

Evaluate the importance of ideology, popular support, weakness of existing governments in aiding the rise to power of Mao.

Mao came to power in China in 1949 after his Chinese Communist Party (CCP) won the Chinese Civil War against the Kuomintang (KMT) party. In this rise to power, ideology, popular support, and the weakness of the existing KMT government played their parts. However, the Sino-Japanese War emerges as the most important factor in Mao's rise to power, since it was a critical turning point for the CCP's ability to defeat the KMT. Before the war, the CCP was a weak organisation and struggled against the numerically and technologically superior KMT forces. The war provided a breathing space for the CCP to expand its support base without much interference from the KMT forces, while weakening the KMT as they faced the Japanese onslaught in the war. As a result, the CCP emerged a stronger fighting force, able to hold out against a strong KMT, and giving it the potential to attain victory in the Chinese Civil War that brought Mao to power in China in 1949.

Ideology contributed to Mao's rise to power. In the 1920s, Mao's ideology was at odds with the ideology of the dominant Soviet-influenced party leadership in Shanghai. While he believed in peasant revolution, the party leaders believed in an urban proletariat revolution. These differences meant that when Mao's Autumn Harvest Uprising, an urban peasant uprising which began in 1927, failed, the leadership's negative views on the idea of peasant revolution were reinforced, and Mao lost his membership in the CCP Politburo. However, this setback did not mean that Mao's ideas would not be fulfilled. In July 1928, Mao set up a Soviet regime in Jiangxi. Here, Mao would be able to implement his ideas with independence from the CCP leadership, the Soviets and the KMT. Since Mao now operated outside the jurisdiction of the CCP central organisation in Jiangxi, Mao and his followers in Jiangxi were relatively unaffected by the central leadership's decisions. Furthermore, the isolated rural region that Jiangxi was meant that the Soviets, which influenced the party leadership and which disagreed with Mao's idea of peasant revolution, could not interfere with Mao's policies in Jiangxi. This isolated and the mountainous terrain in Jiangxi meant that the KMT's troops would find it difficult to attack the CCP in Jiangxi.

Thus, Mao was able to set out to implement his idea of peasant revolution. This idea meant that the CCP had to appeal to the peasants and gain their support. Thus, Mao implemented moderate land reforms. Rich peasants would lose some of their lands but instead of being reassigned to new plots, they were to retain a portion of their original fields. In addition, they were allowed to keep all of their businesses except usury and pawnbroking. Middle peasants were allowed to keep all of their land, land they had invested their time and resources in. Poor peasants and the landless were to be given only land specifically confiscated from landlords and rich peasants and the fields belonging to them. These reforms were important because they prevented a critical segment of rural society – the rich and middle peasants – with more skills like literacy than the poor peasants from being alienated, whilst still satisfying the demands of the poor peasants for a change in their fortunes through some redistribution of land to them. Thus, Mao's moderate land reforms, inspired by the idea of peasant revolution through bringing a focus on improving the lives of the peasants, increased support of the peasantry for the CCP. In addition, the skilled rich and middle peasants contributed to the local administration in Mao's Jiangxi Soviet.

Another element of Mao's ideology, the mass line, encouraged the development of political participation at the grassroots level. This was implemented in Jiangxi through the introduction of elections to local leadership positions. Being empowered to shape the political administration of their localities encouraged the peasants to support the CCP. Mao's ideology also promoted the idea of women's emancipation. This was implemented at Jiangxi through the 1931 marriage laws, which codified the right to choose one's spouse and the right to divorce, and prohibited polygamy, the sale

of women into marriage, and child marriage. Women's associations were established and these brought more women into political participation. As a result, a quarter or more of city and township government delegates were often women. In addition, women's ploughing and planting brigades were formed. These reforms which affected women's lives helped to free the energies of women into improving economic production, and causing the talent pool for administrative tasks, nursing and propaganda work, and even the army to grow. Thus, the elements of Mao's ideology of the mass line and women's emancipation, when implemented, helped to support the CCP cause by expanding the party's support base and through supporting the administration of the Jiangxi Soviet.

