately equal to the linguistic distance between English and French¹¹.

Geographic/Geopolitical

- 1. One Time Zone:** Although it is roughly the same size as the United States, which has six time zones, China only has one. Prior to the establishment of the PRC and the CPC as the ruling party, China had five time zones; after Mao Zedong’s rise to power as the chairman of the communist party, he ordered China to only have one time zone¹³. He demanded the country to follow Beijing standard time for the purpose of national unity.
- 2. Reunification of China and Taiwan:** The PRC established the “One China Policy,” which is a policy that states that there is only one China, despite the existence of both the People’s Republic of China (mainland China) and the Republic of China (modern day Taiwan). Due to the nationalist KMT party fleeing to Taiwan after its defeat during the Chinese Civil War, and thus the existence of “two” different Chinas, the PRC has threatened to invade and annex Taiwan with force if their government does not comply.
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¹¹ Bradley, David (1992), "Chinese as a pluricentric language", in Clyne, Michael G. (ed.), *Pluricentric Languages: Differing Norms in Different Nations*, Walter de Gruyter, pp. 305–324, ISBN 978-3-11-012855-0.

¹² Luo, Chris. “One-Third of Chinese Do Not Speak Putonghua, Says Education Ministry.” *South China Morning Post*, 23 Sept. 2014, www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1598040/3-10-chinese-citizens-do-not-speak-putonghua-says-education.

¹³ Schiavenza, Matt. “China Only Has One Time Zone-and That's a Problem.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 6 Nov. 2013, www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/11/china-only-has-one-time-zone-and-thats-a-problem/281136/.

¹⁴ Schiefelbein, Mark. “China Threatens Taiwan, Says It Seeks Peaceful 'Reunification'.” *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 2019, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-s-xi-threatens-taiwan-force-also-seeks-peaceful-reunification-n953651.

Technological

- 1. Surveillance and Censorship:** The government currently monitors over 750 million internet users, and has denied users access to websites such as Google and Facebook, video streaming sites, use of VPNs, and sites that broadcast western media or criticize the government¹⁵. President Xi Jinping says that he treats online media the same as traditional media, which has been heavily censored and restricted in the past, mirroring the events that transpired during the Cultural Revolution¹⁵.
- 2. Social Credit System:** China is also establishing a Social Credit System, which grants citizens greater privileges for having a good credit score, and penalizes other citizens for having a bad credit score¹⁶. Right now, participating in this system is voluntary, but the government will require every citizen to register for the Social Credit System by 2020 in order to monitor their activities¹⁶.

Final Remarks

I hope that this case study has been insightful. We've most likely learned about a few of these policies that the Chinese government has implemented from the history classes that we've taken, but my intention was to frame these policies in an organizational lens under a unifying theme of the communist party attempting to create *One China*. Viewing these policies from an organization lens, as well as considering the context and the political climate from which the CPC was birthed, allows us to understand the motivations and intentions behind the CPC. I did not intend to write about and categorize every single policy that the government of China implemented, but hopefully this case study will allow you to think about the vast number of China's policies and how many of them can be organized or categorized in order to construct the cultural and political monolith that the communist party strives to create.

¹⁵ Choudhury, Saheli Roy. "China Has Launched Another Crackdown on the Internet - but It's Different This Time." *CNBC*, CNBC, 27 Oct. 2017, www.cnbc.com/2017/10/26/china-internet-censorship-new-crackdowns-and-rules-are-here-to-stay.html.

¹⁶ Hatton, Celia. "China 'Social Credit': Beijing Sets up Huge System." *BBC News*, BBC, 26 Oct. 2015, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-34592186.

