

# Mao's China c.1930–1976

The following topics are covered in this document:

- Why China became a Communist state
- How far Communist rule changed China by the mid 1960s
- What impact Communist rule had on China's relations with other countries
- To what extent Communism produced a cruel dictatorship in China

## LEARNING SUMMARY

Mao's China is one of the options for the Studies in Depth on the OCR B and WJEC A specifications.

For the Study in Depth, you will need to develop an understanding of the people and problems of Mao's China through the study of social, economic, political, cultural and religious aspects of the country during this period.

There are a number of key questions and focus points that will form the framework for your Study in Depth. The following information provides a concise response to each key question, which can be used as starting point for further study and development. Key words are highlighted in colour to help you. (Some of the key questions for WJEC A differ from the key questions outlined below – please refer to the specification for exact details.)

## Why did China become a Communist state?

OCR B  
WJEC A



### Q Why did the Communists start the Long March?

**A** **Chiang Kai-shek** took over the **Kuomintang** (or Nationalist Party) when its leader, Sun Yat-sen died in 1925 and was initially allied with the Communists. At first Chiang Kai-shek turned against the warlords who controlled China but he disliked the way Communists helped the peasants and workers in the regions he controlled. In 1927 he turned on the Communists and ordered the **Shanghai Massacres** in which known Communists were rounded up and killed. Many Communists escaped and fled to a more secure retreat in the mountains between the Kiangsi and Hunan provinces, led by a Communist named **Mao Tse Tung**. Chiang launched four offensives to try and remove them but all failed, so in 1934 he decided to surround them and starve them out. Determined not to be wiped out, the Communists broke out and began the **Long March**. Over 100,000 Communists spent over a year marching through very harsh terrain being constantly harassed by Chiang's forces. They fought over a dozen battles and by the end only 30,000 remained.

### Q How far was the Long March a success?

**A** Whilst many of the Communists had died, enough had survived to form a new base. Mao was now the unchallenged leader of the Communists as he had led the march. The Communists could proclaim the march as a great and heroic Chinese achievement and many of the peasantry began to see the Communists as heroes.

### Q How far did the Second World War weaken the Nationalist government and strengthen the Communists?

**A** The region of China called **Manchuria** had been taken over by Japan in 1931, something Chiang had done little about. In 1937, Japan launched a new offensive. Chiang met this invasion with little success. He received aid from Britain and the USA but his army fought poorly and were highly corrupt. Meanwhile, the Communists in the north-west of the country launched guerrilla raids against the Japanese. They scored few victories, but spent a lot of effort on winning over the local peasants by working with them and not exploiting them as Chiang allowed his forces to do. The war ended in 1945 when the USA dropped two atom bombs on Japan and China fell immediately into Civil War. Chiang was seen as corrupt and weak while the Communists had a lot more popular support amongst the Chinese people.

### Q Why did the Communists win the Civil War?

**A** The Communists were able to claim victory in 1949 because they continued to use **guerrilla tactics** against the Kuomintang and retained **strong peasant support**. The leadership of Mao was very important – even the middle class could see he was fighting to protect China's national interests. Chiang allowed his forces to treat local populations badly and his support from the USA meant he was portrayed as an **American puppet**. In 1949 he retreated to Taiwan and the People's Republic of China was proclaimed.

## How far had Communist rule changed China by the mid 1960s?

OCR B  
WJEC A



### Q What changes in agriculture did Communist rule bring?

**A** The Communists needed to reform agriculture to feed the growing population. They wiped out landlords and moved towards **collective farming**. Communist Party workers were sent into villages and shared out the land between the peasants. The peasants were also allowed to run 'People's Courts' where landlords were put on trial for things like charging high rents or mistreating tenants. Some were let off whilst others were imprisoned or executed. While there was some opposition to the collective farms, by 1957 over 90% of peasants were in collectives.

### Q What was the impact of the Communists' social reforms?

**A** A great emphasis was placed on the need to improve **education, health** and the **rights of women**. A literacy drive was launched with peasants having to pass literacy check points as they arrived at market. Basic education was pushed so China could have a better-educated work force, although Mao

frowned upon university education. Health care, while basic, was free with an emphasis on prevention and the cleaning of urban areas. Women were given new rights such as the right to divorce so they were not forced to stay in unhappy marriages. Nurseries were provided so mothers could more easily join the work force.

**Q How successful were the Five-Year Plans in increasing production?**

**A** China adopted a series of **Five-Year Plans** like the Soviet Union, which saw an **increase in heavy industries** like coal, steel and chemicals but a lack of consumer goods. The first Five-Year Plan exceeded all its targets – railways enabled raw materials and goods to be moved vast distances. By 1958, Mao launched the **Great Leap Forward** to try and **speed up development**. This was a disaster as China tried to do too much too fast. Massive amounts of iron were produced in back yard furnaces but it was brittle and of no use. China lacked the technical expertise to rapidly modernise its industries.

