

Cross-reference

For details on the purge of Peng Dehuai, see pages 86–7.

A closer look

Mao and the purges of the Communist Party

Mao had purged political opponents from the Party leadership on earlier occasions – for example, during the Yan'an years – and he would purge other opponents in the future. There would be another purge (of Peng Dehuai) in 1959. Mao would also engage in a long power struggle with Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping in the early 1960s, which would culminate in the Cultural Revolution of 1966. Purging opponents became a regular and necessary method by which Mao exercised his dominance over the Party.

Summary questions

- 1 How successful was the Communist Party in establishing its control over the lives of ordinary Chinese citizens in the years from 1949 to 1953?
- 2 How successful was Mao in dealing with challenges to his authority from within the Communist Party?

4

Reforming China

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the process of land reform and how this affected Chinese peasants
- how the Chinese revolution changed the role and status of women
- the progress made in establishing a system of universal education in China
- the progress made in improving public health.



Fig. 1 A propaganda poster, 'New books for the State farm', reflecting educational and propagandist work by the Communists among the peasants

As the train approached Chengdu in the early afternoon, [my mother] found herself increasingly looking forward to a new life there. She was twenty-two. At the same age, some twenty years before, her mother had been living as a virtual prisoner in Manchuria in a house belonging to her absent warlord 'husband', under the watchful eyes of his servants; she was the plaything and the property of men. My mother, at least, was an independent human being. Whatever her misery, she was sure it bore no comparison with the plight of her mother as a woman in old China. She told herself she had a lot to thank the Chinese Revolution for.

1

From Jung Chang, *Wild Swans*, 1992

As a young revolutionary student in 1919, Mao had concluded that in order to change China it was necessary to change society. To change society it was necessary to change the system and to change the system it was essential to take power. In 1949, with power in his grasp, Mao Zedong began to attempt to change many aspects of Chinese society.

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee, which had met in September 1949, drew up a Common Programme for China setting out an agenda for political, economic and social change. Article 5 of the programme guaranteed to all, except 'political reactionaries', the rights of freedom of thought, speech, publication, assembly, association, correspondence, the person, domicile, movement, religious belief and the freedom to hold processions and demonstrations. The programme promised economic change through land reform and the development of heavy industry. Social change was highlighted in two key clauses: the promise of equal rights for women and an end to their lives of 'bondage', and the emphasis on the need for universal, free education.

In rural China, the possession of land gave life: if you had fields, you could eat; without fields, you would starve. Among a nation of four hundred million, 90 per cent of whom were peasants, land redistribution – taking from the rich and giving to the poor – was the primary vehicle carrying the revolution forward.

2 From P. Short, *Mao: A Life*, 1999

Exploring the detail

Executions

Estimates vary as to how many actually died in this wave of land seizures in the early 1950s. Official Chinese estimates put the figure at around 700,000, whereas Chang and Halliday (*Mao: The Unknown Story*, 2006) estimate that the true figure was nearer 3 million. Mao wanted the executions to have maximum impact by involving peasants in the killing and having the executions carried out in public.

Key term

The means of production: Marx used this phrase to refer to factories, mines, transport systems and land; in other words, the economic resources that produce the wealth of the people.



Fig. 2 Mao Zedong (left) at a village in Shunyi, 1954. Photographs showing Mao participating in manual labour were used to strengthen his image as a man of the people

Land reforms

Land confiscation

Before 1949, in areas controlled by the Communists, land reform was the essential means by which the Communist Party had gained the support of the peasants. Once the CPC had taken control of the whole of China, land reform was extended to the whole country. No longer did Mao veer between rent reductions and land confiscation, as he had done in 1946–9. Once the Communists were in power, land reform meant nothing more nor less than the confiscation and redistribution of land to poorer peasants and landless labourers. On the other hand, Mao was careful to ensure that it was only land belonging to the rich landlords that was confiscated; the holdings of better-off peasants were left untouched because Mao recognised that the food produced by the wealthier peasants was essential to the nation as a whole.

