Paper 2, Option 2E.1: Mao’s China, 1949–76

Overview

This option covers the period of Mao Zedong’s rule in China, from the proclamation of the People’s Republic in October 1949 until Mao’s death in 1976.

The reasons for the triumph of communism in both Russia and China are very different. Lenin’s seizure of power in Russia had many features of a *coup d’état* carried out in Petrograd and a few other cities. In China, however, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), founded in 1921, fought against the *Guomindang* for almost 30 years. Mao, leader of the CCP from 1935, rejected Marx’s idea that revolution would come from industrial workers, and based his strategy on gaining the support of the peasantry, the overwhelming bulk of the population. This policy was a success, for the peasants gave vital support to the CCP during the civil war of 1946–49. Following their defeat, the Guomindang retreated to the island of Taiwan, where they remain to this day.

The CCP quickly established its power over China’s territory and people. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA), a major force in Chinese politics throughout Mao’s rule, used force to bring Tibet and other outlying provinces under Beijing’s control; and they were sent to the cities to wipe out the triad gangs and execute thousands of their members.

Mao followed many features of the USSR’s economic model. Initially, land was confiscated from landlords and distributed to the peasants, but within a few years collective farms were being established. Soviet planning was imitated with the successful First Five-Year Plan. However, the Second Plan from 1958, known as the ‘Great Leap Forward’*,* ended in disaster thanks to a huge famine: some estimates suggest that this famine was the deadliest in history, perhaps claiming 30 million lives.

Wide-ranging social reforms improved educational and health provisions, and efforts were made to extend these throughout the countryside. Mao made real attempts to improve the status of women, including a Marriage Law in 1950 and the banning of the centuries-old practice of footbinding.

However, social reforms in China have to be assessed in the light of the Cultural Revolutionof 1966–76, when terror and anarchy swept the country. Millions of young Red Guards, inspired by Mao’s *Little Red Book*, abandoned their education and launched violent attacks on traditional customs and ideas, as well as torturing and executing huge numbers of innocent citizens. The Cultural Revolution was only brought to an end by the intervention of the PLA, and by Mao’s death in 1976.

The judgement of historians on Mao’s rule is a mixed one, especially in the light of subsequent developments. Deng Xiaoping, one of the CCP’s leaders purged in the Cultural Revolution, returned to power in 1978 and began a programme of far-reaching economic reforms. Deng is credited with the dramatic expansion of the Chinese economy and with lifting hundreds of millions of Chinese people out of poverty. This helps to explain why, after 65 years in power, the CCP remains in control of China today.

The option is divided into the following four key topics. It is important to appreciate the linkages between topics, as questions may target the content of more than one key topic.

**Topic 1: Establishing communist rule, 1949–57**

**Topic 2: Agriculture and industry, 1949–65**

**Topic 3: The Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, 1966–76**

**Topic 4: Social and cultural changes, 1949–76**

**Topic 1: Establishing communist rule, 1949–57**

The topic covers the establishment of communist rule in the aftermath of the civil war, and the nature of the political system developed to 1957. While knowledge of the events of the civil war is not required, you should be aware of conditions within China in 1949, and the challenges these posed to the new communist government.

You are not required to know the details of the military campaigns within Korea in the years 1950–53, but you should understand both the benefits and the costs of intervention and the impact on the new government of China’s involvement in the war.

**Topic 2: Agriculture and industry, 1949–65**

The topic covers the agricultural and industrial changes from the early years of communist control until the Cultural Revolution. Although agricultural and industrial changes are dealt with separately, you should be able to make links between the two policies. For example, the growing demand for labour in the towns, and the effects which the mass movement of people had on both agriculture and industry.

You will not be required to have detailed information on the economic reforms introduced by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping after the failure of the Great Leap Forward, but should be aware of the extent to which they differed from Mao’s policies.

**Topic 3: The Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, 1966–76**

The topic covers the years of the Cultural Revolution from the destructive anarchy of its early years, through the restoration of order within the country, to the death of Mao in 1976. You should have a detailed understanding of the activities of the Red Guards, the ways in which both Mao and Jiang Qing controlled young people, the growing anarchy in the years 1966–67, and the human, economic and cultural effects of their activities.

