



Men of the People's Liberation Army join with peasants in admiration of Mao Zedong's portrait.

MAKERS OF THE
20th
CENTURY

MAO ZEDONG

That Mao Zedong has changed the course of modern history is beyond dispute. The extent and nature of his influence, both in China and abroad, has, however, been a matter for fierce debate since his death in 1976

Stuart R. Schram

FEW MAJOR FIGURES OF THE TWENTIETH century have been subject to such widely varying assessments as Mao Zedong. In the 1940s, he was seen in many quarters (including the Kremlin) as a talented guerrilla leader whose Marxist credentials were of dubious authenticity. In the early 1950s, he was perceived rather as the ruler of a totalitarian party state, subservient to Moscow. Then, during the Cultural Revolution, he was metamorphosed once more in people's minds (especially those of student rebels in the West) into an inspired visionary who had devised a new pattern of socialism, purer,

more radical, and more humane than that of the Soviet Union. Finally, in his last years the view began to gain ground that he was, on the contrary, a harsh and arbitrary despot cast in a traditional Chinese mould.

Mao was all these things simultaneously, and a number of others beside. It has often been said that Mao Zedong was both China's Lenin and her Stalin. If, however, we wish to explain developments in China in terms of analogies drawn from Russian experience, it would be more appropriate to say that Mao Zedong was China's Lenin, Stalin, and Peter the Great.

Though he did not himself create the Chinese Communist Party, Mao qualifies as China's Lenin in the sense that he

ultimately devised the tactics employed in the conquest of power, and led the Party to victory. He also fulfilled the rather more ambiguous role of Stalin, who not only presided over agricultural collectivisation and laid the foundations of a socialist economy, but brought the whole enterprise perilously near to ruin by the methods he used in destroying his rivals in the Party. In addition, he was in a very real sense China's Peter the Great: the first ruler who sought to modernise the country by drawing upon ideas and techniques of Western origin as none of his predecessors had done either before or after the fall of the empire.

Mao Zedong was drawn to Peter's goals of national resurgence before he had even heard of Marxism or revolu-

tion, so it is with this dimension of his life's work that we must begin. A paragraph or two cannot do justice to the very complex problems which confronted China at the turn of the nineteenth century, yet neither Mao himself nor his political combat can be understood without reference to them. Western military, political, economic and cultural penetration, which had begun in 1840 with the Opium War, had reached, within a few decades, an extent that seemed to threaten not only the integrity of China as an independent nation, but the very survival of her national heritage, which the Chinese had for so long regarded as co-extensive with civilisation itself. The initial response of the ruling élite, in the 1850s and 1860s, was to seek to appropriate only the fruits of Western technology, in particular modern arms to resist the foreigners and put down internal rebellion, while retaining intact China's incomparable 'way'. A generation later, when Mao Zedong was born in 1893 in Hunan Province, the door had been opened somewhat wider, to Western knowledge as well as to Western machines - provided these new studies were kept firmly in their proper place. The slogan was 'Chinese learning as the foundation, Western learning for practical use'. On more than one occasion in later life, Mao Zedong was to date the beginnings of the Chinese revolution from the programme of industrialisation launched under this slogan at the end of the nineteenth century, both because of its impact on economic development and because it had given rise to the emergence of a working class.

These concrete economic and social changes were important, but the total process of social, political and cultural change generated by the response to the Western impact was vaster and more far-reaching. As a result, by the time the youthful Mao Zedong read his first political tract, at the age of fourteen, the imperial system and the Confucian ideology which buttressed it had been drastically shaken and called into question, and the debate was between those who wanted to reform it beyond all recognition into a European or Japanese style constitutional monarchy, and the revolutionaries who wanted to do away with it altogether. Four years later, in the autumn of 1911, the tottering empire finally collapsed in the face of concerted but relatively modest uprisings in several provinces, of which Mao's native Hunan was the second, and he was able to join the army to defend the new Republic.

Although Mao remained in the army for only six months on this occasion, he consistently expressed, throughout the ensuing half-century, an intense admiration for the military virtues, and warfare

was to become a way of life during most of his middle years.

