**The Creation and Expansion of Mao Zedong Thought**

Maoist ideology, or “Mao Zedong thought”, was a product of Mao’s own peasant background and early career. Mao was introduced to Marxism at Beijing University in 1919 and developed his belief in the masses as a source of energy that could transform China. He attended the first CCP Congress in July 1921 and joined the Central Committee in 1923. However, Mao remained detached from the mainstream communist group who attributed little importance to the Chinese peasantry. While the party concentrated on the cities, Mao saw the numerically strong peasants as the leaders of revolution, and from 1924 he worked in the newly created GMD peasant Movement Training Institute, where he increasingly formulated his own ideology, believing a vigorous organization of the peasantry under communist leadership and a radical land policy were needed.

The CCP in the 40s:

The Rectification of Conduct Campaign of 1942 established Mao’s ideas as official CCP ideology. **“Rectification”** became a regular feature within the CCP; Party members had to scrutinize their behavior and engage in self-criticism and criticism of each other, in order to ensure they remained faithful to the ideals of the party. Mao also used rectification to maintain his own ascendancy over the party. A leadership cult began to develop from 1943: CCP ideology was referred to as “Mao Zedong Thought.”

Under Mao, the CCP adapted Marxism to Chinese conditions; it departed from orthodox Marxism in that the CCP came to see the peasantry as the main revolutionary class. This view had been developed by Mao from the late 1920s and had been opposed by many of the CCP’s leaders, particularly the so-called 28 Bolsheviks.

The CCP broadened its support base by appealing beyond the peasantry to other classes. At the Wayaobu Conference (December 1935), the Party approved Mao’s policy of allowing even bourgeoisie and gentry into the CCP. In 1940 Mao wrote ***On New Democracy* (1940**), in which he appealed for an alliance of four revolutionary classes (National bourgeoisie, petite bourgeoisie, peasants and industrial workers) to defeat the Japanese and landlordism. During this period the CCP pursued a moderate land policy insisting on rent reductions but only expropriating landlords who had collaborated with the Japanese. Because of this, CCP membership grew from 40,000 in 1937 to 1.2 million by 1945.

The CCP won peasant support, through land and educational reforms; also the CCP helped the peasants organize their own associations. Mao advocated the ***Mass Line***: CCP officials were to live among the peasants and learn from them. From 1940 the CCP followed the “Three-thirds policy” which meant CCP members only occupied a maximum of one third of local posts; in 1941 only 25% of government officials in the Yanan area were CCP members.

The CCP had the opportunity to expand massively the area under its control because the Japanese drove the GMD southwards but were too thinly spread out to prevent the CCP controlling much of the countryside in northern China. By the end of the Sino- Japanese War, the CCP controlled an area occupied by about 90 million Chinese. The Red army based at Shaanxi, led by Zhu De and Peng Dehaui was much better disciplined than the GMD forces. Mao’s ***Eight Rules of Conduct***laid the basis for good relations with the peasants. As well as combating the Japanese, the Red army had important non-fighting roles in distributing propaganda and helping to organize Peasant Associations.

The CCP established stronger nationalist credentials than the GMD. The CCP ‘s decision in December of 1936 to allow Chiang’s release (during the Xian Incident) in exchange for the Second United Front was greeted approvingly by many Chinese. The CCP took a more active part in resisting the Japanese (1937-45) than the GMD. Mao favored using the Communist Eight Rout Army to fight a Guerrilla war, aided by peasants behind enemy lines. The only time the Communists mounted a major conventional attack against the Japanese was in 1940, known as the Hundred Regiments Offensive. This inflicted heavy casualties on the Japanese but communists losses were high too and the Japanese conducted terrible reprisals on Chinese civilians.

**Main Events in the Civil War Contributed to the Rise of Mao Zedong Thought**

1948-49 decisive victories

1. The climax of the Manchurian campaign. In October-November 1948 Lin Biao successfully attacked the last three Manchurian cities (Jinzhou, Shenyang and Changchun) in GMD hands. Mao was astonished by the speed and completeness of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) triumph in Manchuria. Chiang Kai-shek lost 50,000 of his best soldiers in the process
2. The battle for Tianjin and Beijing. Lin Biao took his forces 600 miles south, to link up with the Communist North-Eastern Army. Their objective was to capture the key cities of Tianjin and Beijing. Mao ordered Lin Biao to encircle the two cities and then in January of 1949 the PLA stormed Tianjin, leading to the surrender of Beijing a week later.
3. The Huaihai Campaign. This was conducted over the four Northern provinces and lasted between December 1948 and January 1949. The PLA and GMD both had about half a million troops engaged in this campaign but the PLA had significant help in the shape of peasant militias. By mid-January, almost 500,000 GMD troops had been killed or captured, most of them at the decisive PLA victory and Xuzhou.
4. The Conquest of the South. Mao certainly had not envisioned such a rapid collapse by the GMD. It was at this point that Stalin urged Mao not to cross the Yangzi River but instead be content with control of just northern China. Stalin was concerned that a PLA offensive into southern China triggered intervention by the USA and was probably also anxious about the prospect of a potentially powerful, reunited China on the USSR’s southern border. Mao ignored Stalin’s advice and in April 1949 the PLA crossed the Yangzi River. Nanjing fell to the Communists in April; Shanghi fell in May. Chiang Kai-Shek resumed the presidency and in December 1949 he crossed over to the island of Taiwan with many of the remaining GMD forces and $300 million in gold and foreign currencies. On October 1, 1949, in Beijing, Mao proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China

