

CHAIRMAN MAO:
***GREAT LEADER, GREAT TEACHER, GREAT SUPREME
COMMANDER, GREAT HELMSMAN AND THE GREAT LEAP
FORWARD***



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“From the Red East rises the sun,
There appears in China Mao Zedong,
He works for the people's welfare,
He is the people's great savior (www.morningsun.org).”

In 1958, Chairman Mao launched the Great Leap Forward. The Great Leap Forward aimed at finishing the socialist revolution to reach communism and attaining full economic development by surpassing the West in industrial output.

“Struggle hard for three years. Change the face of China. Catch up with Britain and catch up with America” (Www.cnn.com).

The Great Leap Forward, however, was a complete disaster. It resulted in one of the greatest famines in history, with a death toll of approximately 20-43 million. Despite affecting the lives of millions and causing crop production to plummet by 59 million tons from 1958 to 1960, Mao was still able to reign as leader of the China Communist Party and was also able to garner public support for further projects like the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (Johnson 5). Given the complete failure of the Great Leap Forward, why did the people still choose to support Mao and his plans instead of protesting against him? Some scholars argue that it was blind faith that allowed him to enjoy a continuum of support. Instead, I will argue that a legacy and continuing policy of political suppression was the key to preventing the rise of opposition and ensuring support for his programs.



This picture illustrates the Chinese in Peiping holding up a portrait revering the Communist Party with Chairman Mao in the middle (http://gale.corbis.com).

BRIEF HISTORY

The Great Leap Forward was a product of Mao's utopian visions at the Beidaihe Conference in August 1958(Cheek 160). Promising "very bountiful" production in ten years, he established 20,000 "people's communes" that integrated government administration with commune management. These communes set up smelters to create steel in their backyard furnaces. A certain quota had to be met and people worked day and night fuelling these furnaces. (Jasper, 73) The dismantling of the State Statistical Bureau resulted in false reports from Party officials who told Mao of astounding agricultural successes. Marshal Peng's memoirs reveal the actual scenario of the communes.

"The impression I got from my tour of these places was that the grain harvested was not as much as claimed in the figures (Peng, 487)."

However, Mao refused to believe that the statistics were falsified. This led to encouraging the people to eat as much as they wanted, and for free "Eat as much as you can and exert your utmost in production" (Jasper, 80). The massive push to eat resulted in bare granaries by the winter of 1959. Mao would not accept the fact that there was a shortage of grain and cut off imports of food. He was convinced that the peasants were hiding their grain.

Mao's reluctance to acknowledge the failure of the Great Leap Forward resulted in the Great Famine in 1959. Yet, despite the negative ramifications of the Great Leap Forward, Mao maintained a stature of authority in the Communist Party and was able to mobilize the public to launch the Cultural Revolution in 1966.



Mao in Hangchow, learning about the improved double blade plough (<http://gale.corbis.com>).

Alternative Arguments

One alternative explanation for the continued support of Mao's programs is that stated by Cheek: people "simply believed in Mao". Jiang and David Ashley purport that Mao's revolutionary achievements allowed him to continue to command immense respect (xiv). However, the magnitude of destruction undermines all the authors' claims. Minister Tao Chu's report to Mao recognized a deliberate sabotage of crops as a result of peasant dissatisfaction. (P'eng 186) Also, the devastation caused by the Great Leap Forward led to the questioning of Mao's credibility by members of the CCP as well as the public. Dr Tung, born and raised in Beijing during the Great Leap Forward states,

"The boastfulness and falsification of facts as exhibited in their agricultural programs are by no means peculiar to this industry but are the logical outcome of the dogmatism and totalitarian system of Mao's regime."(Tung 70)

ARGUMENT

Instead of relying on the masses that “simply believed in Mao”, I will argue that political suppression was Mao’s key to stifling opposition against him. First, I will analyze the significant success of the Hundred Flowers Movement in weeding out opposition from the public. I will then focus on Mao’s success in eradicating political opposition. Finally, I will conclude with the policies Mao undertook to curb the spread of anti- Communist propaganda after the Great Leap Forward that stymied any possibility of spreading revolutionary ideology.



Students protesting against communism in Macau (<http://gale.corbis.com>).

The Hundred Flowers Campaign (Bai Hua Yun Dong)

Despite launching the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1956 to encourage intellectuals to participate more actively in the China Communist Party, Mao quickly switched his agenda to suppressing political opposition. This devastatingly intense campaign left such a lasting effect on the people such that it deterred political opposition after the Great Leap Forward. The Hundred Flowers policy was predicated on the belief that a genuine exchange would ultimately lead to

ideological unity. Minutes of the Central Committee Conference in April 25th 1956 reveal Mao's implementation of the Hundred Flowers Movement,

“The Party needs public feedback, disciplinary measures that prevent change should be eliminated. In the arts, let a hundred flowers bloom, in the sciences, let a hundred schools contend. This should be the direction we take (My translation, Red Guard Publications 263).”

