

## Introduction

As was seen in Chapter 3, in January 1958 Mao had announced his Great Leap Forward.



**Figure 4.1:** Commune members building the Sanmenshia Dam during the Great Leap Forward, 1958.

However, after some initial successes, things had begun to go badly wrong. Apart from a general economic failure in industry, there was a particularly severe crisis in agriculture – in part the result of bad weather – which led to food shortages and famine during the ‘Three Bitter Years’ from 1959–61.

This had led some leading Communists to criticise Mao’s economic policies – the most outspoken critic had been Peng Dehuai. His letter to Mao during the Lushan Conference in July 1959, despite approving the general approach of Mao’s Great Leap Forward to ‘building socialism’, had voiced very strong criticisms of the specific policies and implementation of the GLF. Although Mao had been able to get the Central Committee to repudiate this letter and to purge Peng and his supporters from their positions, the mounting problems caused by the Great Leap Forward led to the loss of some of his influence.

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Nonetheless, despite Mao giving up his position as Chairman (president) of the PRC, and relinquishing direct supervision of government affairs, he remained as Chairman of the CCP. He thus retained considerable prestige, as well as theoretical precedence, within the Party. From 1962 onwards, he began moves to re-establish his pre-eminent leadership.

### TIMELINE

- 1962 Sep:** Socialist Education Movement launched  
**Dec:** 'Four Cleanups' campaign announced
- 1963 May:** First Ten Points raised by Mao
- 1964 Feb:** Mao calls for intellectuals to 'learn from the peasants'  
**May:** Publication of *Quotations from the Thoughts of Chairman Mao*  
**Jun:** Mao calls for a 'rectification' campaign against intellectuals
- 1965 Jan:** Mao warns of 'capitalist roaders' within the CCP; announcement of the Twenty-three Articles  
**Jul:** Campaign to study Mao's thoughts begins
- 1966 May:** PLA calls for purge of 'anti-socialist' elements; Central Cultural Revolutionary Committee set up  
**Jun:** 'Four Olds' campaign announced  
**Aug:** 'Sixteen Articles' call for a Cultural Revolution; mass rally in Beijing
- 1968 Dec:** Mao and Lin start to limit actions of Red Guards; Liu and Deng dismissed from posts
- 1969 Apr:** Cultural Revolution called off; Lin Biao emerges as Mao's successor during Ninth Congress of CCP  
**Sep:** PLA disarm the Red Guards  
**Dec:** Central Cultural Revolutionary Committee abolished
- 1970 Aug:** Lin attacks Zhou Enlai's policies at the Second Plenum of 9th CC
- 1971 Sep:** '571 Affair'; death of Lin Biao

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How did Mao begin to re-establish his political leadership after 1961?
- What were the main features of the Cultural Revolution?
- Why was there another power struggle after the Cultural Revolution?

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## Overview

- The economic problems that resulted from Mao's Great Leap Forward had reduced his power and influence.
- Under Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, economic and administrative policies were introduced that undid many of Mao's initiatives.
- Mao decided to oppose these 'Rightists' and, after launching his Socialist Education Movement in 1962, began the Cultural Revolution in 1966.
- By 1969, this had resulted in Liu and Deng being removed from power. Mao then began to curb the activities of the Red Guards.
- Mao was supported during the Cultural Revolution by Lin Biao, and by what became known as the Gang of Four.
- However, in 1971, serious differences emerged between Mao and Lin: Lin died trying to escape after his alleged plot against Mao had failed. This began another power struggle – between Rightists such as Zhou and Deng, and the Maoist Gang of Four.

### 4.1 How did Mao begin to re-establish his political leadership after 1961?

Liu Shaoqi – who had long been seen as Mao's likely successor – took over from Mao as chairman of the PRC. To tackle the serious problems of China's agricultural system, Liu – who saw the GLF disaster as *'seventy per cent man-made and thirty per cent due to natural causes'* – allowed peasants to have private plots, so that, after they had worked on the commune lands, they could grow extra food for their families. He also introduced bonuses and other incentives for the hardest workers on the communes, and for factory workers, in order to increase production.

At the same time, in order to ensure these new policies were implemented at all local levels, the authority of central Party and state bodies was re-established. Instead of the 'voluntarism' and relative autonomy of Party cadres in local rural communes which had marked the GLF, the authority of higher Party organs was strengthened. During



1961–62, for instance, the Politburo and the CC initiated a campaign that stressed the Leninist principle of 'democratic centralism' – with the emphasis very much on centralism. Yet these policy changes saw the Chinese economy slowly begin to recover from the impact of the GLF.

Although the centre-right – often referred to as 'moderates' – were now clearly in charge of economic policy, this did not mean that Mao and his supporters were completely sidelined. In particular, as Philip Short and other historians have suggested, Mao still remained an important member of the leading group of Communists, while his considerable political 'capital' as the main leader of the 1949 Revolution meant he continued to have much political influence over CCP members and ordinary Chinese people. For the time being, however, he largely withdrew from public life – he later said this gave him the opportunity to think and plan, instead of being bothered with daily administrative matters. However, other historians – such as Maurice Meisner in Source 4.1 – have suggested that, at first, Mao became pessimistic about the immediate future of the Chinese Revolution.

#### SOURCE 4.1

Shortly after his victory over Peng Dehuai at Lushan in August 1959, Mao removed himself from the day-to-day affairs of the Party. The withdrawal was perhaps voluntary, or at least graceful, but it was certainly motivated by Mao's awareness that Peng's criticisms of the Great Leap were widely shared by Party leaders, even if they did not share Peng's bluntness, by a recognition that he could not command a majority of the Central Committee to continue the socially radical policies of the Great Leap (even assuming that he might have been inclined to do so), and that a collapsing economy and a demoralized peasantry did not provide favourable circumstances for any attempt to override the Central Committee as he had in the past...

