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OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand the significance of the sweeping economic reforms introduced in China since the 1970s.
 2. Students will better understand how these changes clash with China's communist political system.
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Freeing the Economy

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS**Illustration 1**

This simple cartoon sums up the huge changes China has seen in the past fifty years. First came the great communist revolution led by Mao Zedong, who took power in 1949. Mao and the founder of Communism, Karl Marx, are seen guarding the doors of this greenhouse. After many disasters, Mao's rule ended in 1976 with the nation united yet still terribly poor. Since then, China has switched course again to adopt many of the economic practices of the free-market democracies of the West. The dollar sign here suggests that these changes have transformed China and put an end to Mao's dream of a communist future. Not everyone would agree, however, that this change is complete.

Illustration 2

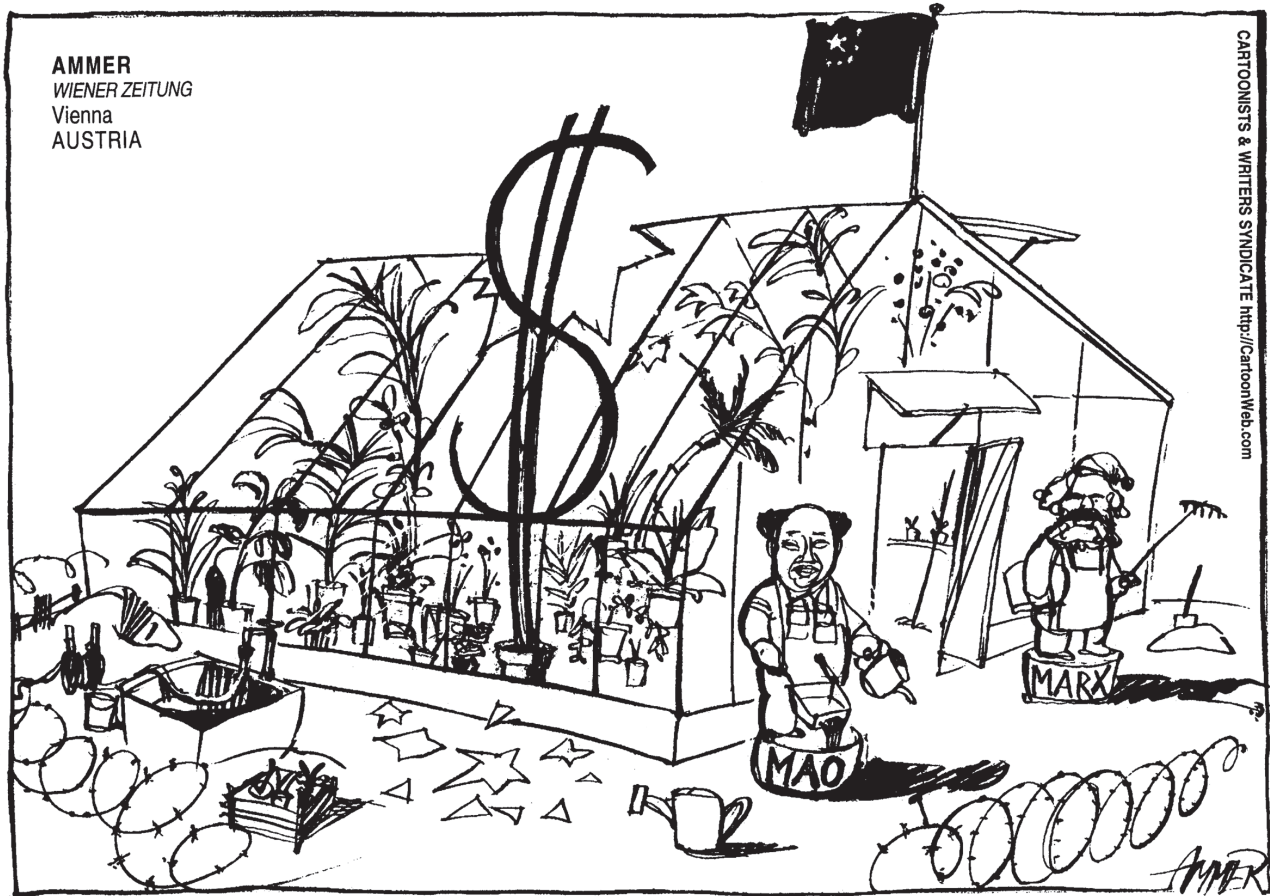
In the 1990s, China became a big player in the growing global economy. It did this by pushing ahead with the free-market, capitalist reforms begun by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s. Now billions of dollars of foreign investment is helping to industrialize China. Yet China still has a way to go. In the late 1970s, nearly 80 percent of its industrial output was from government-owned industry. By the early 2000s, that figure was still at about 40 percent. The state-run businesses of communist nations are generally badly run—given a lack of incentive to earn a profit, and given the fact that prices of products and supplies often do not reflect their true costs. This cartoon views the run-down, government-owned part of the Chinese economy as a big drag on its efforts to reform and modernize.

