

## Exam focus

REVISED

Below is a sample exam answer to the following A-level question. Read the answer and the comments around it. Bear these in mind when tackling the activity at the end.

How far do you agree that the policies of the CCP brought widespread benefits to Chinese society in the years 1949–58?

In the years 1949–58, Mao introduced a wide range of policies to improve Chinese society. These included gender equality as well as change to the lives of the middle classes, workers and peasants. There were certainly some benefits at the start of the period, but they could not be deemed as 'widespread'. Lack of investment and the disastrous Great Leap Forward outweighed the improvements. By the end of the period the situation of some of the groups was arguably worse than it had been at the start.

Women had little social status in 1949. They could not own property or divorce, and many were deformed by foot-binding. Few girls were allowed to go to school, and many were forced into arranged marriages or became concubines. In 1949, the CCP banned arranged marriages, concubines and foot-binding. The 1950 Marriage Law gave women the right to own property and to divorce. However, these benefits were short-lived. The New Marriage Law was not always adhered to: conservative Party cadres refused to enforce it, particularly in traditional rural communities. In Islamic Xinjiang, the practice of arranged marriages continued unaltered. Women might have become politicised, but that did not mean that they were equal: Communist leaders like Song Qing Ling and Ding Ling held important roles in the Party, but complained that their male counterparts still did not take them seriously. The right to own land was quickly removed by land reform and women's lives became even worse during the Great Leap Forward. Gender equality meant equal work, but male expectations of women's roles remained unaltered and husbands still expected women to take responsibility for the bulk of domestic work and childcare. Overall, there was little real change in the status of women in these years.

The Communists promised to improve the lives of the urban workers. The standard of housing was poor, wages were low and there was little job security. After 1952, the Five-Year Plan improved employment prospects and helped wages to rise, and food supplies to the cities were increased. These benefits came at the cost of personal freedoms, however. All workers were organised into Danwei, or work units. They organised the distribution of permits for travel and marriage as well as access to food and housing. The focus on heavy industry meant that, although they had more substantial wages, there was still a shortage of consumer goods in the shops and the famine of the late 1950s led to reduced food supplies. Most workers had previously been peasants and had travelled to the cities for work: they could not leave the cities to return to their villages and many lost their families to the famine.

For the peasants, the group whom the CCP had championed in the revolution, Mao's rule was one of false hope. There were improvements in health care: although there were still not enough doctors, rural clinics meant that many peasants were able to see a doctor for the first time in their lives. Patriotic Health Movements taught peasants how to be more hygienic, for example by digging latrines well away from housing and ending the use of human excrement as fertiliser. In 1950, the Agrarian Reform Law began the process of land redistribution. Peasants seized their landlords' farms and claimed them as their own. From 1950 to 1953, peasants were organised into Mutual Aid Teams, where around 30 families came together to pool their resources and farm the land together. This did improve the life of peasants because they were able to increase food production. In 1953, Mutual Aid Teams were combined to create Agricultural Production Co-operatives (APCs), but these benefits broke down. Peasants were now organised into groups with total strangers, which reduced their incentive

A focused introduction that identifies the significance of the dates and presents a judgement that shows awareness of the term 'widespread'.

Answer sets out the problems for women at the start of the essay's date range, helping the candidate to make a judgement of 'improvement'.

Addresses limitations of policies showing an awareness of the duration of the policies' effectiveness.

Paragraph ends with a judgement of how far the policies had succeeded.

Strong supporting detail including specific examples of both benefits and negatives for urban workers.

Impact of policies on middle classes in rural and urban areas addressed.

to work well, and in the years before the Great Leap Forward the APCs would only get larger. This affected production and reversed the improvements of early land reform. In 1958, all land was collectivised and peasants were forced into communes. Lack of investment in health care – it was just 1.3 per cent of state investment in 1952 – meant a shortage of medicines for the communes, and malnourishment meant that life expectancy and fertility dropped. Peasants were also used as labourers, set to work on large irrigation projects and building industrial plants. The backyard furnaces campaign meant that crops often lay in the fields, uncollected. Because of the Anti-Rightist campaign, there were no scientists or intellectuals who would dare to offer alternative policies or to set out the economic failings of Mao's policies. Because of the ideologically driven nature of Mao's policies, millions were to die during the famine.

Detailed supporting evidence referring to specific campaigns and statistics to support their impact.

The middle classes definitely did not benefit from Mao's policies. In rural areas, landlords were purged during the land reform programme. Millions died and their land was confiscated. These landlords were often the peasants with the most energy, commitment and education, who could have modernised Chinese agriculture by using new techniques or machines. With the introduction of the communes during the Great Leap Forward, these benefits were ignored and they were forced into harsh manual labour. In the cities, intellectuals were negatively affected by Mao's policies. In 1949, many scholars wanted to help Mao rebuild China. However, Mao disliked intellectuals since most had attended the Western-funded and -run universities pre-1949 and were usually from the traditional ruling classes. After they had helped China rebuild after decades of war, many civil servants were purged and replaced by Party cadres. An example of Mao's violently oppressive attitude to the intellectuals is the consequence of the Hundred Flowers campaign of 1956–57. Mao encouraged the intellectuals to offer their advice and comments about the progress of the revolution. When the intellectuals were critical of both the Communist Party and even Mao himself, he branded them as 'rightists' and 500,000 were sent to Laogai, a network of brutal prison camps. Attacks on intellectuals and the old ruling class showed that the CCP's policies did not benefit all of Chinese society.

Judgement addresses change over time and utilises key term from question.

Specific detail on Mao's policies towards the middle class and intellectuals.

In conclusion, the benefits of the Mao's policies were only short-lived and were not widespread. Although there was some improvement in the legal status of women from 1950, and the standard of living did rise for urban workers, the violent attacks on intellectuals and the middle classes, and the starvation of the peasants in order to satisfy Mao's desire for China to become a great military force, led to overall few benefits for the Chinese people. All these benefits were wiped away by the Great Leap Forward, which caused famine and destitution. This would not change until 1961, when the pragmatist President Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping would take the reins of the CCP and sacrifice ideological purity for functional policies to recover and improve China's economy.

Conclusion addresses duration of impact and widespread nature of policies, and ends with the impact of the Great Leap Forward, ensuring the answer addresses the final date in the question's date range.

This response has a strong focus on the question, detailed supporting evidence and a clear judgement that differentiates between a range of social groups and across time. It addresses the importance of the term 'widespread' in the question to present a nuanced judgement.

### Reverse engineering

The best essays are based on careful plans. Read the essay and the comments and try to work out the general points of the plan used to write the essay. Once you have done this, note down the specific examples used to support each general point.

### AS-level questions

How far did the lives of women improve in China during the period 1949–76?

Communist educational reforms were a complete failure in the period 1949–76.  
How far do you agree?

How far did traditional attitudes and beliefs in China change in the period 1965–76?