With the disintegration of the Great Leap and his consequent isolation from the center of political power, Mao began to suffer from an uncharacteristic loss of confidence in the future of the revolution. He no longer entertained any hope of an imminent transition from socialism to communism.

*Meisner, M. 1999. Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic. New York. The Free Press. pp.253–4*



### QUESTION

How, according to Source 4.1, did the Great Leap Forward lead to a loss of political influence for Mao?

In fact, Meisner has seen the victory of the centre-right of the CCP as a 'Thermidorian reaction' – similar to what had happened in the French Revolution in 1794, when the radicals were overthrown by more conservative leaders – in which the centre-right succeeded in overturning the temporary halt to bureaucratisation which had been a feature of the GLF. According to him, it was the growing expansion of Party and state bureaucratic centralism after 1961 that worried Mao, as he feared this social strata was rising above society and becoming the dominant force in China – and was using its growing power to emphasise order and stability over the revolutionary goals of 1949.

### ACTIVITY

Both Soviet and Chinese Communists often referred to key developments of the French Revolution when commenting on current issues. Try to find out what was meant by the terms 'Thermidorian reaction' and 'Bonapartism' (which appears later in this chapter). How valid do you think the use of such terms was in the context of Chinese history in the 1960s?

Historians such as Meisner see Mao's anti-bureaucratism as stemming mainly from the influence of anarchist ideas during his pre-Marxist youth, and from his attraction to the more anti-authoritarian aspects of Marxism. However, other historians see his 1960s campaign against bureaucracy merely as a way of crushing his political opponents and re-establishing his personal authority.

## Mao's political views in 1961

During 1960–61, Mao became increasingly concerned that the political and economic policies that marked the retreat from the GLF were moving China back from the socialist path towards a possible restoration of capitalism. In particular, he was worried by the renewed emphasis being placed on technical 'experts'. He had always been suspicious of

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experts, fearing they might put their interest above those of the people and the revolution.

Mao also believed that the Soviet model of industrialisation was not appropriate for a country like China. He had come to the conclusion that the Russian Revolution had been undermined by the reliance on experts and administrators. He believed this had led to a new 'class' of bureaucrats who gave themselves privileges and, under Khrushchev, had begun to restore aspects of capitalism in the Soviet Union. He believed that 'moderates' such as Liu and Deng were now trying to do the same in China.

### DISCUSSION POINT

Is the emergence of a bureaucratic élite of administrators and experts – effectively beyond the control of electorates and even governments – inevitable in any large society? Or is it possible to devise democratic political controls that ensure the political wishes of ordinary people remain paramount when policies are being drawn up and implemented?

Though temporarily having little direct influence over economic policy, he soon began to take steps to put himself back at the centre of affairs and to regain control of the CCP which, he felt, had been infiltrated by 'bourgeois elements' who were using political bureaucracy to undermine the gains of the 1949 Revolution.

## The Socialist Education Movement and 'rightist deviations'

Mao became increasingly worried about Liu's economic and Deng's political policies, and a serious debate soon developed within the leadership of the CCP over future economic policy. Liu and Deng argued for more incentives – including larger private plots – for peasants, and for a return to the methods of the First Five-Year Plan, which had been drawn up with the advice of Soviet experts. Mao disagreed with such ideas and, in his view, the Party was taking China off the 'revolutionary socialist road', resulting in a tendency towards 'creeping capitalism'.



Yet, according to several historians, the differences between Mao, and leaders such as Liu and Deng, were not as great as was later claimed. Maurice Meisner in Source 4.2, for instance, sees Liu's economic policies as very similar to those followed by Lenin in Soviet Russia in the early 1920s.

#### SOURCE 4.2

During the cultural revolution of 1966–1969, the economic policies of the preceding half-decade were condemned for leading China on a retreat from 'socialism' to 'capitalism,' and the Party leaders responsible for implementing those policies were purged as 'capitalist roaders' who allegedly exercised a 'bourgeois dictatorship'. This, in brief, was the Maoist judgment on the early 1960s, or at least the dramatic picture of a 'life-and-death struggle' between capitalism and socialism that Maoists presented to the world.

Yet the differences between what became known as the Maoist and Liuist roads do not appear to be nearly so sharp. It is instructive to compare the economic policies pursued by Liu Shaoqi in the early 1960s with those adopted by Lenin in the Soviet Union forty years earlier... The economic policies adopted by the Chinese leaders... were in some respects similar to Lenin's NEP... Yet, as an alleged 'retreat to capitalism', the Chinese program was but a pale reflection of its earlier Soviet counterpart.

*Meisner, M., 1999, Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic, New York, The Free Press, pp.260–1*

In order to correct this bureaucratic 'Rightist deviation', Mao – and the other radicals who supported him – decided that what was needed was a mass revolutionary campaign among Chinese youth: Mao called this the 'Socialist Education Movement' (SEM). It was based on three 'isms': collectivism, patriotism and socialism, and involved workers and peasants studying his works, and attending rallies and meetings. He paid particular attention to stressing the importance of school and college students, believing they should be encouraged to take action in a 'new' revolution. Mao saw this as important because most had been born after 1949, and so had no real idea of what China had been like before. If they saw nothing wrong with the economic policies currently being advocated by the centre-right of the Party, Mao believed that capitalism would soon re-emerge in China.



## QUESTION

Why did Mao stress the importance of the younger generation?