The context in which Mao Zedong grew to maturity was that of the so-called 'new culture' movement, which emerged in 1915. The protagonists of this, China's first cultural revolution, sought to repudiate everything that was old, outdated and rotten in the Chinese tradition, and to replace it with new, fresh and vital ideas, largely drawn from abroad. But while it was easy to agree on the negative aim of 'overthrowing the Confucius family shop', the partisans of this 'new thought tide' soon split regarding the positive choice of a path for the future. The circumstances of the time exacerbated this discord. The European powers commanded respect because of their technical advancement and military might, but the wanton slaughter of the First World War did not enhance their moral prestige, and the Russian Revolution of 1917 soon attracted attention in

Mao Zedong photographed in Beijing in 1949, shortly after assuming power as first Chairman of the People's Republic of China.



China as offering an alternative pattern, possibly more suited to Asian conditions. The decision of the Paris Peace Conference to hand the former German concessions in Shandong to Japan, rather than return them to China, contributed to the disillusionment with the West, and called forth student demonstrations in Peking on May 4th, 1919, which have given a name to this period of rapid and decisive change, now commonly known as the 'May Fourth Era'.

Within two years, the accelerating process of polarisation within the intellectual élite had led to the founding in June, 1921, of the Chinese Communist Party. Mao had already made something of a name for himself both as a journalist and as a political organiser during the summer of 1919, in Changsha (the capital of

Hunan), where he had obtained a sound education, both Chinese and Western, during the previous five years at a teacher training college.

During the first two years of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong was in general charge of the trade union movement in Hunan Province. After the Chinese Communists, in response to orders from Moscow, concluded a form of alliance with Sun Yatsen's Guomindang which involved their joining the latter party as individual members, Mao worked actively in 1923-26 in several Guomindang organisations. The most important of these, in terms of his future, was the Peasant Movement Training Institute in Canton, which he headed from May to September, 1926. An article he published in September, in a collection sponsored by the Institute, summed up his vision of the structure of Chinese society, and the conclusions he drew from this analysis regarding the tactics of the Chinese revolution, with a stark clarity which he was seldom afterwards to equal.

Mao Zedong argued that the domination of the landlord class in the countryside constituted the main foundation of the existing reactionary political order. The decisive blows against the existing order, therefore, could only be struck by the peasants, who stood in direct opposition to the landlords, and were pursuing explicitly political aims (unlike the urban workers, who were concerned only with short-term improvements in their living conditions). 'The Chinese revolution', wrote Mao, 'has only this form [of a peasant revolution in the countryside], and no other.'

Although the Communists still enjoyed some support in the cities, even after the bloody suppression of the workers' movement in 1927, the main theatre of operations in the ensuing ten years of civil war between the Communists and the Guomindang was to be the rural areas, where Mao set up his first base in the Jinggang Mountains of southern Jiangxi, in 1928. At first Mao did largely as he liked, although he was frequently at odds with the Central Committee in Shanghai. Later he was progressively turned into a figurehead. But his rivals, who had abandoned the flexible guerrilla tactics of 'luring the enemy deep' in to the base area developed by Mao Zedong and Zhu De in favour of something more akin to orthodox positional warfare, were discredited in turn by the defeat of October, 1934, at the hands of Chiang Kaishek which forced them to abandon their existing base and to embark on the Long March to the north-west. As a result, at the Zunyi conference of January, 1935, Mao again obtained *de facto* control over military affairs, and thenceforward his ascendancy steadily increased until he

became Chairman of the Central Committee in March, 1943.

In July, 1937, the political context was profoundly transformed following all-out invasion by the Japanese, who had already since 1931 occupied by stages significant portions of China's territory. In later years Mao told Japanese delegations not to apologise so profusely for their country's aggression against China, since it was thanks to the intervention of the Japanese Imperial Army that the Chinese

and north-east, open to penetration by guerrilla units, allowed the Communists to establish grass-roots political and military control over tens of millions of people. Third, the success of these anti-Japanese guerrilla actions helped rally support to the Communists as an effective and patriotic political force, and access to the Chinese and foreign press symbolised by the publication in 1937 of Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China*, gave Mao the opportunity to project himself as the

stoutest champion of China's national struggle.