You should also understand the extent to which the PLA was responsible for the gradual restoration of order from 1968, and the extent to which the Cultural Revolution was brought to an end in the years before Mao’s death in 1976.

**Topic 4: Social and cultural changes, 1949–76**

The topic covers the social and cultural changes which occurred alongside the political and economic developments outlined in Topics 1–3. You should understand the link between anti-religious policies and the government’s attempts to impose ideological uniformity on the Chinese people.

You are not required to consider the youth movements in China during this period, though they will need to know the activities of the Red Guards in relation to Topic 3.

**Mao Glossary**

**Agronomists –** experts in agricultural science

**Ancestor worship –** the practice of paying respect to the deceased members of the family in a simple ceremony of remembrance

**Anti-Rightist movement –** a term used to apply to anyone Mao wanted to remove; rightists were accused of being anti-communist

**Backyard furnaces –** primitive smelting ovens for turning iron into steel that every family was encouraged to build on its premises during the Great Leap Forward

**Barefoot doctors –** the teams of swiftly trained doctors who were sent into China’s countryside to provide a basic health service

**Bourgeoisie –** the middle class capitalists who exploited the workers, including landlords, managers, business owners, administrators, financiers

**Bride-price –** the money paid to the bride’s family, based on a calculation of how many children she would have

**Buddhism –** an ancient Chinese philosophy, which laid great stress on the individual’s gaining enlightenment through meditation

**Capitalism –** economic system where exchange of goods and money is in private hands

**Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) –** a sub-committee of the Politburo, it was established in May 1966 to direct the Cultural Revolution. Its 17 members included the Gang of Four

**Central planning –** control of the economy by the government

**Chinese Communist Party (CCP) –** the name given to the Communist party in China, formed in 1921 and committed to a Marxist revolution

**Cold War –** the period of tension (1945-91) between the Communist Eastern bloc, led by the USSR, and the Western democratic nations, led by the USA

**Collectivisation –** taking land from the peasants and organising huge government controlled farms

**Command economy –** Target setting for industry, farming and trade coming from the government

**Communism –** the belief that everyone should be equal and that the workers should run the state

**Communes –** organised regions where the collective farms were grouped together

**Concubinage –** the practice of men keeping women as mistresses

**Confucianism –** a pattern of thought based on the teaching of the philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC), who emphasised the need for harmony in human relations

**Conscript army –** troops who have been compulsorily called up to fight

**Continuing revolution –** Mao’s notion that revolution was not a single event but a continuous process

**Cult of Personality –** Mao was revered as the personal embodiment of the Communist revolution

**Cultural Revolution –** Mao encouraged a new revolution in China to purge any remaining enemies of communism, this went on from 1966 to 1976

**Dalai Lama –** The leader of Tibet’s Buddhist faith, who became a powerful symbol of national resistance to the Chinese occupation

**Détente –** a policy aimed at easing relations between the Eastern bloc and Western nations by encouraging mutual acceptance of coexistence

**Dictatorship –**government of a country by a single person or party who does not have to obey any laws nor take into account individual Human Rights

**Dysentery –** severe diarrhoea and dehydration, often fatal

**Economy –** the resources of a country, e.g. coal, iron, oil, making goods, the working people and how it uses them to create wealth

**Expatriate Chinese –** Chinese nationals living abroad

**Extended family –** not just parents and children, but all the relatives living together

**Faction –** a breakaway group within a political party who disagree with the party leadership

**Feudal –** the period of history in which the emperor allowed a group of rich landlords to hold land in return for their loyalty and service. The landlords made the peasants work for them in return for food

**Foot binding –** the tight bandaging of women’s feet to prevent growth so that they had to hobble and so could not move about and to make them more attractive to men

**Forbidden City –** Beijing’s spacious walled inner city that had been home and court of the emperors between 1368 and 1911

**Foreign embassies –** buildings which are specially protected areas which the host nation respects as being immune from local interference

**Free Market –** allowing prices of goods and labour to be set by what they can get rather than by government control

**Gang of Four –** made up of Jiang Qing and her three male associates, Zhang Chunquiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Honwen

**Genocide –** the deliberate destructive of a people or ethnic group

**Guomindang (GMD) –** the nationalist party that had run China before 1949 and been defeated by the CCP in a civil war from 1945-1949

**Great Helmsman –** one of the terms of adulation in which Mao was described, a reference to his skill of steering the ‘ship of state’