In September 1962, he made a speech at a Central Committee meeting, warning it was still possible for China to move backwards to a 'restoration of the reactionary classes'. He persuaded the Central Committee that the period of transition to communism would be marked by a continuing class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, so that it was necessary to condemn 'revisionist tendencies' in the Party, and to strengthen socialist principles – especially in the countryside. In Mao's view, Liu and Deng's policies were taking China along a 'capitalist road', and he attacked those administrators and peasants who, he believed, showed signs of becoming 'capitalists'.

Although the SEM was initially intended as a campaign to restore collectivisation in rural areas, it soon widened out to tackle the growing problem of corruption – in the countryside and elsewhere. In December 1962, the 'Four Cleanups' campaign was launched initially in two provinces, but was soon extended to the rest of China. The focus was on four main aspects: the administration of collective accounts, communal granaries, public property and work points. As part of this, the role of middle and poor peasants in agricultural management was to be enhanced, and more 'experienced' (politically reliable) cadres from urban areas were sent to assist in the campaign.

In May 1963, the Central Committee issued a resolution, known as the 'First Ten Points', which set down the campaign's objectives and methods (see Source 4.3). Work teams were sent to rural areas to monitor the campaign. However, these soon faced considerable opposition from many peasants. As a result, two revised versions – by Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi – came out in September 1963 and September 1964 respectively. These tried to limit the scope of the campaign – in particular, they called for greater support for private plots, and for a market economy in rural collectives.

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### SOURCE 4.3

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*Extracts from the 'First Ten Points', translated in Baum, R. & Teiwes, F. C., 1968, Ssu-Ch'ing: The Socialist Education Movement of 1962–1966, Berkeley, University of California Press, pp.62–71.*

Consequently, Mao – increasingly dissatisfied with political developments in the early 1960s – became concerned that the campaign was no longer being carried out in a truly revolutionary way, and that such leaders were de-railing the revolution. At first, Mao's ideas had little support but, during 1964–65, the support of **Lin Biao**, the Minister of Defence responsible for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), became increasingly important. As a first step towards greater equality, Lin Biao had abolished all ranks and insignia in the PLA; and, during the early 1960s, the PLA and its values – especially simplicity, self-sacrifice and devotion to duty – had increasingly come to be held up as a model for the whole of Chinese society.

### Lin Biao (1907–71):

Lin's real name was Lin Yurong, and he had been an important Red Army leader during the Civil War. He moved increasingly to the left after replacing Peng as Minister of Defence in 1959, and rose to prominence during the Cultural Revolution. After Liu had been purged, he was named at a Party conference as Mao's second-in-command, and described as '*closest comrade-in-arms and successor to Mao Zedong*'. As early as 1960, he had pushed for the 'concentrated study' in the PLA of Mao's writings. However, in 1971, he died under mysterious circumstances, following what became known as the '571 Affair'.



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In May 1964, Lin – with the help of **Chen Boda** – got the Political Department of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to publish the pocket-sized book, *Quotations from the Thoughts of Chairman Mao Zedong* – later known as the 'Little Red Book'. This was made required reading for all 4 million PLA soldiers, who were expected to be able to memorise at least some of the quotations. As a result, the PLA soon became a stronghold of Maoist thought – this support gave Mao a significant power base which enabled him to push his ideas forward; it was also the starting point for the creation of a cult of personality around Mao.

### Chen Boda (1904–89):

Chen joined the CCP in 1927 and, in 1937, became Mao's researcher and secretary. After 1949, he became one of the most important interpreters of Mao's thoughts; in 1958, he became editor of *The Red Flag*, the CCP's journal. At the Lushan Conference in July 1959, he put forward Mao's criticisms of Peng Dehuai. In May 1966, he joined the Politburo and became the head of the newly formed Central Cultural Revolutionary Committee, working closely with Jiang Qing. After 1972, when centre-right 'moderates' increasingly returned to power, his radicalism put him at odds with the new leadership: in 1973, he was expelled from the CCP and, once the Gang of Four had been overthrown, was briefly imprisoned in 1981.

### QUESTION

What is the message of the photograph in Figure 4.2? How does it get the message across?



**Figure 4.2**  
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**Figure 4.2:** Mao and Lin Biao together. Lin is holding a copy of the Little Red Book.

In all, nearly a billion copies of Mao's book were printed, along with 150 million copies of the fourth edition of *Mao's Selected Works*, which had been published in 1960. In July 1965, the press mounted a formal campaign to encourage the study of Mao's works. By then, the 'Mao cult' had spread across China – and he became known as 'the Great Helmsman'.

Mao had previously said that personality cults had valuable political uses – he attributed Khrushchev's overthrow in the Soviet Union in 1964 to the fact that he had not developed a cult of personality. When Edgar Snow, an American journalist partly sympathetic to Communist China, visited China in the winter of 1964–65, he was puzzled by the 'immoderate glorification' of Mao – and, as Source 4.4 shows, compared it to Stalin's personality cult in the Soviet Union.

**SOURCE 4.4**

Giant portraits of him now hung in the streets, busts were in every chamber, his books and photographs were everywhere on display to the exclusion of all others... It gave me ... [an] uneasy recollection of similar extravaganzas of worship of Joseph Stalin seen during wartime years in Russia... The one-man cult was not yet universal, but the trend was unmistakable.

*Snow, E., 1971, The Long Revolution, New York, Random House, pp.68–9.*

**QUESTION**

Why did Mao allow a 'personality cult' of himself to develop during the early stages of his campaign to regain power?

**Intellectuals and 'revolutionary successors'**

In February 1964, Mao called for intellectuals to be sent from the cities to the countryside, to 'learn from the peasants'. Mao had long distrusted intellectuals, and the cities they resided in – cities were seen by Mao as breeding grounds of ideological corruption and revisionism. In June 1964, he called for a 'rectification' campaign, similar to the anti-rightist one of late 1957, conducted against intellectuals.