Illustration 3

While China has been building a free-market economy, its political life is still controlled completely by the Chinese Communist Party. The tension this creates can be seen most starkly in Hong Kong, until recently a colony of Great Britain. As a colony, Hong Kong became one of the wealthiest Asian cities. Its wealth is based on its trade and investments all over the world. In 1997, Great Britain returned Hong Kong to China, in compliance with a long-standing treaty. Now Hong Kong is ruled by China's communist government. Some people feared that Hong Kong would lose its freedom and its free market once China took control. Others thought Hong Kong might actually help to bring more freedom to China instead. Only time will tell who is right.

Lesson 1 — Freeing the Economy

Illustration 1



Discussing the Illustration

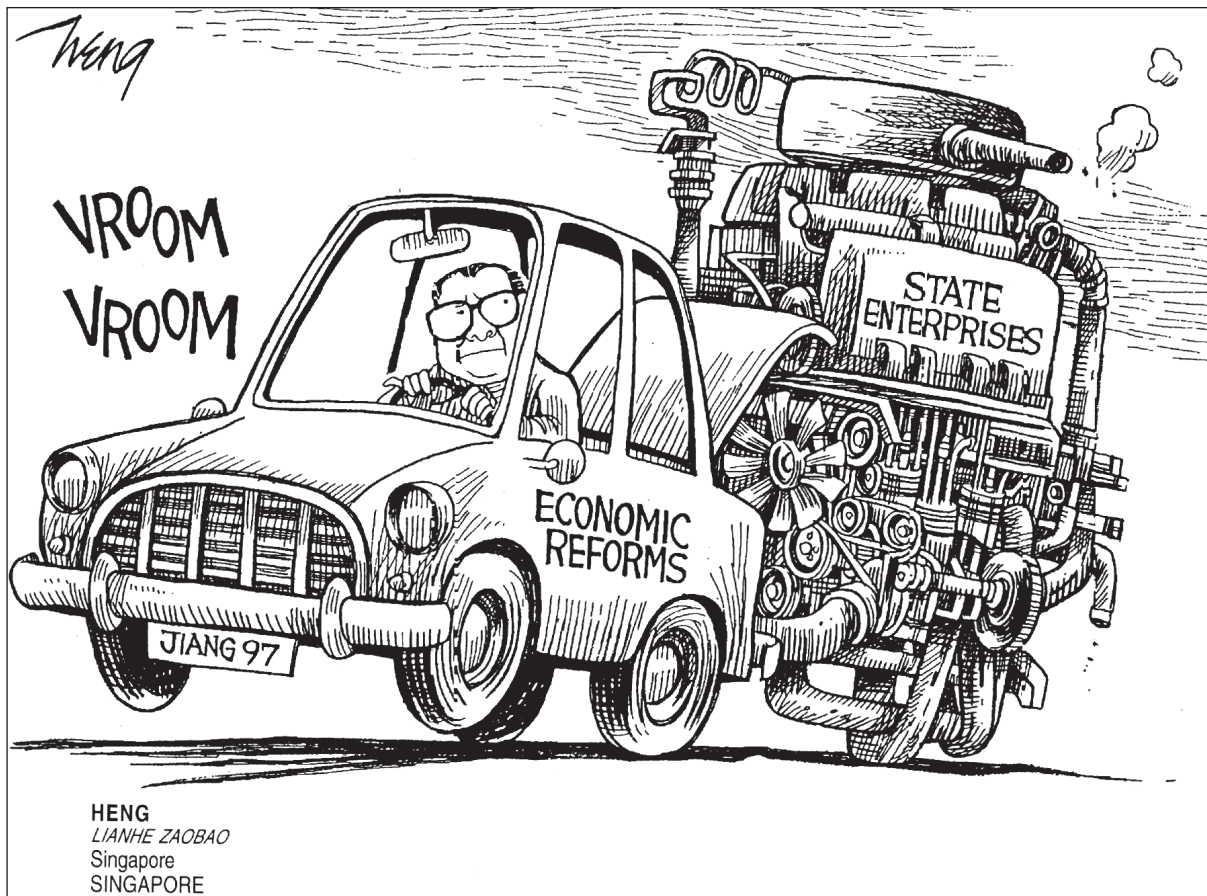
1. This cartoon is about the huge changes that have shaken all of China since 1949. That was the year a rebel leader took control of China and turned it into a communist nation. Can you name that leader?
2. Mao is shown guarding this greenhouse, along with the man whose writings formed the basis for all communist societies. Can you name that man?
3. What are some key features of any communist nation?
4. Mao died in 1976. After that, China began another huge change. It began to reform its economy by creating a free-market, or capitalist, economic system. What big changes do you think this means China is making? How does this cartoon make the point that China is changing in this way?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small Group Activity:** Mao Zedong's political ideas developed over a very long and active life. As a group, learn more about Mao's life. Then have each group member concentrate on learning more about one of the following:
 - Mao's early years in the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920s
 - The time of the so-called Long March in the 1930s
 - The final years of China's revolution, 1945–1949
 - The Great Leap Forward
 - The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

