

Question

Identify what you think will be the key influences on the development of Mao Zedong's thinking from his early years.

Confucianism This was a complex system of moral, philosophical and political thinking developed by the philosopher Confucius (551–478 BC), whereby individuals were encouraged to devote their lives to the achievement of moral perfection.

Fact

It was the anti-imperialist aspect of Marxism that appealed in China. After the chaos of warlordism and the collapse of the administration, the Marxist idea that dramatic change could be achieved by the action of 'ordinary people' and that history was on the side of its followers appeared attractive. A ferment of Marxist discussion and writing was encouraged in Beijing by returning overseas students, who left the USA and other Western countries because of the war, or came back from Japan when it renewed its hostile stance towards China after 1915. See Chapter 1, pages 9–10, to recap on Marxist theory.

voluntaryism This term refers to individual willingness to accept and share the same beliefs as those of the community in which they live. This might involve freely renouncing past evil, re-education and remaking in the communist image.

mass mobilisation This term refers to everyone working together to decide on and carry out policies.

What were the origins of Maoist ideology?

Maoist ideology, or 'Mao Zedong Thought', was the product of Mao's background and upbringing. Born into a middle-ranking peasant family in 1893, he knew of hardship, the humiliation brought by foreign influence and the prevailing sense of disillusionment with the government. As a teenager, he experienced life as a volunteer soldier in the 1911 revolution and was bitterly disappointed when the warlords took over. Mao was an intelligent boy with a love of reading. His decision to train as a teacher in 1913 brought him into contact with Yang Changji, who had spent six years in Japan and four years in Britain and rejected **Confucianism**, in which Mao was steeped as a boy. Yang Changji was a contributor to the periodical *Hsin Ch'ing-nien (New Youth)*, which spread 'Western' ideas. He introduced Mao to the work of Yan Fu, a scholar who had stressed the need for strong leadership to bring change in China, and of Wang Fuzhi, who believed that 'there is not a single part of human nature already shaped that cannot be modified'.

Mao became deeply concerned about the future of his country and read many Western works, including those of Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Charles Darwin, J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer. He was convinced that the solution to the future of China would need to be a military one. However, before 1918, he lacked a mature political philosophy. He later said, 'My mind was a curious mixture of ideas of liberalism, democratic reformism and Utopian socialism.'

In 1919, Mao moved to Beijing University where he worked under the librarian, Li Dazhao. Beijing University had become a focus for Marxist studies. Just before Mao's arrival, Li Dazhao had published an article on 'The Victory of Bolshevism' in *New Youth* and he encouraged Marxist discussion in his room, known as the 'Red Chamber'. Here, Mao developed his belief in the masses as a source of energy that could transform China.

Mao pursued his Marxist studies in Beijing in late 1919, and subsequently in Shanghai. In Shanghai, he worked as a laundryman, read *The Communist Manifesto* and took part in discussions with the prominent communist Chen Duxiu. He formed a communist group in Changsha in 1920, attended the first CCP Congress in July 1921 and joined the Central Committee in 1923. However, Mao remained detached from the mainstream communist group who attributed little importance to the Chinese peasantry. In 1923, Chen Duxiu wrote, 'The peasants are widely scattered, therefore it is not easy to organise them into an effective force.' While the party concentrated on the cities, Mao saw the numerically strong peasants as the leaders of revolution, and from 1924 he worked in the newly created GMD Peasant Movement Training Institute.

Mao increasingly formulated his own ideology, believing a vigorous organisation of the peasantry under communist leadership and a radical land policy were needed. He thought that 'revolutionary impetuosity' had to be avoided, and developed tactical ideas about the need for a base area, organised military forces and guerrilla tactics – 'encircling the city with the country'. He also practised the 'ruthlessness and determination' that was to characterise his career. Torture and execution were justified if they were in the interests of the masses.

By the time of the Long March (1934–35) Mao's ideology was clear. His adaptation of Marxism–Leninism (see Chapter 1) for a peasant mass base won support, as it was seen to work. In Yan'an, he also encouraged **voluntaryism**, **mass mobilisation** and self-criticism.