By then, Mao and his supporters were becoming increasingly concerned about the need to train 'revolutionary successors' among the youth of China. He therefore proposed that the period of formal education be reduced and that, instead, education should be combined with productive labour – in order to stop the 'corruption' of China's youth.

This led to growing unease among intellectuals in the Party. However, those in the Party who opposed Mao's statements, and who wanted a more flexible interpretation of Marxism, looked for an opportunity to undermine Mao. An earlier veiled criticism had been made by allowing publication of a play, in 1960, by Wu Han (a professor of history, a playwright and deputy mayor of Beijing). Although set in the Ming period, its main theme – the wrongful dismissal of an official for telling



the emperor the truth – had clear parallels with the dismissal of the PLA general Peng Dehuai in 1959, which Mao had pushed for. This play was just one of several anti-Maoist satires written during the ‘Bitter Years’ that followed the collapse of the GLE. Although the number of such satires rapidly declined once the Socialist Education Movement had begun in September 1962, these writers and intellectuals had been supported by both Liu and Deng.

This led Mao to take more serious action: in January 1965, at a Politburo meeting, he identified as the principal enemy of socialism ‘those people in authority within the Party who are taking the capitalist road’. Mao’s concerns about the existence of ‘capitalist roaders’ within the CCP leadership were then published in the ‘Twenty-three Articles’, which explicitly warned that the struggle between socialism and capitalism was also taking place within the Party at its highest levels, and that socialism was being threatened by these ‘capitalist roaders’.

He then demanded that Wu Han’s play be criticised by the Party, as part of a ‘cultural revolution’. But this was delayed repeatedly so, urged on by his wife, **Jiang Qing**, Mao had a critical review published in a magazine in Shanghai in November 1965 – most of Mao’s supporters later saw this as the start of the Cultural Revolution.

### Jiang Qing (1914–91):

Jiang was an actress, and had married Mao in 1938 as his fourth wife (or third, if Mao’s first arranged marriage – which he refused to consummate – is ignored). During the 1950s, she worked with the Ministry of Culture, where she supported and promoted plays and operas that reflected revolutionary sentiments. In the 1960s, she increasingly took control of the national media to ensure it followed a ‘correct’ cultural line. This control allowed her to become increasingly politically important, and she was able to gather a group of radical supporters – mainly from Shanghai – around her. Several leading communists became worried about her influence – especially during the Cultural Revolution. Later, she and her main Shanghai supporters became known as the ‘Gang of Four’ (see Chapter 6).



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### Liuists versus Maoists

By the spring of 1966, differences within the Party leadership had resulted in the emergence of two clear factions: the 'Liuists' who dominated the Party and state apparatus; and the minority 'Maoists', supported by the PLA. In fact, this division had first become apparent during the Lushan meetings of 1959, at which the political consensus of the Communist leadership, established in the years before 1949, had first begun to disintegrate.

These two distinct political responses to the failures of the Great Leap Forward, which emerged at Lushan, sowed the seeds for the deep political polarisation which culminated in the Cultural Revolution just seven years later.

In early May 1966, the PLA's *Liberation Army Daily* began to call for a purge of anti-socialist elements in cultural circles – and also of 'anti-socialist elements' in the Party itself. As a first step, the heads of newspapers, and cultural and propaganda departments in Beijing were purged. In particular, Mao moved against the 'Group of Five', an informal group – headed by the mayor of Beijing – which had been set up by the CC in January 1965, to initiate a revolution in China's culture. However, four of the five tended to support Liu and Deng, and the committee had done little – so Mao abolished it, and replaced it with a new 'Central Cultural Revolutionary Committee'.

This was headed by Chen Boda, and was packed with his supporters, including Jiang Qing. With her support – and that of other leftists associated with her – Mao began what turned out to be his last mass political campaign.

#### KEY CONCEPTS ACTIVITY

**Significance:** Using the information in this section, and any other sources available to you, draw up a table to summarise the main political and economic differences between the 'Liuist' centre-right and the 'Maoist' left within the CCP by the end of 1965. Then write a paragraph to explain which difference you think was the most important one.

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## 4.2 What were the main features of the Cultural Revolution?

From May 1966, as a way to restore his power, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution – its official name was the ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ – which is generally taken as lasting from May 1966 to April 1969. However, those who took power after his death – many of whom were its victims – state that it lasted till October 1976, when the Gang of Four were overthrown and arrested.

It has thus been described as a decade-long ‘catastrophe’, which resulted in the ‘heaviest losses’ suffered by the Party, state and the people of China since 1949. Other commentators have seen it as continuing as late as 1980, only ending with the final victory of the ‘moderates’. Although the Cultural Revolution was based in part on the *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, the destructive aspects of the Cultural Revolution were not apparently anticipated by Mao.

### Reasons for the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution was, on one level, Mao’s attempt to eradicate old anti-revolutionary ideas, especially ‘capitalist’ and ‘bourgeois’ ideas. It was also directed against those holding such ideas – especially the political and administrative élite which he saw as taking control of the revolution. Thus he hoped that, by removing them, and remoulding Chinese society and culture, he could ensure that there would be no more attempts to take China off the ‘revolutionary path’ – and that China would avoid the ‘revisionist’ errors which, in his view, had overtaken the Soviet Union. Finally, on another, more simple, level, it was also part of Mao’s bid to restore his own personal power and influence, which had been reduced as a result of the Great Leap Forward.



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To carry it out, Mao relied on the PLA and the radical youth of China – seen by him as the ‘revolutionary successors’ who would carry his ideas forward and so secure the revolutionary future. Thus, the Cultural Revolution was a deliberate attempt to turn the young against the old.