On the basis of what you learn in your group, prepare a brief talk in which you debate the pros and cons of this statement: Mao's whole life proves he was a totalitarian who never really cared for the peasants or China, but who was interested mainly in his own absolute power.

Illustration 2



Cartoonists and Writers Syndicate

Discussing the Illustration

1. The man driving the car here is Jiang Zemin. In 1997, he became China's top leader. But the leader who took over after Mao and really began to change China to a free-market economy ruled China from 1976 to 1997. Can you name him?
2. In a sense, then, the car Jiang is driving here actually belonged to Deng Xiaoping first. Can you explain?
3. The main feature of communism is that the government owns and runs most businesses. How does this cartoon picture those businesses? How does it make the point that those businesses are not well run?
4. Most economists agree that government-controlled businesses under communism are usually poorly run. Why might that be so?
5. In the cartoon, what effect are China's remaining government-run industries having on its economic reform efforts? Why might they have this effect?

Follow-up Activities

1. From 1976 until 1997, China's most powerful leader was Deng Xiaoping. Use encyclopedias, history books, and other sources to learn more about him. Based on your reading, try to imagine what he might have thought about this cartoon. Pretend you are Deng and write a letter to Jiang Zemin, commenting on this cartoon and offering advice based on your long years as China's ruler.
2. How have China's reforms affected farmers in the countryside? Use encyclopedias, almanacs, or other sources to make a table comparing China's farmers in the 1970s to today. Try to find information on average personal income, sizes of farms, crop yields, use of machinery, and so on. Put the information in a table comparing the year 1975 to the most current year for which you have information.

Illustration 3



Cartoonists and Writers Syndicate

Discussing the Illustration

1. This cartoon is similar to the previous one. That cartoon showed China as a modern car pulling China's old-fashioned state-run industries. This cartoon shows China as an old truck pulling a modern city. What city is it, and where is it located?
2. This cartoon is actually about what happened to Hong Kong in 1997. Can you explain?
3. Hong Kong is a modern city. Under British rule, it had a capitalist, free-market economy. And it had become one of the wealthiest cities in the world. In the cartoon, Hong Kong is being pulled by an old truck. Look closely at the driver, his hat, and the shape of the hook pulling the city. Taken together, these symbols help the cartoon make a point. What do these symbols stand for?
4. These symbols make the cartoon into a warning about China's takeover of Hong Kong. From what you know about Hong Kong since 1997, do you think this warning has proved accurate? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small Group Activity:** Read more about Hong Kong. Find out how it was run when Great Britain controlled it. Then collect recent news articles about Hong Kong and what has been happening to it since China took control. Based on what you find, conduct a panel discussion on this cartoon in front of the class. Have panel members play the following parts: a Chinese government official, a former top official of Hong Kong's government, an ordinary citizen of Hong Kong, a Hong Kong business owner, an ordinary worker in China, a business owner in China. In these roles, each of you should comment on the cartoon and explain why people should or should not worry about the warning it seems to be making. After you each give a brief talk, discuss the cartoon among yourselves. Then let others in the class ask questions or make comments.