In 1939-40, Mao coined the term 'New Democracy' to characterise the current stage of the Chinese revolution. This concept was largely derived from the ideas of Lenin regarding a 'bourgeois-democratic' stage in the political development of relatively backward countries such as Russia, during which the Communist Party would exercise power in the name of the proletariat, while not pursuing explicitly socialist goals. Lenin had referred, in 1905, to the 'Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Workers and the Peasants'. Mao, summing up in June, 1949, the conception he had elaborated during the intervening decade of internal and external struggles, culminating in three years of renewed



(Left) Mao lectures in Yan'an, 1942, and (below) talks with some 'little devils' of the eighth Route Army at Yan'an, 1939.



(Below) Mao and Chiang Kaishek in Chongqing during the negotiations on post-war collaboration, autumn, 1945.

Communist Party had been able to win victory. Though allowance must be made for Mao's love of contradiction and paradox, there was much truth in this statement. The Communists' appeal to the hunger of the peasantry for the land had not been, as some have claimed, almost wholly ineffectual. In three important respects, however, the 'War of Resistance against Japan', which began in 1937, set the stage for the ultimate triumph of the Chinese Communist Party and for Mao's own rise to national and international prominence as a major political leader.

First, the acute threat posed by the Japanese invasion to China's national survival forced Chiang Kaishek into the acceptance of a renewed alliance with his adversaries, and thus gave the Communists a breathing space. Second, the circumstances of the war, in which the Japanese held only the cities and lines of communication, thus leaving vast areas of the countryside, especially in the north



civil war with the Guomindang, called the political system he was about to set up a 'People's Democratic Dictatorship'.

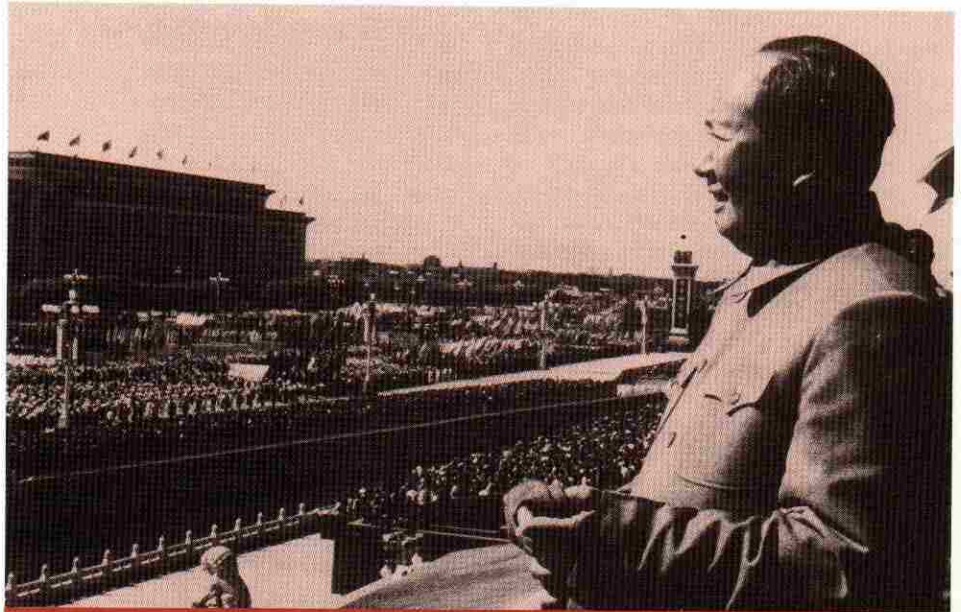
Taking account of what he saw as the broader possibilities of class co-operation in a previously dependent or semi-dependent country such as China, he included among the classes sharing political power not only the workers and the peasants, but the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. In the spring of 1949, Mao also proclaimed that while in the past the Chinese revolution had followed the unorthodox path of 'encircling the cities from the countryside', it would in future take the orthodox road of the cities leading and guiding the countryside.

Though he thus made plain his debt to Leninist theory and to the Soviet example, Mao had no intention of allowing China to become another Soviet satellite. As early as 1936, he had declared to Edgar Snow 'We are certainly not fighting for an emancipated China in order to turn the country over to Moscow!' As Stalin himself subsequently admitted, Mao and his comrades had in fact won nationwide victory only by pressing ahead with the civil war when the Soviets were urging them to compromise to avoid the risk of defeat or a possible threat to world peace.

