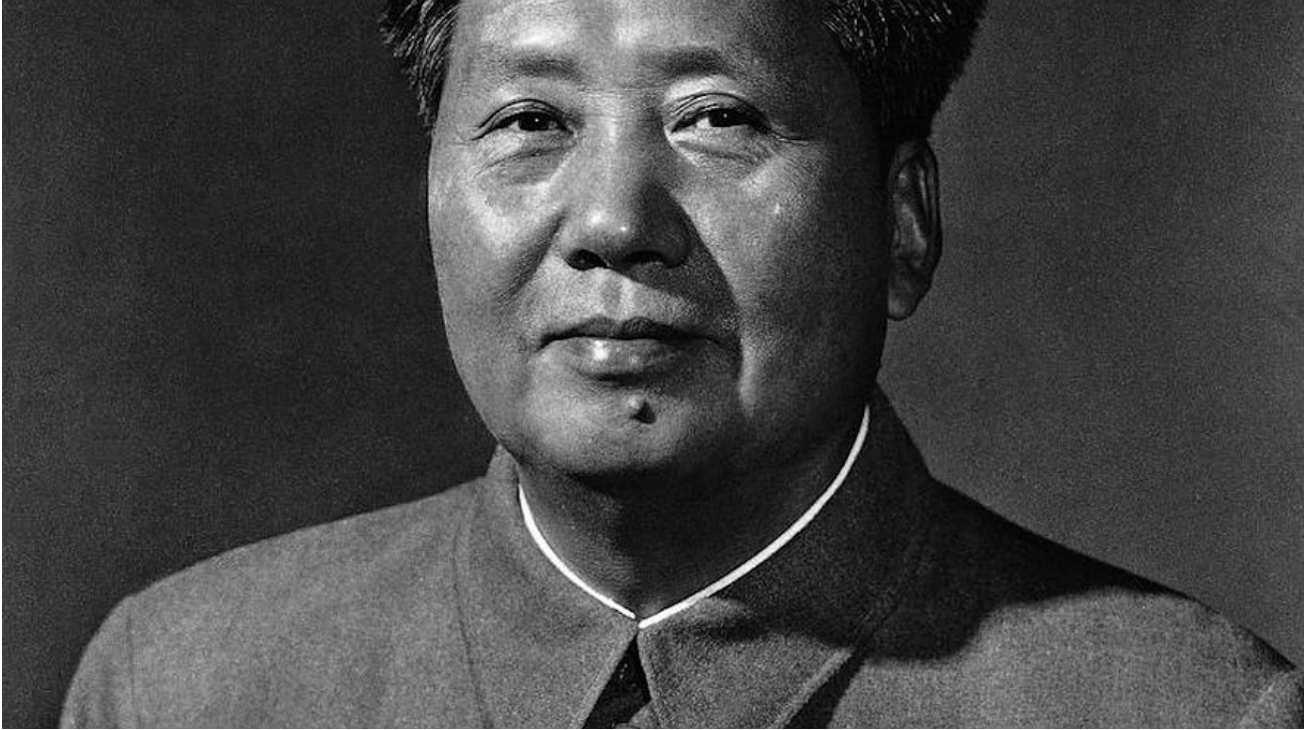


World Leaders: Mao Zedong

By Biography.com Editors and A+E Networks, adapted by Newsela staff on 07.28.16

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Synopsis: Mao Zedong was born in 1893 in the city of Shaoshan in the Hunan Province of China. He served as chairman of the People's Republic of China from 1949 to 1959. Also known as Chairman Mao, he led the Chinese Communist Party from 1935 until his death in 1976. Mao's "Great Leap Forward" program and the Cultural Revolution had terrible outcomes. Many of his goals, though, including promoting the idea of China being a self-reliant country, are praised.

For The Great Leader, Humble Beginnings

In the late 19th century, China was led by the frail Qing Dynasty and had become a shell of its once glorious past. A dynasty is a line of people from the same family who rule a country.

The country's future leader, Mao Zedong, was born on December 26, 1893, in a Chinese farming community. Life was difficult for many Chinese citizens at the time, but Mao's family was better off than most. When he turned 17, he left home to enroll in a secondary school.

In 1911, Mao joined the Revolutionary Army and the Nationalist Party. The party overthrew the country's ruler in 1912. This created the Republic of China. Political and cultural change swept the country.

The "Long March"

In 1918, Mao graduated from school and became a teacher. A few years later, he became one of the first members of the Chinese Communist Party. A communist government means a single political party rules the country. It was a very strict government. Over the next few years, Mao rose through the ranks of the party.