### SOURCE 4.5

These cataclysmic plunges [the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution] were, it is generally agreed, due largely to Mao himself, whose policies were often received with reluctance in the party leadership, and sometimes – most notably in the case of the Great Leap Forward – with frank opposition, which he overcame only by launching the ‘Cultural Revolution’. Yet they cannot be understood without a sense of the peculiarities of Chinese communism, of which Mao made himself the spokesman. Unlike Russian communism, Chinese communism had virtually no direct relations with Marx and Marxism. It was a post-October [1917] movement which came to Marx via Lenin, or more precisely Stalin’s ‘Marxism-Leninism’. Mao’s own knowledge of Marxist theory seems to have been almost entirely derived from the Stalinist *History of the CPSU [b]: Short Course* of 1939. And yet below the Marxist-Leninist top-dressing, there was – and this is very evident in the case of Mao, who never travelled outside China until he had become head of state, and whose intellectual formation was entirely home-grown – a very Chinese utopianism.

**Hobsbawm, E. 1994.** *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*. London. Michael Joseph. p.467

### QUESTION

How far do Sources 4.5 and 4.6 agree on ‘Maoism’ and the Cultural Revolution having limited connections to Marxism and earlier developments in the Soviet Union? Do you agree with these interpretations?

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**SOURCE 4.6**

The forms taken by the Mao cult today [1966–7] appear even stranger against the background of this iconoclasm [in the Cultural Revolution]. Without assuming that they represent simply a new metamorphosis of the imperial tradition, it is clear that they owe a great deal more to certain patterns from the Chinese past than to Marxism. Ironically, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which presents itself as an attack on the 'bourgeois' and 'feudal' values of the past in the name of universal proletarian truth, is accompanied by developments which contradict both the universalist and the rationalist elements in Marxism...

This time, of course, the whole process takes place in Marxist terms: it is not an encounter among diverse schools of thought, but reflects a debate within the [party] élite about the correct interpretation of Marxism-Leninism today.

*Schram, S. 1966. Mao Tse-tung. Harmondsworth. Penguin Books Ltd. pp.344–5*

Although the Cultural Revolution had much to do with political rivalries among the leadership, it was also based on real ideological differences. These included dealing with aspects such as growing social inequalities, the fading of socialist idealism and commitment, and the emergence of new bureaucratic élites divorced from the people. These problems were seen by the Maoists as having increased as a result of the political and economic policies adopted by the Liuists.

Mao used the Cultural Revolution to purge the Party of his opponents and rivals, and as an attempt to get the youth of China – who only knew from books how bad things had been under the emperors, the warlords and the Nationalists – to favour the continuation of a 'revolutionary road' for China in the future. It became increasingly violent and destructive – it also split the Party, and turned young against old. Mao and Jiang Qing – who had established a power base in Shanghai – moulded the young so they could be the vanguard of this revolutionary campaign and become the 'revolutionary successors' of the pre-1949 generation.



## The course of the Cultural Revolution

In June 1966, Mao called for the 'Four Olds' – bourgeois (capitalist) tendencies still existing in old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits – to be destroyed. His call was then published in the *People's Daily*, edited by Chen Boda. Mao's call was taken up enthusiastically by many of the younger generation. These young people were instructed to form revolutionary groups known as Red Guards – named after the armed workers and soldiers who, in 1917, had secured the victory of Lenin's Bolshevik Revolution.

The first to respond to Mao's calls to rebel against established authority were university and middle school students in Beijing, who began to put up large posters that criticised 'capitalist roaders' and those displaying 'bourgeois tendencies'. By early June, there was much turmoil in universities across China. Schools and colleges were then closed down for six months while new curricula were drawn up that would place more emphasis on Communist education and values.

This long holiday enabled students to concentrate on the political campaign in support of Mao and his ideas. Mao also gave students free travel so that they could extend the campaign to the rest of China. In addition, the PLA provided transport and support – between 1966 and 1969, over 450 million copies of Mao's Little Red Book were printed and distributed.

On 8 August 1966, Mao returned to active politics in public, and got the Central Committee to issue a directive – based on his 'Sixteen Articles' (sometimes known as the 'Sixteen Points') – calling for a great 'cultural revolution' to attack all remnants of the old society so that a new truly revolutionary one could be built. Extracts from this document are provided in Source 4.7. In order to get this directive through, many non-Maoist Party leaders were excluded from the meeting, and their places taken by more radical supporters of Mao.

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#### SOURCE 4.7

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution now unfolding is a great revolution that touches people to their very souls and constitutes a new stage in the development of the socialist revolution in our country... Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture, customs and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds and endeavour to stage a comeback...

Since the Cultural Revolution is a revolution, it inevitably meets with resistance. This resistance comes chiefly from those persons in power taking the capitalist road who have wormed their way into the Party... Don't be afraid of disturbances. Chairman Mao has often told us that revolution cannot always be so very refined, so gentle... Make the fullest use of big-character posters and great debates to... criticize the wrong views and... draw a clear line between ourselves and the enemy.

*Extracts from The 16-Point Directive on the Cultural Revolution, 8 August 1966. From Mitton, D., et al., 1974, The China Reader: People's China, New York, Random House, pp.272–83.*

#### QUESTION

What is meant by the phrase 'taking the capitalist road' in Source 4.7? Which members of the Communist leadership do you think were being referred to?

Mao then got a new Standing Committee of the Politburo appointed, made up entirely of those who supported him. This new body then elected Lin as vice-chairman of the Party, which in effect marked him out as Mao's successor. Finally, on 18 August 1966, the Cultural Revolution was officially launched at a mass rally of a million young people in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The choice of location was significant, as Mao's political opponents were essentially based in Beijing.