Nevertheless, in very many respects the policies of the Chinese People's Republic in its early years were, as Mao later said, based on 'copying from the Soviets'. While Mao and his comrades had experience of guerrilla warfare and of mobilising the peasants in the countryside, as well as of political administration at the grass roots, they had no first-hand knowledge either of running a state, or of large-scale economic development. In such circumstances, where could they turn for inspiration and support, if not to the Soviet Union?

A Five-Year Plan, beginning in 1953, was therefore drawn up under Soviet guidance, and with Soviet technical assistance, including a number of complete heavy industrial plants. Yet, within two years Mao had taken steps that were to lead ultimately to the complete breakdown of the political and ideological alliance with Moscow.

The action which inaugurated this trend, a sharp increase in the rate of formation of agricultural co-operatives, did not appear on the face of it to contradict the Soviet model at all. Enforced collectivisation in the countryside had, after all, been very much a hallmark of Stalin's Russia. The crucial point was, in fact, not so much the decision as the way in which it was imposed by Mao on his comrades, and the resultant tension between his personal authority and the role of the Party's policy-making bodies.



Mao Zedong had an all-pervasive influence in Chinese life: (above) Mao reviews one of the first Red Guard rallies in Beijing in 1966; (below) peasants in an agricultural commune bag rice from mounds topped with Mao's portrait, 1968, under a banner reading 'We respectfully offer our loyal hearts to Chairman Mao'.



On July 31st, 1955, Mao expounded his ideas on the urgency of more rapid co-operativisation to an *ad hoc* gathering of provincial and local Party secretaries, specially called together for the purpose, instead of presenting them first to the Central Committee or the Politburo. Although no formal resolutions were adopted, impetus was thereby given to the implementation of Mao's line so that when the Central Committee met in October his colleagues in the leadership found themselves placed to a significant extent before a *fait accompli*.

It can be argued that, in this particular instance, Mao Zedong was justified in his conviction that the advantages of rapid formation of co-operatives (in economies of scale, water control, and also in helping

the state to extract a surplus from the peasants) outweighed the risks. But even if he was right, this episode strengthened his conviction, already very marked, that he enjoyed unique insight into the historical process. It thus hastened his transformation from the leader of a Leninist Party, formally, if not democratically chosen by his peers, into an autocrat cast in a more traditional mould.

Other important new trends in Mao's thinking also emerged in the mid-1950s. The first of these was contained in his report of July, 1955, on co-operativisation, where he argued that in China's socialist development the social transformation could run ahead of the technical transformation. Deeply impressed

by the achievements of certain co-operatives which appeared to have succeeded in radically improving their material conditions without any outside assistance at all, he came to believe more and more in the limitless capacity of the Chinese people, when mobilised for revolutionary goals, to transform at will both nature and their own social relations.

Secondly, even before Khrushchev's secret speech of February, 1956, Mao Zedong and the Chinese leadership had been discussing measures for improving both the morale and the standard of living of the intellectuals inherited from the old society, in order to secure their active and willing participation in build-



(Left) Mao with Stalin in Moscow in 1950. Marshal Bulganin stands behind them.

ing a new China. In the wake of 'de-Stalinisation' in the Soviet Union and the reactions which this called forth in Poland and Hungary, Mao pressed forward with the so-called 'Hundred Flowers' policy, with the dual aim of allowing critics to express themselves, and of combating arrogance and bureaucratic tendencies within the Party. When the resultant 'great blooming and contending' got out of hand and called into question the very foundations of the régime, Mao was angry not at himself, but at the non-Party intellectuals who had betrayed his confidence, and at those colleagues in the leadership who had opposed this experiment and been proved right. As a result, he was even more inclined to appeal to the masses (and especially to the peasantry) over the heads of the formal Party and state machinery.

