

One hundred years of the Chinese communist party – how do you think it has done?

Tomorrow China will celebrate 100 years from the formation of the Communist party, and reflect a little on its history. I am inviting you to tell me what you think about how this party has governed over the last 72 years of uninterrupted power over the Chinese state. It has been a long time, meaning that modern China is the creature of the work and thoughts of its ruling party.

The first 30 years of the party were years of struggle, as it recruited mass support, fashioned the Red army, fought a civil war and helped the nation dismiss the Japanese invasion. The era of Mao in government or influencing government from 1949 to 1976 saw the experiment of the Great Leap forward from 1958-62 as they sought to nationalise everything and organise work in communes. This led to falls in farm output and many millions dying of famine. This was followed by the Cultural revolution, when young recruits turned against experts and denounced those who did not support the party sufficiently. This too proved disruptive to economic progress. These two movements are now seen as mistakes by many Chinese.

The 30 years from 1978 saw the Chinese economy make rapid progress from a low base, thanks to the Deng reforms. He decided that China needed small independent farms, small businesses, more competition and some privatisation to inject life and growth. The economy sustained growth of almost 10% per annum. More recently the growth rate has slowed, though the policy is still portrayed as Deng's "socialism with Chinese characteristics". There is some ambivalence today about how much further if at all the pro market and free enterprise reforms will be allowed to go.

China today has a per capita income and GDP of \$10,000. This is one quarter the level of Japan, which decided to rebuild its gravely damaged wartime economy with more of the west's free enterprise and democratic system. The Chinese level is less than one sixth of the US, adopting an alternative government and economic strategy. Those who want the state to control more of our lives should pause to ask why so far after 72 years in office Chinese communism has delivered so much less per capita income than the advanced democracies.