**Figure 4.3:** The mass rally in Beijing, August 1966, at the start of the Cultural Revolution.

In an attempt to turn the attentions of the Red Guards away from Communist Party bodies and leaders, Liu and Deng sent official party 'work teams' to get students to attack 'bourgeois authorities' instead – i.e. individual intellectuals, teachers and professors. It was thus not the Maoists but official Party-organised groups sent by the Liuists who first began the violent persecution of individual intellectuals. Soon, however, Maoist Red Guard units began to oppose these more 'moderate' work teams, which were under instructions to divert criticisms away from Party officials and organisations.

The Red Guards – with full equality between male and female members – then went back to their areas to carry out attacks on traditional Chinese culture. Soon, they began to publicly criticise Party leaders, teachers and professors they thought were 'Rightists' who were not sufficiently carrying out Mao's ideas. 'Counter-revolutionary' teachers and university principals – and later state officials – were often paraded through the streets wearing dunces' caps. Sometimes, they were

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**Figure 4.4:** A person wearing a dunce's cap, a symbol of public humiliation during the Cultural Revolution.

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forced to do manual work, such as cleaning toilets or working in the fields. During this early stage, the police were instructed not to intervene.



**Figure 4.4:** Red Guards in Beijing, parading a government official wearing a dunce's cap, during the Cultural Revolution in 1967, to show that he was a 'counter-revolutionary'.

#### QUESTION

What does the photograph in Figure 4.4 tell us about the nature of some aspects of the Cultural Revolution?

As the Red Guards carried out their campaigns across China, Mao moved against his political opponents in Beijing. This group included Liu Shaoqi, who was accused of being a 'Rightist' and dismissed from his Party post in July 1966, though he remained as president until 1968. He was then sent to prison, where he died in 1969. Another of those purged in the period 1966–68 was Deng Xiaoping – accused in 1967 of being the 'number one capitalist roader', and of trying to destroy the revolution from within by keeping Mao out of power after 1958.



## The People's Republic of China (1949–2005)

In 1969, Deng was 'sent down to the countryside', to be 're-educated' by learning from the peasants and commune industrial workers. Deng was forced to work in a tractor factory in Jiangxi; conditions were quite hard, but it seems that Zhou Enlai used his influence to lessen the effects of the punishment.

During 1967–68, the Cultural Revolution became increasingly violent. Factories, offices and homes were broken into. Books, jewellery, works of art – and even technology and machinery – which were considered 'bourgeois', were destroyed. Thousands of innocent people were accused of being 'capitalist roaders', and many were beaten, imprisoned and even killed. It is calculated that up to 3 million people were dismissed or imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution, of whom about 400 000 died as a result of torture, beatings and forced suicides. Thousands more were brutalised by the physical punishments, while many suffered psychological damage from the public self-criticisms and humiliations (such as being forced to wear dunces' caps).

The situation began to get increasingly out of hand, and even local Communist Party headquarters were taken over by more radical groups. In Shanghai, the radicals around Jiang Qing actually overthrew the official administration, and instead set up a revolutionary commune committee. By 1967, some parts of China were in a state of virtual civil war, with different groups of Red Guards – sometimes armed by sympathetic members of the PLA – fighting each other for not being sufficiently supportive of Mao's ideas. Initially, Mao ignored this, and a 'cult of Mao' was deliberately encouraged – in 1969, 'Mao Zedong Thought' was even written into the constitution.

However, as early as September 1967, Mao and Lin had felt the excesses needed to be curbed. In December 1968, Mao began to curb the activities of the Red Guards and, in April 1969, he decided that the Cultural Revolution had achieved its main objectives. On 5 September, the PLA was ordered to disarm Red Guard units and restore order and young people were then ordered to return home and go back to school. There was then a harsh crackdown on those wanting to continue their revolutionary campaign: many of the main leaders were arrested, while others were sent to work on the communes or in industry.

Gradually, order continued, this. However, Lin and the repressive campaign suggest that, during

### ACTIVITY

Find out what

a the Red Guards

b their victims

## The impact

Mao judged the once again the regions, many of those loyal to Mao to bureaucratic reform for a shake-up of – which included were set up to

### QUESTION

Why did Mao

However, China majority of the suffered as workers. Agricultural production concerns about the government statistics under-30 age group hopes for an economic serious setback at the same time, many

Gradually, order returned to China – although the political campaigning continued, this was done by propaganda rather than by demonstrations. However, Lin and Jiang Qing then used the PLA to carry out a repressive campaign against ‘counter-revolutionaries’. Some historians suggest that, during this new purge, large numbers were killed.

### ACTIVITY

Find out what life was like during the Cultural Revolution for:

- a the Red Guards
- b their victims.

## The impact of the Cultural Revolution

Mao judged the Cultural Revolution to be a success – in part, as he was once again the most powerful person in China, while in the provinces and regions, many ‘Rightist’ leaders had been purged, and replaced by those loyal to Mao’s more radical plans. To prevent any future return to bureaucratic rule, and the taking of ‘the capitalist road’, he called for a shake-up of government structures. ‘Revolutionary Committees’ – which included workers, Party members, and members of the PLA – were set up to run the government, communes and industries.

### QUESTION

Why did Mao think the Cultural Revolution had been a success?

However, China had suffered economically during this upheaval – the majority of the campaigns were in urban areas, so industrial production suffered as workers were involved in political campaigns and meetings. Agricultural production also declined. After Zhou Enlai expressed concerns about the disruption to production and education – even government statistics showed an increase in illiteracy among the under-30 age group – schools and colleges were re-opened. Thus, Mao’s hopes for an economically and militarily strong China suffered another serious setback as a direct result of his campaign during 1966–69. At the same time, many had become used to repeating politically ‘correct’



# 4

## The People's Republic of China (1949–2005)

slogans, rather than saying what they really felt. This resulted in growing cynicism about Mao and the CCP.