Finally, in a speech of April, 1956, entitled 'On the Ten Great Relationships' (which he afterward said had marked the beginning of his attempt to elaborate a pattern of 'building socialism' different from that of the Soviets), Mao laid great stress on decentralisation, both in the political and in the economic domain. For Mao, the ultimate goal of such de-

centralisation was to contribute to the building of a 'strong socialist state'. The 'mass line' he formulated in Yan'an in 1943, and to which reference was constantly made from the mid-1950s onwards, had always meant not letting the masses do what they liked but listening to their 'scattered and unsystematic' ideas, and then elaborating a synthesis at the centre. The manner in which the 1956 de-centralisation was carried out led, however, to a system of so-called 'dual rule', in which responsibility for economic decisions was shared between the ministries in Peking and political authorities at the local level, and the result was often confusion and inefficiency.

(Right) Khrushchev with Mao on his visit to China in July, 1958.



Against this background the 'Great Leap Forward' was launched in 1958. While the policies of this period marked a sweeping and open departure from the Soviet model, they were by no means so one-sided and simplistic as they have commonly been made out to be in recent years. Mao placed stress equally on moral and material incentives, on 'redness' and expertise, and on large- and small-scale industry. The policy of 'walking on two legs', which was at the heart of his whole economic strategy, was a policy of walking as fast as possible on both of these legs, and not of hopping along on the leg of small-scale indigenous methods alone. In no sense was Mao a partisan (like some of his admirers in the West) of a 'steady-state' or planned zero-growth economy. On the contrary, throughout the twenty-seven years during which he presided over the destinies of the Chinese People's Republic, Mao never ceased to call for rapid economic

progress, and for progress defined in quantitative terms: tons of steel, tons of grain and so on.

While Mao took as his goal to build China into a 'powerful modern socialist state', there were aspects of his approach to development that reflected a certain ambiguity toward the implications of technical progress. One lay in his attitude toward the intellectuals, the bearers of modern knowledge. In January, 1956, he had declared that, in achieving the 'great goal' of 'wiping out China's economic, scientific, and cultural backwardness within a few decades', the 'decisive factor' was to have 'an adequate number of excellent scientists and technicians'. Two years later, disillusioned by the behaviour of the intellectuals during the 'Hundred Flowers' period, Mao said bluntly: 'Ever since ancient times the people who founded new schools of thought were all young people without much learning. They had the ability to recognise new

things at a glance and, having grasped them, opened fire on the old fogeys. . . . Of course, some things can be learned at school; I don't propose to close all the schools. What I mean is that it is not absolutely necessary to attend school.'

During the latter half of 1958, Mao endorsed and promoted the establishment of 'people's communes', which were not included in the original blueprint for the 'leap'. Although the transition to fully socialist co-operatives had been completed on paper by the end of 1956, these did not really begin to function until 1957 in many areas. As a result, the peasants in 1958 found their world turned upside down, and were plunged into enormous new social units of several thousand households, almost before the previous upheaval had been completed. Mao, while recognising that some aspects of the Great Leap Forward, such as the famous 'backyard furnaces' for making steel, had been ill-advised, firmly de-



The Chinese leadership at the first National Games in Beijing, September, 1959. Left to right: He Long, Lin Biao, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi.

fended his policies - in particular the communes. By spring, 1959, he had acknowledged that some adjustments were necessary, including decentralisation of ownership to the constituent elements of the communes (teams and brigades), and reduction in their size to more human and manageable proportions. But he insisted, against the almost unanimous opinion of other Party leaders, that the concept of the communes, and the belief that China, though 'poor and blank', could leap ahead of other countries, were basically correct. Only Peng Dehuai, the Minister of Defence, was bold (or naive) enough, among all the top leaders, to challenge Mao openly at the Lushan meeting of July-August, 1959, but the others saw the handwriting on the wall, and henceforth the conflict was irreconcilable.

Almost immediately, in 1960, Mao began building an alternative power base in the People's Liberation Army, which the new Defence Minister, Lin Biao, had set out to turn into a 'great school of Mao Zedong Thought'. At about the same time, Mao began to detect the emergence, not only in the Soviet Union but in China itself, of 'new bourgeois elements' from among the privileged strata of the state and Party bureaucracy and the technical and artistic élite. Under these conditions, he concluded, a 'protracted, complex, and sometimes even violent class struggle' would continue during the whole socialist stage. In autumn, 1962, he launched a campaign to promote such class struggle, and two years later, at the end of 1964, when Chairman Liu Shaoqi refused to accept Mao's call to direct the spearhead of this struggle against 'capitalist roaders' in the Party, Mao decided that 'Liu had to go'.