Starting in ‘key point’ villages, teams of 30 to 40 CPC cadres working with local peasants’ associations fanned out across the countryside to carry the revolution to the more remote areas. Local peasants were encouraged to identify their landlords, who were then subjected to humiliation and violence. The CPC involved peasants in this process and deliberately stoked up class conflict between peasants and landlords in order to cement the relationship between China’s peasants and the communist revolution. Many landlords and their relatives were sentenced to death.

Peasants who killed with their bare hands the landlords who oppressed them were wedded to the new revolutionary order in a way that passive spectators could never be.

3 From P. Short, *Mao: A Life*, 1999

The land confiscations of the early 1950s finally broke the power of the landlord class in the Chinese countryside. Indeed, with so many landlords being killed and their surviving relatives having been cowed into submission, the landlord class ceased to exist.

Moves towards cooperation

Redistribution of land left land ownership in private hands and peasant families free to cultivate their fields in the traditional way. In the long term it was the aim of the Communist Party to collectivise agriculture. Not only was this seen as the best way to bring more modern methods of farming to the Chinese countryside and thereby increase food production – an essential pre-requisite if China were to become more industrialised with a greater proportion of its population living in cities – it was also a basic tenet of Marxist theory that collective ownership of **the means of production** represented a more advanced stage of development than private, individual ownership. In the early 1950s, however, Mao believed that a policy of forcing peasants into larger collective farms or communes would encounter resistance and threaten to undermine peasant support for the revolution. Only the most

Activity

Revision exercise

Using the sources in this section and your own knowledge, explain why it was important for the communist regime to involve the peasants in the process of land reform.

cautious moves towards cooperation and collectivisation, therefore, were made in the early 1950s. There was encouragement from the CPC to peasants to set up mutual-aid teams (groupings of about 10 families) that pooled labour and equipment. Gradually it became apparent to peasants that they could not obtain the tools and equipment that they needed to cultivate their land unless they joined a mutual-aid team but there was as yet no compulsion on them to do so. The communist revolution in the countryside, therefore, was still at an early stage in its development.

Social reforms

The emancipation of women

In traditional Chinese society, obedience to ‘proper’ authority, whether in the family or in society at large, was a fundamental duty for all Chinese citizens. For women this meant that as daughters they owed obedience to their fathers, as wives to their husbands and as widows to their eldest sons. Despite the efforts of the Qing emperors to stamp it out, the practice of foot binding of women was widespread by the early 20th century. Arranged marriages, often involving the payment of a dowry, were common. Rich and powerful men kept concubines (mistresses) as well as wives. Before the 20th century, few Chinese women were able to receive any kind of education. The lives of peasant women were particularly harsh. As well as bearing the burden of child rearing and household work, they were expected to labour in the fields and carry on handicraft work at home.