The CCP's Red Army also fell under the influence of Mao's ideology. Mao had grasped that mass movements, such as his peasant revolution, had to be supplemented by an organised army. To achieve this organised fighting force, Mao thought that the army had to be brought under the strict control of the party. Hence, Mao designed political training to give soldiers in the Red Army both an understanding of the reasons they were fighting and a sense of discipline. The Commissar system was used to place trusted cadres among the troops and to provide the party representatives required to countersign all military orders. Under the party's control, the Red Army became a fighting force which could distinguish itself from the warlord and KMT armies by its discipline. The respect that it showed to the peasants earned the CCP support from the peasants. Furthermore, this discipline would serve the CCP well in going against the numerically and technologically stronger forces of the KMT in the ongoing civil war.

The success of these ideologically-influenced policies in gaining the peasants' support for the party and strengthening the party as a viable military force gained Mao recognition from within the CCP. Thus, during the Long March, he could supplant the Soviet-inspired leadership in the wake of the Zunyi Conference of 1935, when Mao became a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and an assistance to Zhou Enlai in military affairs. In March, he became part of a new three-man Military group to lead the CCP through the remainder of the Long March. Hence, Mao's ideologically-inspired policies at Jiangxi helped him to rise to the CCP party leadership during the Long March.

Apart from helping Mao rise within the party, Mao's ideologically-influenced policies continued after the CCP headquarters moved to Yan'an in 1936 and were crucial in gaining further popular support for the party. With the establishment of border governments allowed by the Second United Front from 1937, the CCP was able to expand the reach of its ideologically-inspired policies to reach more people and gain more support. This support from the people would help the CCP to become victorious in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, bringing Mao to the leadership of the whole country.

Despite these contributions of ideology to Mao's rise, the appeal of Mao's ideologically-inspired policies only makes sense when the weaknesses of the existing KMT government in addressing the problems that the Chinese people faced are considered also, which made the CCP's approach to governance an appealing alternative. Furthermore, it seems that the Sino-Japanese War, which reduced the KMT pressure on the CCP as it brought its focus on the Japanese, was critical for the ability of the CCP to spread its ideologically-influenced policies to a wider audience allowing it to gain support for itself and contributing to its eventual victory in the Chinese Civil War. In this way, the Sino-Japanese War is a more important factor than ideology in contributing to Mao's rise.

Thus, the weaknesses of the existing KMT government contributed of the rise of Mao to power. While revisionists like Loren Brandt, Thomas Rawski, Jack Gray and David Faure argued that the KMT did try various ways to promote land reforms without having to confiscate land, unlike Mao's CCP, the KMT failed to significantly alleviate the plight of the peasants and the problem of landlordism through land reform. A League of Nations study revealed that tenant and semi-tenant farming

comprised 60 to 90% in South China and in addition to paying 40 to 60% of their annual crops as rental, they had to pay for their landlord's regular land tax and surtax as well – the latter varying from 35% of the former. Thus, peasants were financially burdened under the KMT. All the KMT did was to pass a resolution in 1933 to reduce the land rent to 37.5% of the main crops, and even this modest step was never put into practice. Several factors limited the KMT's ability to address the landlord issue. During his Northern Expedition to unite China, KMT leader Chiang Kai-Shek, in his eagerness to win a quick victory and unify the country, negotiated with more progressive warlords and absorbed them into the KMT's ruling system. Most of these warlords had little concern for the welfare of the masses and the suffering of the peasants. Moreover, a considerable percentage of KMT generals and officials were themselves connected with the landlord interest, and thus they were anxious of radical reform that would jeopardise their own position. In addition, as the legitimate government of China, the KMT had more pressing problems such as domestic threats from the CCP and the foreign threat from Japanese aggression to deal with first. The failure of the existing KMT government to implement effective land reform, unlike the CCP, discredited it in the eyes of the peasants, who turned their support to the CCP.

