

Chapter 4: Mao Zedong¹ and the People's Republic of China:

4.1 MAO'S PERSONALITY AND IDEAS

1. Mao's early years

- Born in Hunan²
- Underwent both traditional and western education

2. Mao's personality

- Opportunistic – Mao was committed to his goals but flexible in his methods
- Ruthless – Mao's absolute belief in an ultimate goal made individual tragedy acceptable to him
- Egocentric – Mao felt that individualism and selfishness was acceptable only in great men
- Mao was not charismatic by nature and not an accomplished mass orator

3. Mao's ideas

- Continual Revolution – Mao believed that constant struggle was necessary to ensure progress
- Authoritarianism – Mao believed that it was necessary for socio-economic progress
- Equality for women – influenced by his mother, Mao blamed oppression of women on capitalism
- Anti-intellectualism – Mao opposed intellectualism, professionalism and formal higher education and despised intellectuals for not appreciating manual labour
- Maoism:
 - Mao was interested in Marxism for its practicality – it appeared scientific and anti-imperialist
 - Mao adjusted Marxism to fit the Chinese situation, creating Maoism
 - Maoism is based on the mobilisation of the peasants (instead of workers) as the revolutionary agents to incite a revolution
- Mao was a very strong believer in Chinese nationalism

¹ Mao Zedong = 毛泽东

² Hunan = 湖南

4.2 THE RISE OF MAO (1921 – 1949)

1. Mao's early CCP career prior to 1928

- Mao did not contribute much to the formation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP³) in 1921
- Mao organised the Hunan branch of the CCP
- Mao joined the Central Committee in 1923

2. Undermining of rivals in the CCP

- The CCP was controlled by the Soviet Union up to the early 1930s
- However Stalin's failure to protect the CCP's interests almost saw it destroyed – this led to a change in CCP leaders
- Mao first came to power during the Long March, opposed by the 28 Bolsheviks
- Mao used the 1935 Zunyi Conference to discredit the 28 Bolsheviks and assert his dominance
- Mao became Chairman of the Central Committee in 1943
- Mao became Chairman of the Politburo and Secretariat by 1945

3. Winning over of key CCP leaders

- Mao's attack on the 28 Bolsheviks at the 1935 Zunyi Conference caused them to lose support
- Mao won the support of Zhou Enlai⁴ (Comintern's Chinese leader) and Zhu De⁵ (head of military)

4. Winning over of mass support

- Mao adopted moderate socio-economic reforms in the Jiangxi Soviet and in Yan'an⁶
- The masses were won over because they were well treated – not due to ideological conversion
- Mao adopted moderate reformist land reforms to win over as much support as possible
- Mao adopted political reforms to attract support from different classes

5. Manipulation of Chinese nationalism

- The CCP played up resistance against Japan during World War II
- Formed the 2nd United Front during the Sino-Japanese War
- Mao adopted an independent position from the Soviets though remaining allies – this demonstrated that he was not an ordinary Marxist leader beholden to the Soviets
- At the core, Mao remained deeply a Chinese nationalist

³ CCP = 中国共产党

⁴ Zhou Enlai = 周恩来

⁵ Zhu De = 朱德

⁶ Yan'an = 延安

6. Development of the Red Army

- Mao believed that 'political power grows out the barrel of a gun'
- In the Jiangxi Soviet, Zhu De and Peng Dehuai⁷ worked on building up the Red Army⁸
- The Army was well treated and indoctrinated
- Mao created the 8 Rules to distinguish the Red Army and retain the support of the masses
- Mao developed the idea of guerrilla warfare to use against the Kuomintang (GMD⁹) forces
- Guerrilla warfare focused on luring enemies deep into communist-controlled areas and concentrating their forces to completely destroy the enemy

7. Mao as a Marxist theorist

- Mao developed his own of Sino-centric Marxism to challenge the pro-Soviet CCP leaders
- This was known as Maoism and was further espoused in the Thought of Mao Zedong¹⁰

8. Use of terror and repression

- Mao was willing to turn to using terror and repression to assert his dominance
- Example would be the 1930 Futian Incident
- The local Jiangxi communists opposed Mao and remained loyal to the original CCP leadership
- Mao claimed that there was an Anti-Bolshevik faction which had infiltrated the communists
- Mao then carried out a purge of over 4,500 people
- A similar purge was carried out in the Rectification Campaign in 1942 at Yan'an
- However this time it was the intellectuals that were persecuted and purged