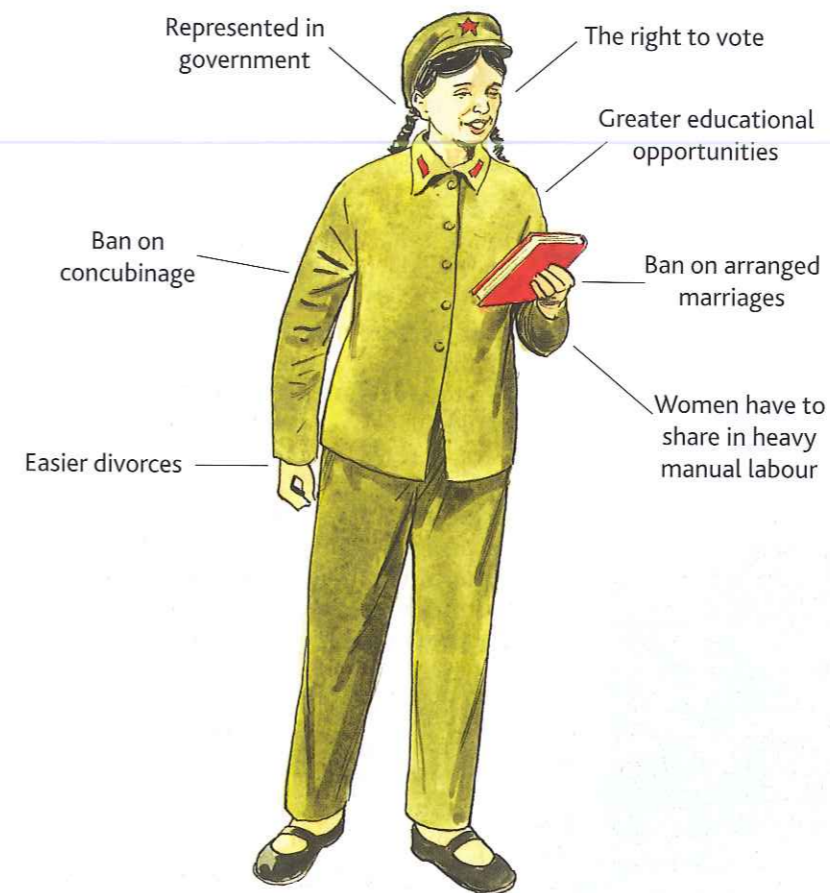


Fig. 3 Advances made by women under communist rule in China

My grandmother's feet had been bound when she was two years old. Her mother, who herself had bound feet, first wound a piece of white cloth, about twenty feet long, round her feet, bending all the toes except the big toe inward and under the sole. Then she placed a large stone on top to crush the arch. My grandmother screamed in agony and begged her to stop. Her mother had to stick a cloth into her mouth to gag her. My grandmother passed out repeatedly from the pain. The process lasted several years.

At the age of 15 my grandmother became the concubine of a warlord-general. Wives were not for pleasure – that was what concubines were for. Concubines might acquire considerable power but their social status was quite different from that of a wife. A concubine was a kind of institutionalised mistress, acquired and discarded at will.

4

From Jung Chang, *Wild Swans*, 1992

Did you know?

Mao's concubines

Mao himself kept a select group of women around him who, although officially referred to as a PLA dance troupe, were in fact treated as 'imperial concubines' and expected to provide for the Chairman's sexual needs.

The revolution of 1911 had brought some changes for women but not equality. Under the 1912 constitution, women were not granted the right to vote. During the warlord era and beyond, the practice of keeping concubines was widespread, as were arranged marriages. In the growing cities, educated women began to challenge traditional attitudes and make their way in professional occupations. Foot binding gradually began to disappear. However, progress was slow and uneven. In 1922, women accounted for a mere 2.5 per cent of the total numbers of students receiving university education. Under GMD administration, China's cities began to experience social progress with the building of new schools and hospitals and greater opportunities for women. In the countryside, however, social change was slow or non-existent. Foot binding and arranged marriages persisted and there were few educational opportunities for men or women.

The Communists had a better record of promoting equal rights for women. In Jiangxi province in the 1930s, for example, arranged marriages were outlawed and it became illegal to purchase wives.

Divorce was made easier. Women were also given the right to vote and Mao stipulated that at least one quarter of those elected to representative bodies had to be women. However, greater equality in many ways increased women's burdens. As the Communists were taking many of the younger men away from the land to fight in the struggle against the GMD, women were expected to do the heavy farm labour that had previously been done by the men as well as continue in their traditional tasks.

After the Communists took power in 1949, one of their first reforms addressed the issue of women's rights. The New Marriage Law 1950 outlawed arranged marriages and the payment of dowries to a husband or his family. Concubinage was banned and unmarried, divorced or widowed women were given the same rights to own property as men. Divorce was made available to



Fig. 4 Chinese women, bearing weapons, participate in the Long March

Questions

- 1 In what ways did women benefit from the communist revolution in China?
- 2 In what ways had women still not achieved full equality with men?

