

China: Cultural Reformation and Economic Transformation

Question: Was Mao Zedong responsible for the economic achievements of Chinese society after 1949 or did he hinder that development?

Hypothesis: Mao Zedong, through his erratic behavior and need to be hero-worshipped, misused his power to mobilize Chinese society, which in turn led to incalculable suffering and turmoil, and that China's economy developed in spite of, not because of, Mao's leadership.

I. Chronological Periods of Chinese History in the Second Half of the 20th Century

- A. Establishment of People's Republic of China (1949–1950)
 - 1. Mao Zedong (1893–1976), Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)
Chairman of the Central Government Council 1949–1959
 - 2. Zhou Enlai (1898–1976), Premier and Foreign Minister 1949–1976

- B. Pro-Soviet period (1950–1956)
 - 1. First Five-Year Plan, 1953–1957
 - 2. Agriculture
 - a. 1953: beginning of socialization of agriculture (cooperative farms)
 - b. 1955: Mao ordered collectivization
 - 3. Mobilization of Chinese society
 - a. Korean War
 - b. Destruction of four pests: sparrows, mice, mosquitos, and flies
 - 4. Land Reform
 - a. “struggle meetings”
 - b. landlord deaths estimated to be in hundreds of thousands
 - 5. Denunciation of “capitalist roaders”

- C. “Let a hundred flowers bloom” (1956–1957)
 - 1. Encouragement of criticism of the Party
 - 2. Ended when Mao published an article calling critics “enemies” and “rightists”
 - a. “downward transfer” of intellectuals and cadres to villages
 - b. end their “separation from the masses”
 - 3. Exhibited tensions in leadership
 - a. between value of “mental” versus “manual” labor
 - b. between value of “expertise” versus “redness”

- D. Great Leap Forward (1958–1961)
 - 1. Decentralization of industrialization
 - a. “battle for steel”
 - 2. Merging of collective farms into 24,000 communes
 - a. commune = 20,000 people or more
 - b. members organized into production brigades and teams

- c. communes subdivided later in 74,000 smaller units
- d. ending of private plots and other personal possessions
- 3. Falsifying of production reports
- 4. Famine 1959–1961 = over 30 million deaths
- 5. Khrushchev withdrew all 30,000 Soviet engineers and technicians (1960)
- 6. “Better red than expert”

E. Relaxed Controls and Shifting Emphasis (1961–1966)

- 1. Liu Shaoqi (1898?–1969), Chairman of the Central Government Council 1959–68
- 2. Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997), Party general secretary (1956–1967);
Paramount Leader (1978–1992)
- 3. Private plots restored (1962)

F. Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)

- 1. Mao’s attack on the Party
- 2. Development of cult of personality
 - a. Little Red Book
- 3. Red Guards (est. 13 million)
 - a. September 1966 – school closed for the year
 - b. October 1966 – massive demonstration in Tiananmen Square
 - c. rival group: Rebels (“Red Guards of Mao Zedong Thought”)
- 4. Mao urged destruction of “four olds”: ideas, culture, customs, habits
- 5. Jiang Qing (1914–1991) controlled arts, media, and education
- 6. GNP = 40% higher in 1970 than in 1965
- 7. Role of Lin Biao (1908–1971), Defense Minister 1959–1971 (coup plot?)
- 8. The Turn to Normalizing Relations with the U.S., 1972
- 9. Role of Zhou Enlai(dies January 8, 1976)
- 10. Mao dies, September 9, 1976

G. China after Mao (1976–2000)

- 1. Deng Xiaoping becomes most powerful political figure
 - a. ousts “Gang of Four” — Jiang Qing arrested October 1976
 - b. proteges become premiers and Party chairmen:
 - Hua Guofeng (1921–2008), Premier and Party Chairman 1976–1980
 - Zhao Ziyang (1919–2005), Premier 1980–1987
 - Li Peng (1928–), Premier 1988–1998
- 2. Central control of economy relaxed
 - a. communes dismantled
 - b. shift toward market economy in countryside
- 3. Rehabilitation of mental labor
- 4. Party continues to suppress dissent
 - a. Tiananmen Square, May 1989
–death of Hu Yaobang April 15, 1989
 - b. restraint of “leftist extremists”

II. Evaluating the Pluses and Minuses of Mao Zedong’s Leadership