

# Mao zedong`s dictatorship

[People](#), [Mao Zedong](#)



By all standards, Mao Zedong belongs in the company of the few great political men of our century. Born and raised in the obscurity and restrictions of nineteenth-century rural China, he rose to assume the leadership of the Chinese Revolution, rule the largest population in the world with the most pervasive and intense government known in history, and finally has clung to life long enough to become the last of the political heroes of the great generation of World War II. His life ps the emergence of modern China and his character has shaped the manner and style of the Chinese Revolution.

His name has become the label for revolutionary extremists throughout the world, " the Maoists," yet it is Mao Zedong with whom leaders throughout the world seek audiences. The Pope in one day admits to his presence more people than Mao Zedong grants audiences in a year. When Mao last appeared publicly, more than a million people expressed tumultuous joy, and since then the occasions for allowing a select few into his presence have been newsworthy throughout the world.

The announcement that the American Secretary of State has had a couple of hours of discussion with the Chairman is a signal to all that the Secretary has been favored, indeed, honored; and, of course, when a trip to China does not include a visit with the Chairman, the universal interpretation is that favor is being withheld.

The extraordinary appeal of Mao Zedong is hard to identify. Some may suggest that it lies less in the man and more in the nature of Chinese society, for the Chinese do seem compelled to make all of their leaders into imperial figures. Yet, the fact remains that many non-Chinese, who have no affinity for his rural origins but represent a host of varied social and personal

backgrounds, seem to find inspiration for their political lives in his words and his example. Restless youth scattered throughout the world who have more formal education than he had feel that in his revolutionary ardor and purity he speaks for them.

What is the character of the man that lies behind all this greatness? Merely to raise the question is an act of sacrilege for many. For the Chinese and other worshippers of Mao and his thoughts, it is enough to dwell on his public virtues, read only hagiographies, and reject all else as being in bad taste. For his detractors, the whole spectacle is revolting, and Mao the man must be the devil behind the Chinese version of socialist totalitarianism. Yet between these extremes there are those who are honestly curious.

The public record reveals a man at home in rural China, a man of the peasantry, who knows the myths and folklore of traditional China. Yet, although he received a Confucian education, Mao was also part of the first full generation of Chinese to explore Western knowledge. From his rural isolation, he moved effectively into the chaotic, competitive world of Chinese student politics and revolutionary scheming. As soldier, ideologist, and planner, he became the symbolic leader of the Chinese Communist guerrilla struggle. As victorious ruler he was a visionary who looked beyond immediate problems of administration to the goals of a new society and to the molding of a new form of man.

The paradox of Mao Zedong is that while his claim to greatness is unassailable, in every specific sphere whether as philosopher, strategist, economic planner, ideologue or even world statesman, his qualities are not the match of his right to greatness. Since Mao's greatness lies so clearly in

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the realm of emotions, the problem of Mao Zedong is a problem in politicalpsychology. To treat Mao merely as an intellectual or as a calculating strategist is to miss the essential dimensions of his historic role. Furthermore, if we are to understand how Mao came to be so successful in mobilizing the feelings of the Chinese, and of others, we must explore his own emotional world and discover the dynamics of his psychic relations with others.

As an individual, Mao is intrinsically fascinating. His acts and his words are startling and unexpected. In his conversations he will bring up the most unlikely subjects: Why are some Africans more dark-skinned than others? Have not all the advances in medicalscienceonly increased the number of diseases? The Chinese people have always known Marxism because they have always appreciated contradictions.

A dedicated materialist, Mao can suddenly speak as a conventional believer in the hereafter: " I shall soon be seeing God" (Cheek 124). " When we see God, or rather Karl Marx, we will have to explain much" (Cheek 115). At times he has depicted himself as an outstanding hero of Chinese history: " Yes, we are greater than Ch'in Shih Huang-ti" (Cheek 79). " We must look to the present to find our heroes" (Cheek 80).

Intrinsic fascination aside, Mao's character demands serious analysis because there is much in the history of modern China that cannot be explained except in terms of Mao Zedong'spersonality. In the fluid circumstances of the Chinese Revolution, time and again events and processes took on decisive form in direct response to the personality of Mao Zedong. In stable societies with solid institutions the scope for the influence

of personality considerations is constrained to the narrow limits of how different individuals may perform established roles. In the case of Mao Zedong there was no defined role for him to fill; rather his own personality created his own roles and thereby shaped Chinese history.

When the story of modern China is systematically related to the activities of Mao, a key element of Mao's genius is immediately highlighted: his remarkable capacity to perform different, and even quite contradictory, roles at different times. As Mao took on the roles of peasant organizer, military commander, ideological spokesman, political strategist, and ruling statesman, he also vacillated between such contradictory public persona as fiery revolutionary and wise philosopher; dynamic activist and isolated recluse; preacher of the sovereign powers of the human will and patient planner who knows that history cannot be rushed.