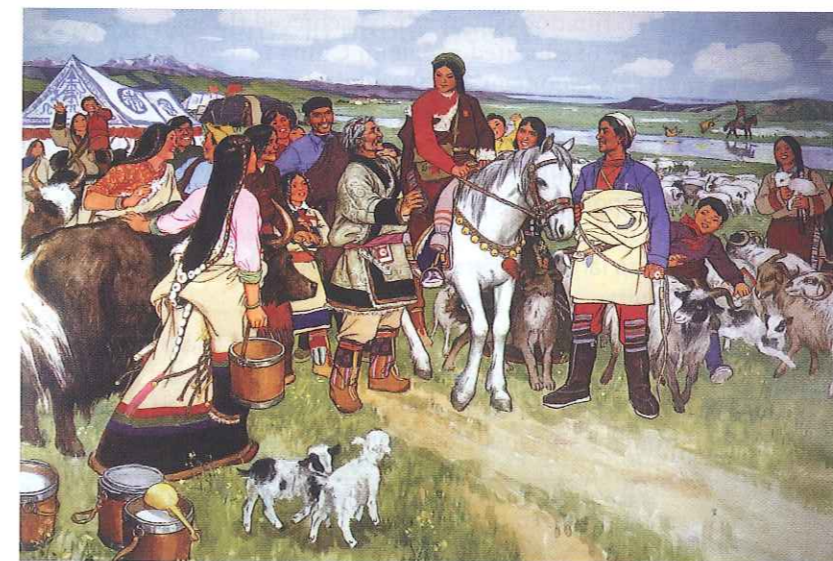


Fig. 5 'The former serf's daughter goes to university.' A propaganda poster illustrating the progress made by women under communist rule

men and women on equal terms. Attitudes in rural areas were slow to change but the reforms of the early 1950s, together with new educational opportunities, provided a legal and social framework for women to establish equal rights with men.

Improvements in education

Education had traditionally been valued in China as the means to gain entry to the imperial civil service. Entry to schools and universities, however, was severely restricted by the high costs involved, while the heavy demands of the academic curriculum and the very low pass rate in the **imperial examinations** – only 5 per cent of students actually passed in any one year – ensured that this form of education existed solely to produce an elite class of administrators. Western involvement in China during the 19th and 20th centuries had led to the creation of a number of schools and universities offering a Western style of education. By the time of the Communist takeover in 1949 there were 31 schools and universities run by British or American foundations and another 32 run by Christian missionary organisations. In addition, after the revolution of 1911 a growing number of young Chinese took the opportunity to study at Western universities. These educational opportunities promoted the development of an educated professional class in China but for the vast majority of Chinese, particularly the peasants, educational opportunities were virtually non-existent. In the early 20th century, according to one estimate, only 30 per cent of Chinese adults were literate and, before 1949, no more than 20 per cent of Chinese children attended primary school.

In his early writings, Mao had developed his own ideas about education and its role in the building of a socialist society. He rejected the traditional Chinese form of education for its elitism, its old-fashioned curriculum and teaching methods and its reliance on learning from books. For Mao, learning should come from experience. He also opposed Western influence in Chinese schools and universities, which he regarded as a form of **cultural imperialism**. For Mao, education was to play a vital role in the building of a socialist society; economic development required the training of large numbers of skilled specialists,

Key terms

Imperial examinations: China's imperial bureaucracy (civil service) had traditionally been staffed by those who passed rigorous examinations. Candidates for the examinations, who had to stay in special examination compounds for the duration of the tests, had to learn by heart 431,286 characters and five classic texts. These tests, and the curriculum on which they were based, ensured that civil servants learned to conform and did not question the authority of the emperor. The examinations were abolished in 1905 as part of a belated reform programme by the Qing dynasty.

Cultural imperialism: imperialism is normally used to mean the political dominance of one country over another. By 'cultural imperialism' Mao meant that Westerners were using their control over education in China to exercise control over the minds of China's younger generation and to train them in Western ways of thinking.

while political indoctrination could only be achieved through mass literacy. The shortage of educated people in China in 1949 was a serious brake on the future development of the country.

In our country today there are so many illiterates and yet the building of socialism cannot wait until illiteracy is eliminated; in our country today it is not only the many school-age children who have no schools to go to but also large numbers of young people above that age, to say nothing of adults.

