

C. THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA SINCE 1949

The first actions of the government of the People's Republic of China after its proclamation on October 1, 1949 were directed towards the founding of new institutions and the restoration of the economy, which had suffered badly from many years of war. Government controls were tightened over the urban and industrial sector of the economy. Nationwide land reform, begun in mid-1950 and completed by late 1952 or early 1953, redistributed farm land on a private ownership basis to those who tilled it. Mass organizations were set up, with training programmes, schools and indoctrination centres, with the goal of changing the structure of society and its mentality. A new marriage law of 1950, aimed at weakening traditional family structure, proclaimed equal rights between the sexes. The Korean War (1950 - 1953) marked China's return to the fields of Asian and world affairs.

From 1953 to 1957 the People's Republic of China launched the first five-year plan, designed to build up basic heavy industry with Soviet help. Agriculture was reorganized on a collective basis at the same time, via voluntary Socialist cooperatives at first and eventually through collectivization. On September 20, 1954 a new constitution was adopted, setting forth the basic principles of the state. The famous "Hundred Flowers" movement in 1956 and 1957, a period of artistic and intellectual debate, threw intellectual circles into a ferment.

From 1958 onwards, the second five-year plan was launched and the phase known as the Great Leap Forward began. This was marked by a frenzied acceleration of production and the reorganization of agricultural and industrial communes. Easier times followed the hard years of 1959 - 1962, and a third five-year plan was launched on January 1, 1966.