9. Incompetence of the GMD

- The leader of the GMD, Chiang Kai-Shek (Jiang Jieshi¹¹) was a very reactionary and inept leader
- The GMD was also hindered by the lack of an effective military and strategy

10. Impact of the Sino-Japanese war

- The Japanese successes in the War destroyed GMD control over the countryside, allowing the CCP to fill the political vacuum
- Without the war, the GMD would have destroyed the weakened CCP after the Long March

⁷ Peng Dehuai = 彭德怀

⁸ Red Army = 红军

⁹ GMD = 国民党

¹⁰ Thought of Mao Zedong = 毛泽东思想

¹¹ Chiang Kai-Shek / Jiang Jieshi = 蒋介石

4.3 MAO'S MAINTENANCE OF POWER (1949 – 1976)

1. Dominance of state and party

- The CCP had an overlapping role in the government
- Mao was the Chairman of the CCP's Central Committee, the Politburo, the National People's Congress, the People's Republic of China and the Central Military Commission
- Mao removed the existing administration in 1954 as it encouraged the growth of independent regional leaders
- Mao replaced the existing administration with a strongly centralised administrative structure

2. Loyalty of the CCP leaders and members

- Throughout Mao's leadership of the CCP, there was no real attempt to overthrow him
- Mao used this to play off the CCP leaders against each other e.g. during the Cultural Revolution
- Mao was willing to manipulate rivalries and conflicts within the CCP itself
- The CCP and the cadres were subjected to constant purges to ensure that they remained loyal
- Mao would manipulate youths during the Cultural Revolution to eliminate disloyal CCP leaders

3. Mao's control over the military

- Mao was careful never to let any of the top military leaders become dominant
- Mao removed those who posed any threat e.g. Peng Dehuai in 1959 and Lin Biao¹² in 1971
- The military became heavily politicised, especially during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s

4. Mao's use of thought reform and terror

- Enemies of the state and party were subjected to self and group criticism, and thought reform
- Enemies were also thrown into labour camps
- Terror was used in the 1957 anti-rightist campaign where 500,000 were imprisoned and killed
- The use of terror was continued during the Cultural Revolution

5. Mao's cult of personality

- Mao's personality cult was reinforced through state propaganda efforts especially during the Cultural Revolution
- Mao used the mass media and mass rallies to maintain this cult of personality

¹² Lin Biao = 林彪

4.4 MAO'S SOCIAL POLICIES

1. Mao's education policies

- Under Mao, the government made efforts to limit higher education – reflected Mao's personal contempt for formal education and intellectualism
- Intellectuals were subjected to persecution during the Hundred Flowers Campaign
- The educational system was disrupted during the Cultural Revolution where schools and universities were closed down

2. Mao's youth policies

- Mao merely saw the youths as tools to maintain his continual revolution

3. Mao's family and women policies

- Mao attempted to undermine the traditional Chinese family system for economic purposes during the Great Leap Forward – however this was deeply resented and reversed in the 1960s
- Mao also introduced equality for women in the 1950 marriage law – this faced much resistance

4. Mao's religious policy

- There were great efforts made to persecute religions or subject them to state control
- There was violence against religious buildings and persons during the Cultural Revolution

5. Mao's cultural policy

- Culture was stifled by Mao's insistence that it was judged on communist lines
- A deep cultural sterility thus set in
- There was deep censorship and destruction of traditional Chinese culture and Western culture

4.5 MAO'S ECONOMIC POLICIES

1. Agriculture

- Mao destroyed the landlord class by imposing the agrarian reform in 1950
- Land was redistributed to the peasants
- In the 1950s, there was a shift to collectivisation to support industrialisation
- This was accelerated during the Great Leap Forward – however it proved to be a major disaster

2. Industries

- All foreign and domestic industries were nationalised in the 1950s
- There was strong emphasis on heavy industrialisation especially during the Great Leap Forward
- This was influenced by the Soviet model
- A decentralised industrialisation system developed during the Cultural Revolution

4.6 MAO'S FOREIGN POLICIES

- Mao was determined to ensure Chinese sovereignty and security
- Mao wanted to erase the century of national humiliation since the late Qing time period
- Mao sought to restore China's greatness and spread communist ideals
- China was seen as a champion of the Third World