To be a good teacher, one must first be a good pupil. There are many things which cannot be learned from books alone; one must learn from those engaged in production, from the workers, from the peasants, and in schools from the students, from those one teaches.

5 Mao's views on education. From *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*

Emphasis in the early years of communist rule was placed on the development of primary education but progress was slow. By 1956, less than half of children aged between 7 and 16 were in full-time education.



Fig. 6 'The beams of the red sun illuminate ten thousand generations.' A poster showing an elderly peasant woman telling young children about her sufferings before the Communists came to power

Questions

- 1 How much progress was made towards improving the educational opportunities for China's citizens in the first 10 years of the communist regime?
- 2 Explain why progress was slow in these early years.

Some 20 years later, the proportion of primary-age children enrolled in schools had reached 96 per cent. Part of the reason for the slow progress was that the education system was starting from a very low base, particularly in rural areas. However, it was also the case that the new communist government did not make spending on education a high priority. In 1952 the investment by the State in education and culture combined amounted to a mere 6.4 per cent of the total budget.

Education in the new China did not entirely break away from the traditional Chinese model of education. In each district there were so-called 'key schools' to which the best teachers were

directed and for which children had to sit a tough entrance examination. In the schools there was a heavy emphasis on testing, examinations and physical education. Although selection was supposed to be based on merit, in practice it was the children of high-ranking party and government officials who occupied most of the places at these schools.

Higher education was expanded and universities were remodelled to concentrate more on technical and scientific subjects, reflecting the country's need for more trained specialists. Large numbers of students were also sent to study at universities in the USSR until the late 1950s. As China became isolated from the West, however, there were no longer any opportunities for Chinese students to study there.

Improvements in public health

Poverty and ignorance were reflected in a complete lack of sanitation, as a result of which fly- and water-borne diseases such as typhoid, cholera, dysentery took a heavy toll. Worm infestation was practically universal, for untreated human and animal manure was the main and essential soil fertiliser. The people lived on the fringe of starvation and this so lowered their resistance to disease that epidemics carried off thousands every year.

6 A British doctor's assessment of the health of Chinese peasants before 1949

Before the communist regime took power in 1949, the provision of health care in China was very uneven. In the 19th century, Western-style medicine was first brought to China by missionaries. The efforts of Western churches and charitable foundations resulted in the building of hospitals and, later, medical schools in some of China's largest cities. Under the GMD regime in the 1920s and 1930s, with a growing number of trained doctors, medical care in the cities began to show significant improvements. Chinese medicine, which had a long tradition of treatments using herbs, minerals and acupuncture, was also available but was looked down on by modernisers and discouraged by the GMD regime. The medical needs of those living in rural areas, however, were not addressed by the GMD and the countryside continued to suffer from many endemic diseases and high infant mortality rates.

Activity

Source analysis

Study Figures 7, 8 and 9.

- 1 Why were posters used to communicate information about public health?
- 2 What were the political messages of these posters?



Fig. 7 'Environmental sanitation of city residents', a public health educational poster from 1952 outlining simple practical steps that city dwellers could take for themselves to improve their living conditions



Fig. 8 'Community sanitation in the countryside', a public health educational poster from 1952 showing the peasants what steps they could take to avoid catching the many diseases that were endemic in the countryside at that time



Fig. 9 'Rats, fleas and the plague', a public health educational poster from 1952 showing the link between rats, fleas and disease and the practical steps that could be taken to deal with the problem

The communist regime placed the emphasis in health care on a preventative rather than a curative approach. This was done largely to compensate for a lack of hospitals and trained doctors. Health reform in the new China mainly took the form of mass campaigns. Using street and neighbourhood committees to mobilise the people, the Communist Party started campaigns such as the Patriotic Health campaign to improve sanitation and hygiene and thereby reduce the incidence of endemic diseases such as cholera, typhoid and scarlet fever. The campaigns produced some improvement as death rates gradually declined. Particular emphasis in these campaigns was placed on improving the quality of drinking water by digging deep wells and on the treatment of human waste. As Source 6 on page 57 shows, the practice of using 'night-soil' as a source of fertiliser for the fields was a major cause of disease in rural areas and efforts were made to encourage peasants to store the waste in pits away from habitation or mix it with chemicals to render it safe.

