

FOREWORD

THE PEOPLE'S UNFINISHED REVOLUTION: COMMUNIST CHINA AT 40

Forty years ago, the world's largest nation exuberantly proclaimed the arrival of the modern era to its half billion people. Since then, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has steered the People's Republic of China toward its vision of socialist utopia in a grand and terrifying fashion unique to China.

Indeed, successes have been spectacular. Millions of hungry were fed, the sick cared for, women emancipated and illiterates educated. The failures, though, have been equally great. Even by Mao Zedong's count, more than half a million people perished in the early years of the republic as the CCP redistributed land and consolidated power. The years of the Great Leap Forward, combined with the natural disasters of the period, resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of people. The Cultural Revolution relegated some of China's brightest intellectuals to obscurity, and with them, any hope for their guidance in the move toward a progressive, fully developed society. The nascent hope inspired by the reforms of the 1970s and 1980s died in the summer of 1989, as the Chinese people's calls for political reform were snuffed out by an entrenched leadership.

The pace of change in China frequently defies analysis. Nevertheless, as the smoke clears from the latest crackdown, some assessment is necessary. In this issue of *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, scholars note the People's Republic's fortieth anniversary from a variety of perspectives. With topics ranging from the CCP's leadership to the role of China's much-ignored ethnic minorities, the contributing authors shed light on the nation's past, its progress and what lies ahead for the Chinese people.

After four decades of Communist rule, China remains an enigmatic presence on the world scene. No doubt it is now a country far more modern than the war-ravaged land that the CCP inherited; yet old China is alive and well within modern China. It is also now a country far more compatible with the rest of the world than it was forty years ago; yet China remains a world unto itself. In a sense, these contradictions testify that China's identity crisis, precipitated by Western encroachment, remains far from resolution — what the world witnessed in June 1989 was a nation groping for its soul.

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