

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Modern China

"Don't Mess with the Dragon"

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. Since 1644, the Manchus of the Qing Dynasty had ruled China. But in the 1800s, their power began to slip for a few reasons. People began to take advantage of the civil service test system. Wealthy people with money were able to bribe test examiners to get the best jobs. And once these cheating and bribing folks gained powerful and influential government positions, they also conveniently forgot about the fact that they were supposed to use their education to help those with less. Neglect of water systems caused massive flooding that destroyed farms. The destroyed farmland led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people from starvation and disease.

Notes

2. China was struck with a huge drug problem: opium. In the early 1800s, when Britain was trading with China, they paid the Chinese in opium, an addictive and destructive drug, instead of in silver as they'd promised. Because it was so addictive, opium was extremely popular. In 1838, about 4 million Chinese people were addicted to it. This drug addiction was destroying the country, so China made importing opium illegal.

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When China banned opium imports, the British declared war. The Opium Wars lasted through the 1850s when the British won and re-established the opium trade. They made the Chinese sign a treaty that favored British interests. Western missionaries moved into China.

Chinese people began to doubt the Ming Dynasty even more. The people wanted their leaders to make China self-sufficient again. In 1900, the Chinese army and a large group of peasants attacked Western merchants and missionaries in Beijing in the Boxer Rebellion. Western powers sent ships of soldiers to squash the rebellion, and they forced China to sign a treaty that made the Chinese pay a huge amount of money to the eight Western nations involved.

3. Suddenly, people in China were not just calling for the elimination of foreign powers. They wanted to completely change society. In 1905, the Chinese government stopped giving civil service exams. This symbolically showed that the people no longer wanted to be ruled by an elite educated class. Finally, in 1911, Sun Yat-sen led an overthrow of the Qing Dynasty. Over two millennia of dynasties had come to an end.

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4. The Communist Party presented itself as a popular alternative to the current government. During the 1920s, the Chinese Communist Party grew in size, which the national government didn't like. In 1927, the Chinese Civil War began, and the government began mass arrests of communists. One person who escaped these arrests was a young communist named Mao Zedong. His view of communism was different from the USSR's. The USSR focused on the power of the working class, while Mao believed that communists should help the peasants take over the government. By helping the poor, Mao gained widespread support of the many poor people throughout the country.

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But the Chinese government was still anti-communist. Communists had to hide or risk persecution. In 1934, about 100,000 hiding communists heard the news that the Chinese army was coming to attack or arrest them. Led by Mao, they marched 6,000 miles in one year across China on this Long March, evading the troops. Once at their destination, Mao continued to build the Communist Party. He empowered peasants by helping them gain land. He convinced people that the communists were serious about fighting against the Japanese, and thus gained even more support.

5. Even though people worshipped Mao, it was not truly a government of the people. With one person making big plans for almost a billion people, many things went wrong. Mao instituted a program called the Great Leap Forward in 1959. Since so many of China's problems in the twentieth century had come from foreign involvement in the country, Mao wanted China to be completely self-sufficient.

One idea was that instead of building factories like those in the West, every person should make steel in their backyards. This would raise China's steel production and make the country more competitive with other industrial nations. But people were melting down their possessions to make steel that was basically useless. And most dangerously, they melted down their farming equipment. Without being able to farm, having enough food became a problem.

As a result of poorly planned policies (and bad weather) during the Great Leap Forward, over 30 million people died from starvation. This was the most lethal famine in history.

6. Mao had another large national plan that failed, called the Cultural Revolution. Mao was worried that people weren't as excited about the spirit of revolution as they had been in the 1940s. So in 1966, Mao created the Red Guard, which was a group of young people who had license to arrest anyone who didn't believe in communist values. As a result, millions of teachers, intellectuals, artists and anyone Mao thought had "bourgeois values" were killed or driven from the country. Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, who held great power, led a group that censored any art or written thought that didn't fit with the communist mission.

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7. Mao died in 1976. The government was still communist (and still officially is), but it made reforms that allowed foreign investment for the first time since Mao came to power. They began to gradually accept some capitalist business practices. Although still very poor, between 1980 and 1983, China's per capita output doubled.

As China became less cut off from the world, citizens began to learn more about democracy. And they wanted it. In 1989, people filled Tiananmen Square to protest the government. Chinese government sent tanks into the square to take down the protesters after weeks of standoffs. Hundreds of people died, and the protesters were arrested.

As China moved into the post-Cold War era, it continued to grow into a major player in the international scene. But censorship, the communist government and human rights offenses continued. Internet censorship in China prevents people from finding information or websites that the government doesn't want them to see. This has been dubbed the "great firewall" of China.