What were the key elements of 'Mao Zedong Thought'?

The key elements of 'Mao Zedong Thought' are illustrated in the chart below.

Orthodox Marxist beliefs	
Marxist revolution	Progress would come through class struggle in which the landowners and bourgeoisie had to be overthrown. This would lead to the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (or masses). There should be collective ownership of the means of production. Socialist states should promote worldwide communist revolution.
Specific Chinese elements	
The importance of the peasants	The peasant masses could overthrow capitalism and create a socialist society.
A two-stage revolution, as explained in Mao's 'On new democracy' (1940)	The first revolution could incorporate elements of the bourgeoisie. During this stage private ownership could continue. A second revolution would bring about the collectivisation and nationalisation of property and economic resources and remove remaining elements of the bourgeoisie.
Mass mobilisation and voluntaryism	The party should 'learn from the people'. Campaigns should be people's campaigns and not be imposed from above. Properly guided, the people would support campaigns voluntarily and work in the best interests of all.
Continuous revolution	Revolution should not cease once a party achieved power but should be a constant process of renewal, to avoid complacency and corruption.
Self-criticism and rectification	Officials should undergo regular criticism to prevent them becoming self-satisfied and élitist and regular purges of the party would keep it pure. Only through self-criticism would individuals see the wisdom of mass campaigns and 'rectify' false thoughts.
Ruthless determination	Will-power and determination would be sufficient to bring about change provided everyone showed total commitment. Violence was a necessary element of revolution.
The primacy of 'Mao Zedong Thought'	Mao Zedong was always right and people could find the solution to any problem if they studied his thought sufficiently.

Fact

Mao's most influential writing was 'On new democracy' (1940), which suggested that China had to adopt a 'third form' of democracy, involving a two-stage revolution that was different from both the democracy of the capitalist West and the communist system as practised in Soviet Russia.

Questions

- 1 Why did Mao focus on the peasants rather than the industrial proletariat?
- 2 Which elements of 'Mao Zedong Thought' do you think would be most effective in attracting support to get into power, and which in maintaining that power?
- 3 What do you think would be the main strength of Mao's political platform?

Activity

Make a spider diagram to show the various elements that created 'Mao Zedong Thought'.

In what ways and with what effect did Mao's ideology influence his rule in China between 1949 and 1976?

Mao's ideology – the 'Yan'an spirit' – proved a recipe for success in establishing his leadership and enabling him to assume power in China in 1949. However, how ideology served Mao thereafter is more controversial.

Mao clashed with other leaders, particularly **Liu Shaoqi**, over planning the communist state. This was partly because Mao adopted the same revolutionary approach to its construction as that which had worked in winning him power. He was convinced that China had to be transformed by the mobilisation of the masses and in his opening address to the Consultative Conference on 21 September 1949 stressed the importance of 'determination' and 'the will to achieve' as the most important elements in bringing about change.

Mao's belief that 'sheer commitment' was sufficient to drive the country forward and make up for China's lack of capital and technology showed an acute lack of real understanding. The Great Leap Forward of 1958–61 (see Unit 4) emphasised the prodigious efforts that the Chinese workers were prepared to make for their country, but Mao's ideological belief that willpower alone could bring economic regeneration proved false. Mao's policies hindered proper industrial management, deprived China of the trained experts it needed to direct its social and economic programme, wasted natural and human resources and brought horrendous famine (see page 151). It was left to **Deng Xiaoping** and Liu Shaoqi, who had always advocated planning and an emphasis on the development of specialist skills, to restore food supplies by restricting Maoist collectivisation and addressing the real economic problems.

Mao's belief in himself and his own leadership was perhaps the most damaging aspect of his ideology. He could never accept that manpower and ambition were insufficient and blamed 'bourgeois elements', 'capitalist roaders' and 'backsliders' for the failure of his economic policies. Furthermore, he ignored the evidence of the famine produced by government advisers, demonstrating the same disregard for human life that had been seen in his years in Jiangxi and Yan'an. While Mao's ideology rested on criticism, he seemed unable to apply this to himself.