Parallel with these internal developments came the open break with the Soviet Union, of which Mao was the chief architect. The origins of the Sino-Soviet split can be traced to the 'de-Stalinisation' launched by Khrushchev in 1956. While accepting that Stalin had committed many grievous errors, Mao objected to what he saw as a one-sided and un-historical evaluation that failed to give Stalin credit for his achievements, and blamed him as an individual for negative phenomena which had also been shaped by the nature of Soviet society. Most of all, he objected to the manner in which Khrushchev launched the process, without consulting the leaders of other Communist parties (including some, such as Mao, who were greatly senior to himself), as though the world Communist movement could be run, as in the days of the Comintern, like a universal empire commanded from Moscow.

The actual split resulted from the Soviet reaction to the Great Leap policies, which were regarded in Moscow both as economically unsound, and therefore likely to waste the Soviet taxpayer's money, and ideologically presumptuous and unacceptable, to the extent that Mao held out the prospect, at least in 1958, of leaping ahead into the Communist stage before the Soviet Union. Khrushchev reacted by heaping ridicule on Chinese claims for the communes, and by abruptly terminating Soviet technical assistance in 1960, in conditions which further disrupted the Chinese economy, already suffering

from the consequences of the Great Leap policies, and left many big plants unfinished. Mao never forgot either the insults or the economic injuries. In 1964, he remarked that Soviet goods were in any case both crude and expensive, and that it was 'better to deal with the French bourgeoisie, who still have some notion of business ethics'.

While none of Mao's colleagues had much sympathy for the Soviets, some of them, including Liu Shaoqi, appear to have argued in 1965 for 'united action' by all socialist states in support of Vietnam. Mao, who had come to regard the Soviets with as much suspicion as the Americans, opposed co-operation with them even in this context. Thus the Chinese leadership was split on both internal and external issues, and the stage was set for the Cultural Revolution. At the outset of this upheaval, it was no doubt the radical calling into question of the Party, and indeed of authority in all its forms, that attracted the most attention. In retrospect, it is clear Mao's repudiation of leadership from above was not so sweeping as it appeared at the time. Though he launched the Red Guards, armed with the slogan 'To rebel is justified!', against the Party machine, he did so with the aim of destroying those in the Party who had crossed him, not because he had ceased to believe in the need for centralised control of the political process.

Confronted explicitly, in February, 1967, with a sharp choice between Leninism and anarchy, Mao had no hesitation in preferring the former. Speaking to the Shanghai leftists Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan (who subsequently came to make up one-half of the 'gang of four'), Mao noted that some people in

Shanghai had demanded the abolition of 'heads', and commented: 'This is extreme anarchism, it is most reactionary. If instead of calling someone the "head" of something, we call him "orderly" or "assistant", this would really be only a formal change. In reality, there will still always be heads.' Discussing the objections to setting up communes as organs of government, as Zhang and Yao had just done in Shanghai, Mao queried: 'Where will we put the Party? . . . In a commune there has to be a party; can the commune replace the party?' The history of the ensuing nine years



made it abundantly clear that in the Chairman's view it could not.

Throughout the last decade of his life, Mao strove to combine the need for leadership, and for a 'strong socialist state' in which he had always believed with the anti-élitism and encouragement of initiative from below which had constituted the justification and *raison d'être* of the Cultural Revolution. In one of the very last 'directives' published in his lifetime, Mao was quoted in May, 1976, as saying that revolutions would continue to break out in future because 'junior officials, students, workers, peasants and soldiers do not like big shots oppressing them'. There is no way of verifying the authenticity of this text but it sounds very much like the irrepressible Mao. Though he remained committed to the need for 'heads', he could not resist the temptation to challenge them, and shake them up.

Over this enterprise there hung, moreover, a fundamental ambiguity, resulting from the fact that the right of the masses to 'rebel' was guaranteed only by a figure exercising personal authority of a kind that was officially likened in China to that of the first Qin emperor, who unified the country in the third century BC. I do not believe we should confuse Mao's view of these matters with that of Jiang Qing and her partisans, who promoted an ideal of ceaseless contestation of all constituted authority, leading to a state

of anarchy tempered and exploited by the rule of a palace clique. But it was he who had opened the door to these excesses, and by his silence condoned them.