This led to the proliferation of anti-Communist propaganda. Initially, Mao remained stoic and undeterred. In 1957 March 20, he delivered a speech in Shanghai explaining his solution to dealing with “luan zi” (troublemakers) who raised dissent against the Communist Party.

“Persuasion is the key to resolving conflicts. There will be no trouble with persistent and sufficient reasoning. This will help us progress and establish a common ideology (My translation, Red Guard Publications 272).”

However, with the increasing anti-Communist propaganda, there was an evident shift in Mao's strategy in dealing with “luan zi.” A notable example was the case of Wang Shiwei and Hu Feng, whose recommendations about policy reforms towards the CCP were seen as “counter-revolutionary” and both writers were, imprisoned (McFarquhar et.al, 54-55).

“When we were in Yen-an, we had that counter-revolutionary Wang Shi Wei. Later, we had that counter-revolutionary Hu Feng, Both of them, in their “essays” or other ways, attacked the Party and the people's regime. It stands to reason that we should give such counter revolutionaries blow for blow.” (Hinton, 347)

A poignant shift in strategy was encompassed in the Central Committee in May 1957 when Mao launched the “Evaluation-Rectification” Campaign. He declared that the anti-Communists were like “du cao(poisonous grass)” that needed to be weeded.

“Poison grass needs to be weeded. People on the right party must be ‘fixed’. Without severe punishment, people will not be fixed.” “Battle plans must involve despising the enemy, war tactics must focus on the enemy. Failure to do so will result in grave mistakes. This must be done bit by bit, kill off the enemy one by one (My translation, Beijing University 3-2).”

His claim was exemplified by the suppression of the Anti Communist movement in Peiping. In Tang Chu Kuo’s report on the movement, he details the movement of The Hundred Flowers Club that aimed to reform the Chinese government. They published a poster, “A Poisonous Weed” as well as a publication, The Plaza, spearheading a new form of propaganda that called for mass oppression of the Communist regime (Tang 13). Unfortunately for them, The Red Army was prepared for the “anti-rightist” drive; offenders were “quarantined” and severely punished. “In the course of this drive, none of the anti-Communist escaped the Communist vengeance. The victims were subjected to the harshest of treatments to pay for their ‘crimes’ to the fullest measure (Tang 37).” He adds that the anti-Communists were either sent to concentration camps to die a slow, agonizing death or “labor education centers” that essentially were slave labor camps (Tang 39).

Om Prakash Mantri, a foreign scholar sent to Beijing to work in the Foreign Language Press, recounts his experience being in the midst of the Hundred Flowers Campaign. He recalls it being a “purge of intellectuals” whereby the extent to which the “Rightists” suffered enabled the CCP to completely “smash” the opposition (Mantri 34).

To further instill fear in the people, “Fan You Pai Dou Zheng” emerged in the 1957 and 1958 newspapers. This was a section that reported Mao’s severe dealings with the Rightists. One of the headlines included “The Party commenced a shocking wave of attacks against the Rightists”.

These are but a few testimonies to Mao’s success in abolishing public opposition to the extent that future protests were deterred. As Mantri comments, the Hundred Flowers Campaign

“paved the way for the massive drive for an unquestionable monolith”, a “monolith” so powerful that he remained in power despite the failure of the Great Leap Forward (Mantri 27).



Porcelain figures holding banners that read "down with the anti-revolutionist", "down with the academic scholars" (<http://accuweather.ap.org>).

POWER WITHIN THE PARTY

While the Hundred Flowers Campaign successfully weeded out intellectuals and public Rightists, Mao also worked on eradicating opposition from within the Communist Party.

Peng De Huai

The case of Marshal Peng De Huai exemplifies the extreme precaution Mao took to ensure he was not politically challenged. Marshal Peng was an outstanding general who served as Vice-Premier of the State Council and Minister of Defense until 1959 (Peng 1). 1958-1959 were turbulent years for Marshal Peng; he was accused of being a Rightist. His honesty in pointing out the flaws of the Great Leap Forward led to his denouncement and dismissal from the Party.