**Great Leap Forward –** Mao’s second five year plan for industry and agriculture,1958-62

**Heavy industry –** large industry such as coal, iron and steel

**Hundred Flowers Campaign –** a propaganda movement started by Mao in 1957 to encourage Chinese people to make their complaints about the state

**Hong Kong –** the Chinese city-port that had been a British crown colony since 1898 and was scheduled to return to China until 1997

**Industrialisation –** the drive to change the economy from mainly agriculture to mechanised production of heavy industry

**Intellectuals –** Mao classed them as people who did not do a proper job e.g. writers, teachers, artists, lecturers and lawyers

**Iron rice bowl –** the system that provided workers with a guaranteed job and protected their wages

**Khampas –** the travelling nomadic yak herdsmen of Tibet

**Lama –** a form of Buddhism which had become a defining characteristic of Tibetan culture

**Laogai** – a Chinese prisoner camp, meaning ‘re-education through labour’. There were thousands of these camps where prisoners who were described as enemies of the state were treated with extreme cruelty and brutality

**Lysenkoism –** the agricultural theories of Trofim Lysenko, a Russian agronomist, on how to improve agricultural output

**Mandarin Chinese –** the main language and dialect of China and is the official language of government, administration and law

**Marxism –** a political theory describing the historical processes and conflicts society and the economy need to go through to reach communism

**Ming Tombs –** the burial ground of the emperors of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644)

**Panchen Lama –** second in spiritual authority to the Dalai Lama

**Panmunjong truce –** the 1953 agreement that brought the Korean War to an end

**Paper tigers –** one of Mao’s expressions to apply to anything whose power, he believed, was more apparent than real e.g. USA

**Paranoia –** a mental state where a person believes that everybody is plotting against them

**Party Congress –** part of the administrative organisation of China, elected the Central Committee which elected the Politburo

**Party line –** Official CCP policy

**Patriarchal –** male dominated

**Patriotic health movements –** government-sponsored schemes for providing Chinese people with basic information on health and hygiene

**People’s Liberation Army (PLA) –** the name for the Communist army from the 1930s and which carried Mao to power in 1949 and remained loyal to him

**People’s Republic of China (PRC) –** the official name for Communist China, 1949-

**Pinyin –** a modernised, simple form of Mandarin

**Politburo –** a group of c 20 leading men at the top of the Party who met to decide all the important issues on policy

**Political terror –** the violent acts of the government against its people which are designed to discourage and eliminate opposition

**Propaganda –** misleading publicity that is intended to promote a political point of view

**Pragmatist –** someone who has a very practical approach to solving problems as opposed to someone who only answers problems from an ideological point of view

**Proletariat –** the working classes

**Public utilities –** gas, electricity and transport systems

**Purge –** the violent process by which a political party “cleanses” itself and the country of unwanted members

**Rectification campaigns –** a series of purges by which Mao removed any member of the CCP he suspected of opposing him

**Red guards –** the revolutionary students who were heavily involved in the Cultural Revolution, so named because of their red arm bands

**Reunification campaigns** – the Chinese government’s euphemism for forcibly bringing invaded provinces (Tibet, Guangdong, Xinjiang) under Chinese control in the early 1950s

**Right wing –** people in the Communist Party who wanted the rate of change to be slower and/or wanted implementation of communism to be less bloodthirsty and include elements of capitalism

**Sino-Soviet agreement of 1950 –** Mao and Stalin met in Moscow and the USSR agreed to provide the PRC with vital resources that the PRC would pay back over time

**Soviet –** a system of government organised on Communist principles

**Sputnik –** the first Soviet satellite to be successfully launched into orbit around the Earth in 1957

**State –** the government of China

**The People’s Daily –** the official CCP newspaper and the government’s mouthpiece

**Triads –** Chinese mafia, involved in drugs, gambling and prostitution

**Tsampa –** a mushy paste made from ground barley, a key part of the traditional Tibetan diet

**Urbanisation –** increasing the number and size of the towns in China

**Yaks –** animals (similar to cows) adapted for the high altitude of Tibet, which provided milk, meat and clothing and were an essential part of Tibet’s traditional rural economy

**Zhongnanhai –** a building compound off Tiananmen Square that housed the government offices and ministers’ residence