### Theory of Knowledge

#### History and bias:

History is often seen as being more prone to bias than the natural sciences – especially when this involves consideration of political and economic theories, systems and actions. Is it possible, for instance, for Western historians to make objective judgements about Mao's opposition to the 'capitalist road' in China? Or are they just likely to reflect the cultural, economic and political values which dominate their own societies?

With power firmly in his hands, Mao began to introduce relatively egalitarian socio-economic policies (such as more equal wages) during the late 1960s and early 1970s, in an attempt to reverse the 'Liuist' economic policies. But the violence of the years 1966–69 left considerable animosity and bitterness, which later formed the backdrop to what happened after Mao died.

### KEY CONCEPTS QUESTION

**Causation and consequence:** Why did the Cultural Revolution become so violent, and what were the main results of the Cultural Revolution by the end of 1969?

## 4.3 Why was there another power struggle after the Cultural Revolution?

Mao's position in 1969 seemed politically very secure. Most of the centre-right 'moderates' had been expelled from the Party and the government, and his supporters held all the top positions. Although this

proved not to be the case, the CCP had 'unity and vitality' and 'close co-

Soon, however, connected to Mao's increasing and heart premanoeuvring Mao's health and Mao.

The first indication of Party control largely to the of Party authority purged during to office. However, seriously under Lin proposed should continue. Nonetheless, i

In addition, as early as 196 attempts to limit 1970, Lin seemed step aside to let Communist leadership authority as a Lin and other as 'arrogant'.

In August 1970, a rift between the prior notification was criticised, was favouring. In particular, Mao died to become had become po

proved not to be quite the case, in April 1969, the Ninth Congress of the CCP hailed the GPCR a success and termed itself a congress of 'unity and victory'. In addition, Lin Biao was named as Mao's 'successor' and 'close comrade in arms'.

Soon, however, new struggles broke out. Although these were partly connected to foreign policy (see Chapter 5), they were also connected to Mao's increasing ill-health. His heavy smoking led to serious lung and heart problems in his later years – this led political rivals to begin manoeuvring for position after his death. In particular, concerns about Mao's health contributed to a rift that began to develop between Lin and Mao.

The first indication of such a rift emerged over the decision to restore Party control which, during the Cultural Revolution, had passed largely to the army. Mao accepted Zhou's conclusion that restoration of Party authority was essential – and that to do this, many of those purged during the Cultural Revolution should be allowed to return to office. However, it was clear that the return of these leaders would seriously undermine Lin's influence once Mao was dead. Consequently, Lin proposed that the Central Cultural Revolutionary Committee should continue – even though he disagreed with it on many issues. Nonetheless, it was abolished in December 1969.

In addition, although Lin had supported Mao's Cultural Revolution, as early as 1968 he had begun to have doubts about Mao's increasing attempts to limit the more radical activities of the Red Guards. From 1970, Lin seemed to think that Mao was power-mad and would never step aside to let him become the new leader. However, Mao and other Communist leaders saw the re-establishment of Communist Party authority as a check to any 'Bonapartist' ambitions possibly arising from Lin and other PLA commanders – Mao even began to criticise the Lin as 'arrogant'.

In August 1970, at the Second Plenum of the Ninth CC in Lushan, the rift between the two widened when Lin launched an attack (with no prior notification to Mao) on Zhou's domestic and foreign policies. Lin was criticised, and this increased his doubts about the directions Mao was favouring. By then, both men had come to distrust each other. In particular, Mao (now 77 years old) felt Lin might not wait until he had died to become the next leader of the CCP, while Lin believed Mao had become power-hungry and would not share power.



**Figure 4.5:** The main rivals in the power struggle in 1976 – from left to right: Zhou Enlai, Lin Biao, Mao and Jiang Qing.

#### QUESTION

Why did a rift develop between Mao and Lin after 1970?

### The 'Project 571' affair

Aware of Lin's power as head of the army, Mao began to remove political and military leaders loyal to Lin, and ordered Lin's troops from Beijing to Manchuria. These actions were seen as moves to prepare Lin's removal from power. Meanwhile, Mao pushed ahead with domestic and foreign policies which Lin opposed. During September 1971, in what later became known as the 'Project 571' affair, Lin vanished from the public scene, and there was a wholesale purge of the upper reaches of military and civilian administrations, including 21 from the Politburo.

The official Chinese account – not given until July 1972 – was that Lin had plotted, with the approval of the Soviet Union, to blow up Mao (apparently referred to as 'B-52') as part of a coup, codenamed 'Project 571'. When the plot was discovered, Lin had tried to flee China to the USSR by plane, but had been killed – along with several co-conspirators – when his plane had crashed (a later version said it had been shot down) somewhere over Mongolia.



**Figure 4.6:** An image from the Cultural Revolution, showing Lin Biao and others.

However, several historians have questioned the sequence of events and the positions of power, arguing that this led Lin to his downfall.

#### SOURCE 4.8

It may well be that Lin Biao was not actively plotting, but that he realised that Mao's chairman's death was the highest official position and then the ex-ambiguity.

*Dillon, M., 2012*

Other historians have argued that Lin Biao deliberately created a rift with Mao, taking over when divisions over political left, and these became Mao's death in became much more





**Figure 4.6:** An official government photograph of the wreckage of the plane in which Lin Biao was said to have tried escaping to the USSR in September 1971.

However, several historians – such as Maurice Meisner – wonder if the sequence was that Mao had determined to remove Lin from his positions of power, rather than the other way round – and that it was this that led Lin to draw up plans for a counter-coup.