In July 14 1959, Marshal Peng wrote a letter to Mao, revealing the shortcomings of the Great Leap Forward. “The grain output was overestimated...In iron and steel, production was

affected with such one sided thinking...In sum, we did not have a balanced overall plan (Peng 516).” Mao saw this as political opposition and humiliated him in 23 July 1959 at the Lushan Meeting, where he also announced his dismissal. Later on in August 16, 1959, the Resolution of the Lushan Meeting labeled Marshal Peng as a “Right opportunist” who was a threat to the CCP. “The long-standing Anti-Party activities of the Right opportunist anti-Party clique headed by Peng Teh-huai constitute a grave danger to the socialist cause of the Party and the people.” (Kung 43)

Not only was Marshal Peng dismissed as a member of the Party, he was utterly humiliated and charged for no reason. Marshal Peng’s case demonstrates Mao’s merciless crusade against those he thought opposed him. The Resolution also mentions other Party members who were accused of being Rightists, Huang Keh-cheng, Chang Wen-tien and Chou Hsiao-chou. To ensure the stability of his political support, he instructed Zhou Enlai to “increase vigilance within all levels of the Party, increase investigation over Rightists and conquer them (My translation, Zhou 246).”

HE LONG

He Long serves as a later example of Mao eradicating opposition from within the Party. He Long was Minister of State Physical Culture and Sports Commission and was accused of being a Rightist in December 1965 (He 601) .In his biography, He Long was accused of being “ye xin” (ambitious) and for plotting Mao’s murder by carrying a gun everywhere he went. The gun was a fake gun that He Long used to entertain children. Despite this, he was persecuted and was forced to go into hiding in remote Zhong Nan Hai (He 610-611).

He Long and Peng De Huai played significant roles in leading the Communist Party to its success. Mao, however, was more intent on wiping out opposition to the extent that he dismissed two prominent Ministers as well as many other members of the Communist Party. In a newspaper report in 1958, 4 headlines concerned the dismissal of Party members that Mao suspected of being

Rightist. One of which reported “The People’s Party severely punished Rightists within the Party, 16 were dismissed, 38 barred and 10 recalled from their duties.”

Mao’s meticulous pruning of “Rightists” within the Party stabilized his dominance in the Communist Party. His dominance and unfaltering authority allowed him to pursue other policies despite the failure of the Great Leap Forward.

PROPAGANDA

Despite the fact that Mao removed opposition before and during the Great Leap Forward, he was aware that the devastation of the Great Leap Forward threatened his authority. To ensure he remained revered and supported by his people, he thoroughly “cleansed” the media from all vestiges and potential vestiges of anti-communism.

“The entire Party must thoroughly remove all propaganda that has the power to spread anti-communism from the academic, news, arts and literature (My translation, RenMin Publications 1).”

In September 24 1962, he addressed his Party with a speech, advocating the danger of novels.

“Aren’t novels popular? Using novels to stir uprisings is a great invention (My translation, Red Guard Publications 217).”

In 1964, a summary record at the Spring Festival reveals his fear that education and propaganda will act as weapons against him.

“Drive actors, poets, dramatists and writers out of the cities. Whoever does not go down will get no dinner. They must go down.” “There is too much studying going on, and this is exceedingly harmful. You don’t have to listen to nonsense; you can rest your brain instead” (Schram 205).

Mao's radical attempts to stymie anti-communist propaganda were justified by his wife, Jiang Qing. A former actress in the 30s and 40s, she served as Mao's private supervisor in the Ministry of Culture in 1963 (Chang et.al, 505). Her speeches reveal many of Mao's policies to completely censor the media. For example, in July 1964, she stated,

“There are 3000 opera troupes and opera is a bad influence, it would disrupt the social class and lead to economic downturn (Jiang 2).”

Both Mao and Jiang Qing's speeches clearly indicate Mao's urgent desire to prevent the spread of anti-communist propaganda. After the failure of the Great Leap Forward, it is no wonder he undertook drastic measures to prevent the rise of opposition.



Students carry a portrait of Mao on a 'Propaganda Truck' in Shanghai (<http://gale.corbis.com>).



People reading Communist Support Posters in Beijing (<http://gale.corbis.com>).

Conclusion

Contrary to Mao's ideal vision of the Great Leap Forward, the outcome of his radical movement resulted in a Great Famine and devastation to the masses. His continuum of support after the crisis stemmed from his success in removing anyone or anything he deemed a threat to his regime. Prior to the Great Leap Forward, the catastrophic consequences of voicing "Rightist" sentiments during the Hundred Flowers Movement imbued a sense of fear in the people. During the Great Leap Forward, and also throughout his reign, Mao was successful in removing what he felt was opposition from within the Communist Party. After the Great Leap Forward, Mao paid special attention to the spread of propaganda, and implemented revolutionary measures to thwart the possibility of anti-Communist antagonism. With such stringent endeavors against all opposition, be it empirical or presupposed, it is no wonder that despite the ultimate failure of the Great Leap Forward, Chairman Mao was able to retain support from his people. Chairman Mao is revered in China as the Great Teacher, Great Leader, Great Supreme Commander, and Great Helmsman. Given his intense efforts at purging all opposition, we can see why the Great Leap is not added to the Four Greats.



Chairman Mao 1976 (<http://gale.corbis.com>)

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