In a very strange manner Mao Zedong has been able to communicate a sense of the integrity of the human spirit precisely because he has defied logic and spoken for exactly opposite points of view. He has praised books (indeed sanctified the presumed magic of his own "Little Red Book") and he has denounced bookish knowledge--"Reading books only makes myopic children" (Cheek 117). He has equally extolled and denounced violence. He has championed reason and also scorned the paralyzing impulses of reasonableness. His intellectual integrity is as unassailable as folk wisdom, with its appropriate sayings for every option.

Mao's revolutionary ideas, like those of his intellectual compatriots elsewhere, drew inspiration from both experience (observing and doing) and intellectual exercise. They were a response to the genuine plight of large

numbers of poor, illiterate, and exploited people, although they were also the result of profound romanticization and sometimes willful ignorance of who and what the people really were.

They reflected a strong inclination to distrust complex patterns of administration and governance -- in a word, bureaucracy--because these only served the interests of ruling elites; and they relied upon popular enthusiasm and passion as substitutes for technical expertise and intellectual sophistication, and too frequently as a means for mobilizing (and manipulating) the masses. Moreover, they displayed an inconsistency born of a human inability to divorce oneself completely from one's cultural environment, with its heavy baggage of traditions, habits, and customs. Thus, rebellion against the decrepit and defeatist past of China was accompanied by appeals -- sometimes disguised, sometimes not -- to the social virtues, modes of discourse, and general spirit of that same past.

If from a classical Marxist standpoint Lenin was wrong to represent Russia as an appropriate site for a Marxist revolution, Mao erred in proclaiming the same for China despite his disingenuous contention in 1942 that " Marxism-Leninism has no beauty, no mystical value; it is simply very useful" (Cheek 127). Much evidence existed, of course, to sustain an argument that China needed fundamental changes in its economic, social, and political order.

Chinese had been debating this for many decades. It was also clear that foreign powers had an enormous impact on China's development, fostering it in some ways, but distorting and exploiting it in others. Mao's writings reveal that he understood quite well that his country's vulnerability to external

aggression resulted largely from internal weaknesses, and that this relationship lay at the heart of his analysis and his demand for revolution.

The doctrine of the mass line did not develop in isolation but reflected what was arguably the most fundamental of Mao's attitudes: voluntarism. Like Lenin, whose successes must have been instrumental in showing Mao the value of seizing the moment, Mao was a committed voluntarist -- a believer in the ability of human will to overcome virtually any obstacle, despite the essential irrelevancy of human motivation to Marx's revolutionary theory.

By seeking to foster revolution in places unsuitable theoretically for such a process, both Lenin and Mao had to relinquish Marxist principle and emphatic determinism (the revolution will follow under the right, organically evolved, socioeconomic conditions) in favor of willful action (the revolution will occur under whatever conditions we can take advantage of). For the sake of possibly seeing the revolution transpire in their own lifetimes, they had to impose their own wills on circumstances and equate volition with accomplishment. Marxism's attraction was, thus, also its weakness.

The theory was supposed to ensure that revolution would occur, but it never promised that it would occur to suit the timetables of revolutionaries. For tremendously egotistical men like Lenin and Mao, Marxist determinism had to be balanced by a voluntarist spirit, men and women had to help make the revolution by whatever means they could be sold on, and time had to be made an ally and not an enemy.

The succession to Mao Zedong will in time worked out, and China has new leaders. Regardless of whatever private feelings they may have about Mao,

they acknowledged his greatness in the making of modern China. As all great men in history he will be honored, especially by those who will seek the magic of his greatness to insure the legitimacy of their authority.

Thus it is likely that as time goes by the public Mao became increasingly shrouded in myth, and it became even more difficult to penetrate to the domain of the private man where must lie the secrets of his greatness. Just possibly, however, history may take a slightly different turn, and, as unlikely as it may seem now, there may be revelations of more facts about the life of Mao Zedong making it possible to evaluate better our interpretation of his greatness.

Mao Zedong's place in Chinese history is, however, secure, and his successors, whoever they may be, will be of quite different character. Mao's belonged to the era of China's response to the modern world: He wanted China to change, to become strong and powerful in the eyes of all the world; yet he also wanted China to be true to itself. He was a leader out of rural China, educated in a provincial setting, and unacquainted with any foreign language. His distrust of cities reflected in part that he was not at home with the more cosmopolitan generation of Chinese who went further in exploring foreign ways than he was ever ready to do.

#### Works Cited

Cheek, Timothy. Mao Zedong and China's Revolutions: A Brief History with Documents. Boston: Bedford, 2002.