Mao stepped down as chairman of the People's Republic of China in 1959, but he retained his commitment to 'continuing revolution'. In 1962, he launched the Socialist Education Movement in an attempt to infuse new revolutionary fervour into the party and government bureaucracies. Also known as the Four Cleanups Campaign, the education movement was designed to 'cleanse politics, economy, organisation and ideology', and its launch was in accordance with Mao's belief that 'governance is a process of socialist education'. The school system was to be based around a work-study programme, with universal participation in manual labour. 'Intellectuals' were also to undertake manual labour in order to remove 'bourgeois influences'. It would thus intensify the class struggle and re-educate the masses for mass mobilisation. However, its effect was largely dissipated by Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi, who believed that China needed a period of stability to allow for economic growth.

By 1966 Mao was so convinced that China was relapsing into corruption, bureaucratisation and élitism that he felt impelled to return to the forefront

Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969) Liu Shaoqi joined the CCP in 1921 and had trained in the Soviet Union as a communist organiser and theorist in the 1920s. He was a close ally of Mao during the Yan'an years and was recognised as Mao's chosen successor in 1943. He succeeded Mao as chairman of the republic in 1959, but was denounced during the Cultural Revolution for 'taking the capitalist road', opposing the communes (see page 138). He was expelled from the CCP in October 1968 and died in prison.

Deng Xiaoping (1904–97)

The son of a peasant, Deng joined the Communist Party while on a work-study programme in France in the 1920s. He studied in Moscow from 1926 to 1927 and was one of the members of the Long March. He was a military leader during the civil war and after 1949 became an important figure in the economic restructuring. He became general secretary of the party's Central Committee in 1956, but was denounced at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. He was purged twice, but was paramount leader of the People's Republic of China from 1978 to 1992.



Theory of knowledge

History and the masses

Is it realistic to be able to run a state through mass mobilisation?

of politics. Mao argued that a gulf was appearing between the cadres (party officials) and the masses, and that revisionist, right-wing tendencies had increased. In accordance with his belief that every generation should have a new commitment, he therefore turned to the youthful 'Red Guards' to challenge 'routinisation'. The youth, he believed, would regenerate the nation and create a new socialist order.

In July 1966, after several months during which he was little seen in public, Mao suddenly reappeared in Wuhan to take a vigorous and well-reported swim in the Yangtze River. It was a publicity stunt and a signal that Mao was in good health and ready to launch a counter-attack on his critics among the 'counter-revolutionary' party leadership. Although in his early seventies, the party propagandists claimed that he had swum nearly 15 km (9 miles) in 65 minutes, which was an astonishing speed, if it was true. If the ageing chairman could conquer the mighty Yangtze, then the nation's youth should feel inspired to face the political storm and help overthrow Mao's opponents.

The reassertion of Mao's leadership and ideology – following his Yangtze River swim – heralded a period of intense 'rectification' which, according to Lloyd Eastman, was 'Mao Zedong's supreme effort to prevent the traditional political culture from suffocating the revolution that he had nursed to maturity'. Mao believed he could 'remould the souls of the people' and accepted the need for ruthlessness and violence as an integral part of the cleansing process with 'great disorder across the land leading to great order'.



A picture released by the Chinese official news agency shows Mao Zedong (centre, bottom) surrounded by his bodyguards, swimming in the Yangtze River near Wuhan, 16 July 1966

Discussion point

Was Maoist ideology constructive or destructive?

Questions

- 1 To what extent did Mao attempt to instigate the main principles of communism during his rule in China? (You may wish to return to this question after studying units 3 and 4.)
- 2 How successful was Mao in fulfilling his ideological aims in the years 1949–76?



Theory of knowledge

History and ideology

Does knowledge of Maoist ideology help the historian to justify and excuse Mao's actions?

However, the Cultural Revolution (see page 138) highlighted an essential paradox. It proved impossible to reconcile voluntarism – whereby men and women were re-educated to participate willingly in the ‘mass struggle’ – with Mao's determination to stamp out ‘bourgeois thinking’. To achieve this, Mao was forced to resort to extensive repression, brain-washing and an unparalleled level of violence. Early revolutionaries became the regime's victims and, in an attempt to prove their socialist credentials, the persecutors became ever more extreme (see page 140).

