

# **To What Extent Was the Cultural Revolution Necessary for Mao's Political Survival?**

**Word Count: 2085**

**Table of Contents:**

<b>Section 1: Source Evaluation</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Section 2: Investigation</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Section 3: Reflection</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>8</b>

## Section 1: Source Evaluation

This investigation will explore the question: To what extent was the Cultural Revolution necessary for Mao Ze-Dong's political survival? The first source that will be evaluated is "The Talk At The Report Meeting", a speech by Mao on October 24th 1966, that has been transcribed and translated on the website Marxists.org.

The origin of this source has supreme value as it is a direct statement from Mao regarding his view on the CCP. Furthermore, as the speech was given in 1966, the source finds value in that Mao's views are expressed right during the time in which he launches the Cultural Revolution. However, there is also a limitation on this source due to it coming directly from Mao. Namely, it only gives his view on the events that are taking place at this time, which means that it has bias, especially as he was paranoid about losing his position in the Party at this time.

As the source is a speech, the purpose of it was to convince Mao's audience of his intentions and political views. This is valuable as Mao would then detail all the instances where he believed that his political survival was threatened within the Party, helping to answer the question posed in this investigation. However, there are also limitations stemming from this, as Mao could've left out important information that detail that his political survival was, in fact, not under threat in order to convince the audience of his viewpoints. The second source that will be evaluated is Michael J. Lynch's "The People's Republic of China 1949-76", a textbook that was published in 2011.

The source's origin has value as Lynch is a historian with Mao's China as an area of expertise. This allows the source to carry considerable legitimacy due to his knowledge of the subject. Lynch is also described as someone who shows considerable insight into China's unique social and political development. Additionally, as he is a Western historian, there is value in the source as it is not subject to the censorship that a Chinese historian would encounter when writing about China's experience under Mao. However, limitations arise in the date of the source, as it was written long after the events which means there are pieces of information missing that would've only been available at the time of the events.

Lynch's academic textbook has several values in that it explores China under the whole of Mao's era. This allows persons investigating Mao to be able to extrapolate huge amounts of information throughout his time as an influential politician in China. However, limitations also arise in this fact as persons investigating specific instances within China under Mao, such as the Great Leap Forward, cannot use this source as effectively. Especially due to the fact it was produced for school-use, meaning it must cover a range of topics but cannot go too in-depth into any one topic.

## Section 2: Investigation

Mao Ze-Dong was the main catalyst behind the man-made disaster that was the Great Leap Forward, the deadliest famine in written history. After Mao accepted a part of the blame for this catastrophe, he was forced into an early retirement from the position of Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, the CCP. (Wemheuer) This investigation will discuss the importance of the Cultural Revolution that Mao carried out shortly after his forced resignation as the Party Chairman. (Wemheuer) The specific question this investigation will answer is: to what extent was the Cultural Revolution necessary for Mao Ze-Dong's political survival?

Political survival entails for the person, in this case Mao, to keep their political position within their own coalition, in this case the ruling CCP. Furthermore, the investigation will consider and examine viewpoints that are both for and against the statement that the Cultural Revolution was necessary for Mao Ze-Dong's political survival.

After Mao's forced retirement Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping rose to power. To combat the economic collapse experienced after the Great Leap Forward, Liu and Deng reversed some of Mao's policies. One major policy change was the abandonment of the collectivization of land that Mao had undertaken during the Great Leap Forward. (Lynch) This was begun in the provinces Gansu and Qinghai in the early 1960s as supporters of Liu and Deng took over local governments. (Lynch) Different viewpoints on the subject of Mao's fear of collectivisation can, however, also be presented. The majority of provincial leaders appeared to have remained loyal to Mao even after Liu and Deng's rise to power. (Lynch) Although this was the case, it did nothing to quell Mao's rising fears.