**Maoist Ideology**

For most of the period form 1942-1976, the official ideology of the CCP was defined in terms of “Mao Zedong Thought.” Prior to 1942, there were bitter and sometimes violent ideological struggles within the CCP; Mao’s opponents, particularly the “Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks” wanted to prepare for a revolution of the industrial proletariat and they dominated the Party until the early 1930s. It was during the early 1940s that Mao established ideological leadership of the Party. In certain respects Mao was an orthodox Marxist in that he believed in class struggle, collective ownership of the means of production and the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, Mao was also highly influenced by Chinese History and culture and adapted Marx’s ideas to Chinese conditions. Mao “sinified” Marxism; in other words he produced a Chinese version. Eventually, Maoist ideology was published in ***The Little Red Book*** (1964) and used to create Mao’s cult of personality during the **Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).**

**Key Components of Mao Zedong Thought**

**The Peasants as a revolutionary class:**

Marx had written off the peasantry as incapable of revolutionary consciousness and the Russian Communist Party affirmed Marx’s emphasis on the industrial proletariat as the principal revolutionary class. In the first half of the 20th century China had undergone only limited industrialization and Mao from the late 1920s, began to argue that the peasant masses could be used to overthrow the feudalism and capitalism and then go on to create a socialist society.

**Belief in a two stage revolution:**

In 1940 Mao published ***On New Democracy*** in which he argued that socialism in China would be created as the result of two-stage revolution; the first revolution would be bourgeois-democratic and the second socialist. In the first, “New Democratic” phase, the revolution would begin to be led, not by the bourgeoisie alone (as in Marx’s writings), but by a “joint revolutionary-democratic dictatorship” of four revolutionary classes: the proletariat, the peasants, the national bourgeoisie (the capitalists who had not collaborated with the Japanese, nor been too exploitative of the poor) and the petite bourgeoisie (shopkeepers and intellectuals). During the National Democratic Revolution, private property would be retained. Later a second, socialist revolution would see property and economic resources collectivized or nationalized. In practice, Mao began to implement this second stage during the early mid 1950s.

**The Mass Line:**

Mao developed the idea that the Party’s role vis-à-vis the masses was to identify what the masses’ true interest were, interpret them in the light of Marxist principles, and then communicate them back to the masses in a way they could understand. The idea of the “Mass Line” involved developing close relations between the Communist Party and the people. During the Yanan period, CCP cadres were expected to live among the peasants so they could learn about the rural live and be in a better position to educate the peasants about Marxism.

After 1949, the Mass Line remained central to Maoist idea. This is illustrated by the regular recourse made by the CCP to mass mobilization campaign such as the Three and Five Antis (1951-52); Mao sought to involve the masses in campaigns to build socialism rather than simply sending out officials to impose socialist change on the masses. (The way in which to a considerable extent the communes of the Great Leap Forward developed out of initiatives by local officials and peasant experimentation in 1958 reflects Mao’s views on the interaction between the Party and the masses.)

**Continuous Revolution and Rectification:**

Mao believed that in addition to the revolutions required to put the CCP into power and to establish a socialist economy, revolution should be a permanent or continuous feature of communist rule. He meant that the Party and people would need to have their outlooks and thought remolded, corrected and inspected regularly in order to create and maintain a selfless, socialist culture. He developed the concept of **“Rectification”** while at Yanan; it involved CCP officials engaging in self-criticism and criticism in order to ensure that they served the people selflessly and remained true to the Marxist Ideology. Mao also used his first “Rectification Campaign” (1942) and later in order to assert and maintain his own authority over the CCP as all cadres were required to study Mao’s writings.

Mao in the 1950s and 1960s remained convinced that “rectification campaigns” were an essential device for ensuring that the CCP, and especially its officials, remained in touch with the mass and did not develop into a self-seeking elite, as had happened in the USSR. Both the Socialist Education Movement (1962) and the Cultural Revolution (1966) were forms of rectification designed to eliminate corruption and ensure the CCP remained faithful to their socialist ideals.

**Worldwide Revolution:**

Up until 1971-72, Mao was committed to Trotsky’s idea of worldwide communist revolution. Mao intervened in the Korean War in 1950 and provided aid to communist guerrilla movements in the Philippines, Vietnam, Malay, Burma and Indonesia. However, in 1971 Mao departed from this principle by pursuing diplomatic relations with the USA.

“Long Live Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought!” 1968