Similarly, in the domain of modernisation and economic development, a new compromise appeared to be emerging in 1971-72, reviving the emphasis on technical progress and rapid economic development which had always been an integral part of Mao's thought. Yet, even before the death of Zhou Enlai, who had been the architect of this new course, the compromise had been overturned. All

Mao with Lin Biao receives acclamation from members of the army, each waving his Little Red Book.

recognition of the importance of professional skills had been swallowed up in an orgy of political rhetoric, and all things foreign were regarded as counter-revolutionary. Some of the blame for the fact that the still-fragile equilibrium of 1972 was so soon shattered must no doubt be attributed to Mao's inability, old and ill as he was, to control the actions of his wife and her associates. Nevertheless, there remained to the end, in his attitude toward the relation between virtue and technology, just as in his thought as a whole, certain unresolved contradictions.

Of these, the most characteristic and most acute was that between the many radical ideas, largely of Western origin, which Mao developed during his last two decades, and the increasingly traditional style of his rule. He spoke of class struggle, of the abolition of the differences between mental and manual labour, and of a whole range of socialist or Communist ideas which, though he sometimes sought to apply them to China before conditions were ripe, were unquestionably in the mainstream of Marxist thought. But at the same time, he willingly accepted elevation, at the hands of the Cultural Revolution left, to a quasi-divine status which owed a great deal more to Chinese political culture than

to the example of Lenin, or even of Stalin.

The blackest aspect of this dimension of his behaviour was unquestionably his propensity to wreak vengeance on those who had slighted or crossed him. In May, 1958, Mao praised the first Qin Emperor as a specialist in 'stressing the present and slighting the past', who had shown his firmness of purpose by endorsing the proposal: 'Let him who uses the past to disparage the present be executed, together with his entire family.' In the Cultural Revolution, Mao himself caused precisely this maxim to be implemented. In the early 1960s, he had been criticised in veiled historical analogies by three writers: Deng Tuo, Wu Han, and Liao Moshu. Of these, the first was beaten to death on May 16th and 17th, 1966, at the very moment when Mao took personal charge of the Cultural Revolution. The second, a noted historian and Vice Mayor of Peking, was not only hounded to death himself, his wife and all but one of his children also perished. Only Liao survived to confront Jiang Qing at her trial in December, 1980.

Of the tens of thousands of violent deaths that occurred during the years 1966-76, very many must unquestionably be put down to the political ambitions and personal spite of Jiang and her allies, and took place with only Mao's passive acquiescence, or even without his knowledge. But some deaths, such as those of Deng Tuo and Wu Han, or his erstwhile successor Liu Shaoqi, persecuted to death in December, 1969, must be blamed in substantial part on Mao himself. In this respect, he was indeed Peter the Great, if not Ivan the Terrible.

Though such parallels as these would not be used in China, the relation between patterns of rule during Mao's last decade and the 'despotic political system' of China's past has in fact been repeatedly evoked in recent months. Much of the blame for the 'feudal fascist dictatorship' prior to 1976 is, of course, attributed to the 'gang of four', but it is made quite plain that Mao, too, had a para-traditional view of the 'mandate' he had received, from history if not from heaven, to rule the Chinese people.

In 1949 Mao set up a 'people's democratic dictatorship' to carry out a 'new democratic' revolution which would be a kind of functional equivalent of the capitalist stage in the development of European society, in the sense that it would serve to liquidate pre-capitalist survivals in Chinese society and culture. One dimension of this process was to be, in Mao's view, the promotion of democratic values in place of the traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic spirit. But the experiment in a freedom of speech

akin to 'bourgeois' democracy ended abruptly in late 1957, and from that time forward, though there was constant talk of democracy (on Mao's part more than on anyone else's), the intervention of the citizens in the political process was more a matter of ritual than of the exercise of that 'self-awareness' and 'conscious activity' which Mao had consistently advocated ever since 1917.