The KMT government was further discredited by the problem of corruption. Chiang often created overlapping and competing factions and bureaucracies. When Chiang made efforts to get rid of the local gentry in the provinces, they were replaced by officials loyal to the government, instead of based on merit. There was a shortage of trained officials and competent officials too. All these fostered corruption within the government. Between 1931 and 1937, the Control Yuan investigated 70,000 officials and 268 were found guilty and 13 were sacked. The prevalence of corruption drew away support from the KMT government, which was seen as a self-serving government instead of one that sought the people's welfare.

In addition, the KMT adopted an oppressive style of governance. The government had a repressive secret police in the Blue Shirts. They were to above the use of summary executions, torture, assassinations and kidnappings to terrorise the opponents of the regime. For example, they arrested critics like university chancellor Zhang Jiasen. Chiang also suppressed the press. This oppression was compared to the CCP's relatively more open form of governance. It should be noted though that the CCP was equally as repressive as the KMT. Therefore, as Jack Gray argues, it was the ability of the CCP to effectively conceal their failings versus the Nationalist government's blatant oppression that was the key difference. For example, during the Sino-Japanese War, Mao formulated the 'Three-thirds system', which limited party-member participation in government and councils of the base areas to one-third, leaving the other two-thirds to progressive leftists and independents. On the surface at least, these policies gave the CCP's rule over its territories a democratic overtone. Thus, the oppressive system under the KMT drew people away from them, in contrast to the CCP which was supported for its supposedly more open politics.

However, for all these weaknesses, it was true that before the Sino-Japanese War, the KMT was much stronger than the CCP. They had destroyed the CCP's Jiangxi base area in 1934, forcing the CCP to find a way to a refuge in the northwest during the Long March. During the Long March, the CCP was constantly in danger of being attacked by the KMT, and out of the 90,000 men who broke out of Jiangxi, only one in ten reached the new base in the north. Thus, before the Sino-Japanese War, the weaknesses of the KMT were not significant vis-à-vis the CCP. However, the Sino-Japanese War would change the fortunes of the CCP and KMT. As the Japanese were focused on attacking the urban areas under KMT control to cripple China's economy and cause it to struggle to support the war effort, the KMT faced the onslaught of the Japanese attack on China, while the CCP was relatively protected from the Japanese because of the nature of their rural bases. As a result, the

KMT troops were facing low morale and exhaustion, while the CCP was gathering strength and expanding into border areas beyond the provisions allowed by their Second United Front with the KMT, while being protected from the pressure of KMT attacks due to the same United Front. In this way, the ideologically-influenced policies of Mao were able to spread and gain more support for the CCP. Meanwhile, the KMT faced a loss of their traditional support base in the urban elites due to the problem of inflation exacerbated by the war. Inflation ran at 230% a year from 1942 to 1945 in Nationalist territories. Key KMT supporters such as the army, officers, bureaucrats and teachers were especially vulnerable to this inflation. However, it was not clear what choice the government had. As Jack Gray points out, it had to pay for the military and new infrastructure like roads, railroads and industry. It had lost its old revenues and so 75% of government wartime expenditures were met by printing money. In these ways, the Sino-Japanese War was more critical than KMT weaknesses in strengthening the CCP and weakening the KMT, such that the earlier KMT advantage was decreased by the time the Sino-Japanese War had ended, and the Chinese Civil War resumed, contributing to the CCP victory in the civil war and thus Mao's rise.