Sources 7 and 8 show how mass mobilisation of the people was used to improve health.

We'll get some powdered lime to sprinkle around the drains and damp and shaded places and along the house walls and fences. We've already contracted with a plumber to clean the drains twice a month and we'll share the cost. Besides cleaning up all places where [rats] can nest, we should use traps and bait to catch them. Then we'll send them to the police station. We get credited with every rat we turn into the police.

7

S. Wood, *A Street in China*, 1958

Schistosomiasis, a disease that causes internal bleeding, liver damage and a bloating of the abdomen, was common in parts of the Chinese countryside. It was caused by a microscopic worm carried by snails.

To mobilise the peasantry against the snails it was first necessary to explain to them the nature of the illness which had plagued them for so long, and for this purpose lectures, film shows, posters, radio talks were used. When the peasants came to understand the nature of their enemy, they themselves worked out ways of defeating it.

8

J. Horn, *Away With All Pests*, 1969

Workers employed in large industrial enterprises or State enterprises had access to urban hospitals reserved for them. In the rural areas, a three-tier system of health care was adopted. At village level, health care needs were catered for by paramedics working out of village health centres. Each township was to have a health centre providing out-patient care as well as a limited number of beds for in-patient care for less serious cases. The most serious cases were to be referred to county hospitals, which were to be staffed by fully trained doctors. Such facilities were expensive and, with health care taking a mere 1.3 per cent of total State investment in 1952, it was some time before many rural areas saw much improvement.

Questions

- 1 In what ways were the health and educational systems improved under communist rule?
- 2 To what extent were there still inequalities in educational opportunities and health care in China by the mid-1950s?

Activity

Preparing a presentation

On your own or in groups, research each of the themes covered in this chapter and present your findings to the class. The focus could be on the extent of change achieved by the Communists in the first five years of their rule.

Learning outcomes

In this section you have looked at the ways in which the Communist Party consolidated its rule in China after 1949. A new system of government was created that established the Communist Party as the leading party in the State. Repression was a key weapon in the struggle against Mao's opponents, from both within and outside the Party. The Communists made many changes to the lives of ordinary Chinese people. The rights of women and access to education were improved, and campaigns were undertaken to improve public health. The communist land reform programme, which had begun in 'liberated areas' in the 1930s, was completed by 1953. After reading this section, you should be able to assess to what extent the lives of women, young people and peasant farmers in particular had changed, and how these changes contributed towards consolidating support for the communist regime.

AQA Examination-style questions

- (a) Explain why the communist regime took a cautious approach towards collective ownership of land in the years 1949–53. (12 marks)



You need to show that you understand what is meant by the words 'cautious approach towards collective ownership' in these years. It would be useful to start by arguing that the ultimate aim of a communist government would be the collective ownership of land but that this was the period when the Communists were trying to consolidate their power and so were moving rather carefully and slowly towards their long-term aims. It would also be worth pointing out that although the Communists had abandoned their earlier caution about confiscating land from landlords, which was shown in some areas during the Civil War, they were careful not to alienate peasants by pushing them towards collective farming too quickly. As with all 'explain why' questions, it is important that you identify and explain a number of factors behind the Communists' decision and that you arrive at a clear and balanced conclusion.

- (b) 'Mao's consolidation of power between 1949 and 1953 was entirely dependent on terror and repression.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view. (24 marks)



Remember to identify the key words in the quotation before you start to answer this question: in this case, they are 'entirely dependent' and 'terror and repression'. With questions such as this you need to consider points on which you agree with the quotation and points on which you disagree. Make a list of the forms of terror and repression used by the Communists, and then make a list of the other methods they used to consolidate power, such as the ways in which the Communists used reforms to try to win the active support of people. Your answer needs to show balance between agreement and disagreement, although this does not mean that you should not come down on one side or the other. You should aim to produce an answer that has a clear line of argument running through it, that looks at both sides of the debate and that has well selected factual information to support the points being made. Finally, end with a clear conclusion in which you make a judgement.