Mao's ideological beliefs thus brought turmoil and destruction to his people. It would probably be fair to say that the social and economic improvements that occurred between 1949 and 1976 took place largely despite, rather than because of, Mao's strong ideological principles. His view that unless the Communist Party was regularly purified it would cease to be a revolutionary force, and China would cease to be truly socialist, threatened to defeat his own objective of making China strong and prosperous.

End of unit activities

- 1 Draw up a summary chart with the main characteristics of Mao's ideology on the left-hand side and a brief explanation of each on the right.
- 2 Draw a diagram to show the differences between the communisms of Mao, Stalin and Marx.
- 3 Design a poster that conveys an aspect of Maoist ideology and tries to persuade its audience of its value.

3 Establishment and consolidation of Mao's rule

Key questions

- By what means did Mao establish communist control in China in the years 1949–54?
- What part did mass mobilisation campaigns and purges play in ensuring Mao's authority in the years 1949–54?
- How did Mao maintain political control between 1954 and 1976?
- What parts were played by propaganda and repression in Mao's consolidation of power, and was Mao's China a totalitarian state?

Overview

- The CCP set up a new structure of government that paid lip service to ‘democratic principles’ but in which the party was dominant and shared many of the personnel of the state government.
- Mass movements, local committees and rectification campaigns ensured surveillance and control over the population.
- The army was used to secure dominance over outlying areas, such as Tibet.
- Attempts were made to improve living standards in towns and the countryside.
- In the period of consolidation and recovery between 1949 and 1952, the CCP made compromises allowing the continuance of some private ownership. However, the land reform programme of 1950 saw the destruction of the power and wealth of the landlords, even if ownership of the land still remained private.
- The four mass campaigns of 1950–52 and the purge of Rao Shushi and Gao Gang in 1954 showed the ruthlessness of Mao and the party in removing their perceived enemies.
- Between 1954 and 1976, pressure on ‘rightists’ was maintained in the anti-rightist campaign of 1957, the Socialist Education Movement of 1962 and the Cultural Revolution from 1966.
- Even Mao's former colleagues and loyal supporters could be purged, as was the case with Peng Dehuai in 1959. Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi were ousted in 1966 and Lin Biao died in mysterious circumstances in 1971. Deng was rehabilitated in 1973, but purged a second time in 1976.
- Constant propaganda, fear and the use of rectification campaigns ensured the communist hold over the Chinese people. The police, courts and legal system were entirely in the party's hands and the prison camps removed opponents and kept others in check.
- Mao's system of rule, which even included trying to change the way people thought, contained all the key elements of a totalitarian state.

Timeline

- 1949 Oct:** The People's Republic of China (PRC) is established with Mao as chairman
- 1950 Mar:** suppression of counter-revolutionaries campaign is launched
- Jun:** land reform programme is launched – up to 2 million landlords are killed
- Oct:** the PLA invades Tibet
- Nov:** resist America and aid Korea campaign is launched
- 1951 Dec:** the three antis campaign is launched
- 1952 Jan:** the five antis campaign is launched; all political parties except CCP are banned
- 1954 Feb:** purge of Gao Gang and Rao Shushi
- Sep:** formal constitution is introduced
- 1956 May:** the 100 flowers campaign is launched
- 1957 Jul:** the anti-rightist campaign is launched
- 1958 Jul:** Great Leap Forward is launched
- 1959 Apr:** Mao steps down as chairman of the People's Republic of China
- Sep:** Peng Dehuai is purged
- 1962 Sep:** Socialist Education Movement is announced
- 1966 May:** Cultural Revolution begins
- 1966 Jul:** Liu Shaoqi is dismissed from the post of party deputy chairman
- Dec:** Deng Xiaoping is forced to withdraw from public life
- 1971 Sep:** Lin Biao dies in mysterious circumstances
- 1973 Apr:** Deng Xiaoping is rehabilitated
- 1976 Jan:** Zhou Enlai dies
- Jul:** Deng Xiaoping is removed again
- Sep:** Mao Zedong dies