**Q Did the Chinese people benefit from Communist rule?**

**A** Before the Communist Party came to power China was a corrupt and underdeveloped country with its resources scarcely used. The Communist Party were able to turn this around and create a modern, functioning state with a place on the world stage but with a tremendous loss of life and lack of personal freedom for Chinese citizens.

## What was the impact of Communist rule on China's relations with other countries?

OCR B  
WJEC A



**Q What has been China's changing relationships with neighbouring states?**

**A** At first China looked to fellow Communist country, the Soviet Union for support. However, this relationship soured as both countries sought to establish themselves as the dominant Communist country. By the 1960s, the **USSR withdrew a lot of support**. China wanted to prove its independence and detonated its own atom bomb in 1964 despite Soviet worries. In the 1950s, China came into **conflict with the USA in the Korean War** and tensions were raised over Taiwan. China also caused international controversy when it invaded the mountain state of Tibet and supported Communist regimes and rebels groups in Vietnam and Laos.

**Q Why did China try to improve relations with the USA after 1970?**

**A** In the 1970s it was decided that greater ties with the USA were **needed for trade**. President Nixon visited the country and established formal diplomatic relations with China and, in 1971, China was allowed to join the UN.

## Did Communism produce a cruel dictatorship in China?

OCR B  
WJEC A



**Q How successful was 'The Hundred Flowers Movement'?**

**A** In 1957, Mao launched the **Hundred Flowers Campaign** to encourage criticism of the Communist Party but there was so much criticism that the campaign stopped suddenly in June 1957. Mao was deeply hurt by the amount of criticism

and large numbers of people were arrested, re-educated or lost their jobs. Propaganda poured forth to not only convince the Chinese people of the value of Communism but to also expose any opponents of the regime. Those people who were anti-Communist learnt they must hide their feelings or risk persecution.

### **Q** Why did Mao launch the Cultural Revolution?

**A** In 1965, Mao launched the **Cultural Revolution**, which aimed at getting China back on the **right path to Communism** – as perceived by Mao. He had become concerned that the middle class was becoming wealthy at the expense of the peasants and ordinary people. Mao used youthful supporters in the army and students to force change and call for protests against the then Communist leadership. Inspired by Mao's **Little Red Book** students organised themselves into the **Red Guards**. The Red Guards went on the rampage, destroying anything perceived to be anti-Communist including works of art or suspect technology. Although little is truly known about the impact of this, probably a million people died and industry, agriculture and education were disrupted. The Chinese people's faith in the Communist Party was severely damaged.

### **Q** How far was Mao a great leader of China?

**A** Although Mao can take credit for many of China's achievements, he must also accept responsibility for some of the failures. Under Mao, China became a world power and millions were lifted out of poverty as the economy grew. However, the cost of this was in the deaths of millions of other Chinese people whom Mao appeared to give little thought to.

# Sample GCSE questions

(a) Why was the Long March a success for the Communists?

- Enough Communists survived to form a new base.
- Mao was now the unchallenged leader of the Communists as he had led the march.
- The Communists could proclaim the march as a great and heroic Chinese achievement and many of the peasantry began to see the Communists as heroes.

(4)

By expanding on the reasons why the Communist were liked by the peasants you can earn the four marks.

(b) What affect did the Second World War have on those trying to control China?

- The Communists did little fighting but worked hard to win the support of the peasants.
- The Nationalists were seen as corrupt and exploited the local Chinese people whenever their armies moved into the area.
- The leader of the Nationalists, Chiang Kai-shek, was thought to have done too little to stop the Japanese taking over large parts of China.

(6)

Give extra details about each point rather than six short points.

(c) To what extent did Mao make China a superpower?

Mao did make China a superpower - by the 1970s it was recognised as being one of the most powerful countries in the world. He did this by ensuring that China was strong militarily but also by having other powerful nations such as the USA recognise China as a powerful country in their own right.

Mao sent troops to fight in the Korean War against UN forces in the 1950s where they fought the US-led forces to a stalemate. In 1950 they also invaded Tibet and put down an uprising in 1958, maintaining control of the region. After this, China supported Communists fighting in Vietnam, although they did not send troops to fight directly. This showed to the world that China had a strong military presence.

Mao also proved China was a strong and independent country by not becoming reliant on the other Communist superpower, the Soviet Union. In 1960 Mao ended a friendship agreement with them and China was able to test its own first atomic bomb in 1964, demonstrating both their independence and power. As the war in Vietnam dragged on, the USA came to realise that it needed Chinese support to help end the war and, in 1971, the USA allowed China to enter the UN as well as starting to trade with them. This led to a friendship treaty the following year. This showed that the other world powers now thought China was a world power in their own right who had to be dealt with accordingly.

Therefore, China was a superpower by the time of Mao's death as it had proved it had a strong military and was recognised as one by the other important world powers.

(10)

Your introduction should clearly state your point of view. You should then go on to argue your case and develop this viewpoint in the rest of your answer.

# Exam practice questions

**1 (a)** What was the impact of the Hundred Flowers Campaign?

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**(b)** What affect did the Communist Party have on Chinese society?

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**(c)** Did the Communist Party dictatorship help China overall?

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*(Model answers can be found in a separate answer document)*