3

Economic planning and its results, 1953–67

5

Controlling the economy

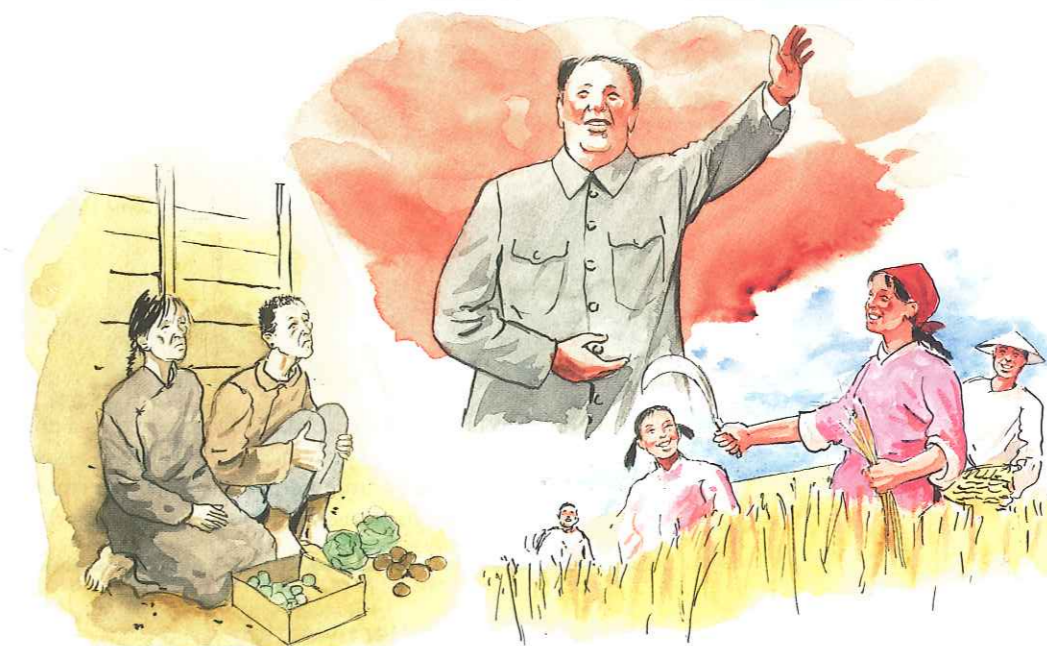


Fig. 1 'The peasants want freedom but we want socialism'. Mao understood that the peasants wanted the freedom to farm their own plots of land and sell any surplus produce in local markets. Mao's vision of a socialist agriculture involved the peasants' small plots being combined into large collective farms, in which the peasants would work co-operatively to produce more food and the surplus would be shared between them

In this chapter you will learn about:

- how the Communist Party began the process of collectivising Chinese agriculture
- the beginnings of economic planning and the development of industry
- how the introduction of economic planning led to divisions within the Communist Party
- how Mao dealt with criticism and opposition to his policies.

■ The collectivisation of agriculture, 1953–7

Mao and the peasants

Mao's long-term aims were to transform China into a socialist society. In terms of what this meant for Chinese agriculture and peasants, he envisaged grouping together small, privately owned farms into much larger, collective farms. This, he believed, would make farms more productive and therefore able to feed China's growing population, and also enable peasants to pool their resources and work together for the common good. However, Mao recognised that China's peasants, having long been exploited by wealthy landlords, wanted nothing more than to have their own small farms and to continue farming in the traditional way. In other words, he recognised that the peasants showed a 'spontaneous tendency towards capitalism'. Needing the support of the peasants in the struggle against the Nationalists during the Civil War, Mao had been careful, despite his long-term aims, to ensure that land confiscated from landlords was redistributed among poorer peasants. Collectivisation would have to wait.