Lastly, popular support contributed to Mao's rise. Mao's ideologically-inspired policies, which improved the lives of the peasants, as compared to the KMT's failure to improve the peasants welfare and its corruption and oppressive nature, contributed to a rise in popular support for the CCP, especially in the rural areas where the CCP was based. This was critical for the CCP's victory in the Chinese Civil War in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War, because the CCP was reliant on guerrilla warfare in the early stages of the war. After the KMT made use of US naval and air transport to move their forces swiftly to the Northeast to prevent the CCP control of the region, the CCP's strategy shifted in early autumn 1945. The CCP had initially intended to extend its territorial control over the Northeast, but in view of the KMT's overwhelming numerical and technological advantages, the CCP chose to shift to guerrilla-style operations. This shift was also motivated by the failure to emerge victorious in a conventional-style battle in November 1945 at Shanhaiquan Pass against the KMT. Through the emphasis on guerrilla warfare in the early stages of the war, the popular support for the CCP by the peasants became useful. Guerrilla warfare required the CCP to take advantage of the local people in the rural areas, with their superior knowledge of the terrain, to help overcome the strong enemy. CCP mass organisations involving supporters from among the population could be involved in military tasks such as supply, intelligence, medical services, guarding the rear, and harassing the enemy units. With their popular support, the CCP was able to implement guerrilla warfare against a strong enemy in the KMT effectively, allowing it to hold out in the war and keep the potential for victory in the war alive.

Popular support also helped the CCP in the war because the people were willing to join the party's Red Army to fight for the party that they believed in. This was significant because KMT troops initially outnumbered the Red Army during the early years of the war. In August 1945, the Nationalist army consisted of 2.7 million people, approximately three times the size of the Red Army. The popular support for the CCP meant that even at this early stage when the CCP was numerically weaker in its army, the party was able to call a militia force of some 2.2 million even in August 1945. Furthermore, as the war progressed and greater amounts of territory and hence potential recruits came under Communist control, numerical superiority swung in favour of the CCP. The CCP's growing numerical advantage over the KMT allowed the CCP to switch from guerrilla to conventional tactics, such as in launching the huge Huai-hai and Pingjin campaigns simultaneously from November 1948 to January 1949, and it was this switch that allowed the CCP to finally take the urban areas from KMT control, thus being decisive in leading the CCP to victory in the civil war.

Finally, popular support especially among the rural populace for the CCP was useful because of food. The CCP was able to get enormous provisions of food from their countryside base areas to supply their armies. This ready access to food from the countryside enabled the Red Army to pursue their strategy of guerrilla warfare since their troops could effectively live off the land around their countryside bases, and the sustenance of guerrilla warfare would prove vital to the CCP's eventual victory. In contrast, the KMT troops lacked food and this resulted in low morale. These troops had little access to countryside areas, and their bases in the cities made them more dependent on the railways for food, which were cut frequently by the Red Army resulting in food shortages in the cities. The foodstuffs that were available were subject to massive inflation, which was exacerbated by the corruption of KMT officials who hoarded food to sell for profits. As a result, conscripted KMT soldiers not infrequently went hungry. Short of rations, they were sometimes only given mugs of congee, the water in which rice had been boiled. This contrast in conditions meant that some KMT soldiers chose to defect to the CCP side in search of better conditions, contributing to the manpower and weaponry of the CCP. Thus, popular support was important in helping the CCP to sustain its war effort through the supply of food, manpower and weaponry.

Overall popular support contributed to the CCP victory in the Chinese Civil War which brought Mao to power in China in 1949. However, it should be remembered that the Sino-Japanese War was crucial to the CCP's gaining of popular support. Before the war, the CCP was weak and under attack from the KMT. However, during the war, the CCP was allowed to expand to gain more support from the people as the KMT became focused on the Japanese threat. Thus, the Sino-Japanese War is an important prerequisite for the CCP's significant popular support that contributed to its victory in the Chinese Civil War and thus to Mao's rise to power in China.

In conclusion, ideology, popular support and the weakness of the existing KMT government all contributed to Mao's rise to power. However, their importance pales in comparison to the Sino-Japanese War, which was a critical turning point in the CCP's fortunes that allowed it to attain victory in the Chinese Civil War that brought Mao to power in China in 1949.