Mao's own opinion, at the end of his life, was that the fault lay with the Chinese people themselves. In his last conversation with Edgar Snow, in December, 1970, he argued that, at their present stage of development, they could not do without an infallible leader to worship. But perhaps it was rather Mao who had failed to move with the times. That is in any case the view of a large number of people in China today. Not only the so-called 'dissidents', but many influential members of the political and intellectual élite, are today persuaded that unless the democratic revolution which proved abortive in 1957 is resumed and carried to completion, genuine modernisation will be impossible.

Though Mao Zedong could not transcend his own historical limitations, his contribution to China's development as a nation in the twentieth century re-

Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, applauds a rally at the height of her influence during the Cultural Revolution.



mains an imposing one. Inspired by a fierce and uncompromising attachment to China's independence and national dignity, he turned her from a weak and disunited country largely at the mercy of foreign intervention to a strong and respected member of the world community. And though he allied himself first with the Soviet Union against the American threat, and then with the United States against the Soviets, he made it plain from beginning to end that these policies were designed in the first instance to serve the interests of China, and of the Third World in general.

Mao likewise insisted on the ideological independence of the Chinese revolution, symbolised by the slogan of the 'Sinification of Marxism', which he put forward in 1938. In this respect, too, there is continuity between the Maoist heritage and current policies, which call for 'Chinese-style modernisation'. Though the emphasis today is placed more on the adaptation of methods of economic development to the concrete circumstances of China, Mao's successors remain committed, as he was, to the maintenance of China's cultural identity, however much they may insist on learn-

capacity to shift the emphasis whenever previous excesses had brought the country to the brink of disaster.

The fact was that, in practice, 'Maoism' came to mean more and more, both in China and outside it, reliance on political zeal as a substitute for, rather than a spur to, the effective mobilisation of economic and technical resources for development, the over-hasty introduction of social changes for which the material conditions were not yet ripe, and above all a policy of relentlessly levelling down rather than up, in everything from education to material rewards.

It was precisely this caricature of Mao's ideas (a caricature for which he himself was largely responsible) that had such wide appeal to the 'New Left' a decade ago, and is still fiercely defended in some quarters. The Chinese, who have seen such Maoism in action, for the most part want none of it, and dismiss it under the two headings of 'voluntarism' and 'egalitarianism'. This reaction is understandable, and yet it would be a pity if, in the effort to divest Mao Zedong's political heritage of the errors and distortions of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution, the current leadership were to discard also the participatory and anti-bureaucratic thrust which was an integral part of mainstream Maoism. Were 'Mao Zedong Thought' to be re-interpreted to become merely a synonym for Leninism in Chinese garb, and the Chinese political system to regress toward a variant of the Soviet pattern, there could be no true breakthrough to 'modernity', though there might well be substantial economic progress. If, on the other hand, the Chinese are able, while avoiding the self-defeating and gratuitous violence of the Cultural Revolution decade, and the tendency to treat every difference in status and rewards as a pretext for 'class struggle', to preserve something of that lively sense of the tension and contradictions existing in a modernising society - and indeed in every society - which constitutes perhaps the most fruitful element in the Maoist heritage, then they may move forward to new forms of cultural as well as technical modernisation, which will greatly facilitate further exchanges with the outside world.

NOTES ON FURTHER READING

My own biography of Mao, *Mao Tse-tung* (Penguin, 1967) is now sadly out of date for his later years, but may still be of some interest for the period prior to 1949. The most recent and fully documented works are those of Ross Terrill, *Mao*, Harper and Row (New York, 1980), and Dick Wilson, *Mao Tse-tung, the People's Emperor*, Hutchinson (London, 1979). S. Schram (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed: Talks and Letters 1956-1971*, Penguin (Harmondsworth, 1974) offers a self-portrait in Mao's own words. Dick Wilson (ed.), *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1977) contains a series of useful if perhaps slightly premature evaluations.

ing from the advanced countries of the West.

Mao's role as a nation-builder is already part of the historical record, and can scarcely be called into question. Far more ambiguous and uncertain is his ultimate contribution to the theory and practice of socialism. Although he originally formulated his ideas, from the mid-1950s onwards, in relatively balanced terms, they were frequently applied in a very unbalanced way. No doubt this was partly because he allowed himself to be carried away by his own enthusiasm, and partly because he relied on his own

Copyright of History Today is the property of History Today Ltd. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.