#### SOURCE 4.8

It may well be that Mao was actively planning to exclude Lin from power and that Lin had got wind of this. It is not impossible that Lin Biao was actively plotting to overthrow Mao, although it is more likely that he realised that Mao was a sick man and was trying to ensure that after the chairman's death it would be Lin, and not Jiang Qing, who succeeded to the highest office of the state and party... Whatever the case, the facts, and then the exact circumstances of Lin's death remain confusing and ambiguous.

*Dillon, M., 2012. China: A Modern History. London, I. B. Tauris, p.347*

Other historians argue that tensions between Mao and Lin were deliberately created by the centre-right in order to prevent Lin from taking over when Mao eventually died. Certainly, as early as 1972, new divisions over policy began to emerge between the centre-right and the left, and these became increasingly significant in the period leading up to Mao's death in 1976. After his death in 1976, the struggle for power became much more open.

## Paper 3 exam practice

### Question

Examine Mao's reasons for launching the Cultural Revolution in 1966.  
[15 marks]

### Skill

Writing an introductory paragraph

### Examiner's tips

Once you've planned your answer to a question (as covered by Chapters 2 and 3), you should be able to begin writing a clear introductory paragraph. This needs to set out your main line of argument and to outline briefly the key points you intend to make (and support with relevant and precise own knowledge) in the main body of your essay. Remember: 'Examine...', 'Discuss...', or 'Evaluate...' questions (just like 'To what extent...?' questions) clearly require analysis of opposing arguments, interpretations or explanations – not simply description. If, after doing your plan, you think you will be able to make a clear overall or final judgement, you might find it a good idea to flag up in your introductory paragraph what overall line of argument/judgement you intend to make.

Depending on the wording of the question, you may also find it useful to define in your introductory paragraph what you understand any 'key terms' to mean – in this case, some definition of 'Cultural Revolution' is required. Other possible terms for this question might be: 'bourgeois', 'capitalist roader', or 'revolutionary successors'.

For this question, you should:

- establish Mao's political position in 1966
- set out the possible reasons for launching the Cultural Revolution
- write a concluding paragraph that explicitly gives your judgement about the most important reason(s).

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You will need to:

- outline relevant political and economic developments in the decade or so before 1966
- examine a range of reasons for Mao's decision to launch the Cultural Revolution
- provide a judgement about which reason/reasons was/were most important.

Setting out this approach in your introductory paragraph will help you keep the demands of the question in mind. Remember to refer back to your introduction after every couple of paragraphs in your main answer.

## Common mistakes

A common mistake – one that might suggest to an examiner a candidate who hasn't thought deeply about what's required – is to fail to write an introductory paragraph at all. This is often done by candidates who rush into writing before analysing the question and doing a plan. The result may well be that they focus entirely on the words 'Cultural Revolution', an approach that may simply result in a narrative of the main events of the Cultural Revolution. Even if the answer is full of detailed and accurate own knowledge, this will not answer the question, and so will not score highly.

## Sample student introductory paragraph

This is a good introduction, as it shows a good grasp of the topic, and sets out a clear and logical plan, clearly focused on the demands of the question. It shows a sound appreciation of the fact that to discuss and assess why Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, it is necessary to identify a range of different reasons, and it explicitly demonstrates to the examiner what aspects the candidate intends to address. This indicates that the answer – if it remains analytical, and is well-supported – is likely to be a high-scoring one.

*When Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, his position and power within the CCP seemed considerably less than they had been in 1949, immediately after the Revolution of which he was acknowledged main leader.*

*Many historians have thus explained the Cultural Revolution as essentially his attempt to re-establish his paramount position within the party and the state.*



# 4

## The People's Republic of China (1949–2005)

*While it is true that, after the great problems resulting from his Great Leap Forward, he had felt obliged to give up the day-to-day supervision of government policy, it seems fair to argue that Mao's reasons for launching the Cultural Revolution were more complicated than simply wanting to be regain his former power. In many ways, the Cultural Revolution – directed against the 'four olds' of pre-revolutionary Chinese culture – can be explained by concerns that Mao – and other CCP leaders – had that, during the early 1960s, the Chinese government was pursuing 'capitalist' economic policies. It is also possible to argue that Mao was particularly concerned about how increasing bureaucracy risked creating a void between the party and the people, and even abandoning the aim of creating a communist society. Finally, Mao was also conscious of the fact that young people born after the 1949 Revolution – seen by him as the 'revolutionary successors' – needed to experience revolutionary activity in order not to take the gains of 1949 for granted.*

*Thus it is probably fair to conclude – as have several historians – that there were many different reasons behind the Cultural Revolution. Overall, the need to change economic and political policies away from the 'capitalist road', and back to revolutionary socialism, was probably the most important reason.*

### Activity

In this chapter, the focus is on writing a useful introductory paragraph. So, using the information from this chapter and any other sources of information available to you, write introductory paragraphs for at least two of the following Practice Paper 3 questions.

Remember to refer to the simplified Paper 3 mark scheme in Chapter 10.

## Practi

- 1 Examine chairman
- 2 Evaluate attempts Deng Xia
- 3 Discuss th Mao's aim
- 4 To what e Cultural R
- 5 'By 1971, leadership with this s



## Practice Paper 3 questions

- 1 Examine the reasons why, in 1959, Mao gave up his position as chairman of the PRC.
- 2 Evaluate the importance of Lin Biao, in the years 1960–65, to Mao's attempts to overturn the policies being pursued by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping.
- 3 Discuss the degree to which the Cultural Revolution had achieved Mao's aims.
- 4 To what extent were young people merely used by Mao in the Cultural Revolution to remove his political opponents?
- 5 'By 1971, the "rightists" and "capitalist roaders" within the CCP leadership had been decisively defeated.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?