By 1927, President Chiang Kai-shek had imprisoned or killed many Communists. Mao led an army against the president's political party, but was defeated. They fled and reorganized to form the Chinese Soviet Republic. Mao traveled to villages and gathered a small but strong army, and punished those who went against him.

There were more than 10 regions in China under the control of the Communists by 1934. Chiang Kai-shek gathered nearly 1 million government forces to defeat the Communists. Mao was alerted to the upcoming attack. He was able to convince the forces to retreat.

For the next 12 months, 86,000 Communists trekked west and north in what became known as the "Long March." Only about 8,000 survived the 6,000-mile journey. Mao inspired volunteers to join his cause and he emerged as China's top Communist leader.

Japanese-Chinese Conflict And Mao's Rise To Power

In July 1937, the Japanese army invaded China. Chiang Kai-shek was forced to flee. His forces soon lost control. Chiang had to reach out to the Communists to help fight the Japanese.

After the Japanese defeat in 1945, Mao took control of all of China, which slid into a bloody civil war. In 1949 in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, Mao announced the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Chiang and his followers fled to Taiwan. There, they formed the Republic of China.

Over the next few years, Mao began sweeping land reform, sometimes using violence and force. Mao did make some positive changes in China by promoting the role of women, improving education and increasing health care. But, he feared he would lose control. He imprisoned or killed thousands of Chinese who spoke out and disagreed with him.

Fallout From The "Great Leap Forward"

In 1958, Mao started a program called the "Great Leap Forward." It was an attempt to increase production by establishing large shared farms with as many as 75,000 people working the fields.

At first, there were reports of overwhelming success. However, three years of floods and bad harvests told a different story with an estimated 30 million people dying of hunger between 1959 and 1961.

As a result of the Great Leap Forward's failure, Mao was quietly pushed to the side in 1962 and his rivals took control of the country.

The Chairman's Return To Power And The Cultural Revolution

Mao made his return in 1966 and launched the Cultural Revolution. He made up a crisis that only he could solve. Mao told his followers that some people in China wanted to restore capitalism and his young followers formed the Red Guards to remove these people. Soon Mao was back in command. To prevent a repeat of the rejection he received during the Hundred Flowers Campaign when he allowed people to speak freely and they criticized him, Mao ordered the closure of China's schools, and young intellectuals living in the cities were sent into the countryside to be "re-educated" through hard manual labor. The Cultural Revolution created economic and social chaos in the country and Mao's power grew to massive proportions.

A Revolutionary Legacy

Mao died from complications of Parkinson's disease on September 9, 1976, at the age of 82 in Beijing, China. Parkinson's disease is a movement illness that causes body shakes that become worse over time.

He left a controversial history as both a monster who killed his own people and a political genius. Officially in China, Mao is well respected, though his efforts to close off China have mostly been rejected by the leaders who came after him.

Mao's focus on China's self-reliance and the rapid industrialization that he pushed is credited with laying the foundation for China's late 20th century development. Yet his harsh methods and dislike of anyone who did not give him complete loyalty are viewed as self-defeating.

Quiz

- 1 The CENTRAL idea of the article is developed by
- (A) showing how Mao gained and held on to power in China
 - (B) describing how Mao's successful programs earned respect
 - (C) showing the current effects of Mao's actions as leader of China
 - (D) describing the ideas of people who opposed Mao
- 2 Which two of the following sentences from the article include CENTRAL ideas?
1. *Mao led an army against the president's political party, but was defeated.*
 2. *Mao inspired volunteers to join his cause and he emerged as China's top Communist leader.*
 3. *Mao died from complications of Parkinson's disease on September 9, 1976, at the age of 82 in Beijing, China.*
 4. *He left a controversial history as both a monster who killed his own people and a political genius.*
- (A) 1 and 2
 - (B) 1 and 3
 - (C) 2 and 3
 - (D) 2 and 4
- 3 Which answer choice accurately characterizes Mao's reaction to the Japanese-Chinese Conflict?
- (A) He was happy to assist Chiang Kai-shek and his army.
 - (B) He saw it as an opportunity to reform education and health care.
 - (C) He feared it would lead to him losing his place in the Communist Party.
 - (D) He used the results to gain control of the government.
- 4 Which of the following MOST influenced Mao's power during the Cultural Revolution?
- (A) his fear of the rise of capitalism
 - (B) his interest in the Red Guards
 - (C) the confusion and disorder caused by his harsh changes
 - (D) the support of the Hundred Flowers Campaign