This is due to the fact that the policy change reminded of the "capitalist restoration", as Mao called it, that the Soviet Union had experienced after the death of Stalin. Mao was afraid that China would have a "Soviet-style capitalist restoration" after his own death, as the USSR did after Stalin's. (Lynch) This fear escalated as Liu and Deng reversed Mao's policies, a fear ultimately proven correct through Deng Xiaoping's abandonment of many traditional communist doctrines as leader, exhibiting the supposed need for the Cultural Revolution for Mao's political survival. (Britannica)

Further changes took place within China under Liu and Deng. There was a return to a highly centralized government, and wage differentials were also reintroduced under their leadership. Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi had beliefs that were in conflict with Mao's. Liu Shaoqi believed that material incentives and the formation of a technical and managerial elite was necessary for economic growth, while Deng Xiaoping thought that individual self-interest was necessary. (Britannica) These factors all contribute to the idea that the Cultural

Revolution was very necessary to Mao Ze-Dong's political survival, especially as he himself believed that he was being treated as a "dead ancestor". (Tse-tung)

During the Cultural Revolution Mao attempted to combat the centralization of power through the creation of the Revolutionary Committees. (Wemheuer) The Revolutionary Committees were meant to decentralize the government in order to prevent corruption within the CCP. They were also meant to reform Chinese society and spread the Party's message throughout China. (Lynch, Wemheuer) The attempt at spreading the Party throughout China was largely unsuccessful during the Cultural Revolution, different reasons for this was all put forth by Wemheuer, however none were conclusive.

Mao wanted to regain the power that he had relinquished after the Great Leap Forward. He said, "there are many things I have not been consulted about, such as the land problem, the Tientsin speeches, the cooperatives in Shansi, the rejection of investigation and study, the big fuss made of Wang Kuang-mei." (Tse-tung) The Cultural Revolution was his vessel through which he could reinstate himself as the Chairman of the CCP, and through it Mao also wanted to create a lasting legacy and to fulfill his ideal of a continuous revolution. (Lynch, Wemheuer) This is the reason for the continual cycles of destruction and construction that took place during the Cultural Revolution. The continuous revolution that Mao so desperately sought out was another policy that was lost out on during the reign of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping during the in-between years. (Lynch)

Hodder further writes that Mao was regretting withdrawing from power, considering it an error due to the formation of factions in his own absence from the political scene. This view is backed up by Mao himself when he said, "Now, however, they have set up independent kingdoms." (Tse-tung) This can be validated as after Mao's death, the power void left behind led to political cliques fighting to gain control. (Britannica)

However, Mao's aim to create a legacy and re-assert his power through the Cultural Revolution did not turn out as he expected it to. Mao expected that during the cycles of destruction, recognizing and replacing the political opponents would be an uncomplicated endeavor. (Wemheuer) This was not the case. "As Lin Piao revealed in his report to the congress, was that the Cultural Revolution produced 'an extremely complicated situation' in which (quoting Mao) it was 'hard' to distinguish 'between ourselves and the enemy.'" (Wemheuer) This gives clear insight into how Mao could not efficiently achieve what he set out to do with the Cultural Revolution: identify and replace political opponents. Hence, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the Cultural Revolution was, in fact, not necessary for Mao Ze-Dong's political survival.

The last reason put forth for the Cultural Revolution that will be covered in this investigation is that Mao Ze-Dong wanted to expand the CCP throughout China. (Wemheuer) Mao tried

to introduce new blood into the Party through the youth, leading to the formation of the Red Guards. (Lieberthal) He also believed that it was important for the youth of China to experience a revolution in preparation for an attack from the West. This last point was thoroughly achieved through the Cultural Revolution, as masses of young people fervently abided by Mao's every order. (Lynch) However, the attempt at initiating new blood into the CCP was largely unsuccessful throughout the Cultural Revolution. (Wemheuer)

Through Mao Ze-Dong's Cultural Revolution, he attempted to simultaneously achieve a multitude of objectives. He wanted to reassert himself as the main figure in the Party, to create a continuous revolution in order to preserve the CCP's purity as an institution. He also wanted to prevent China going down the same route as the Soviet Union did after Stalin's death, ultimately also preserving his own legacy. Lastly, he wanted to give the power back to the peasantry and thus, break the power that the urban bureaucrats had. (Lynch)

Answering the question posed throughout this investigation isn't a straightforward ordeal. To what extent was the Cultural Revolution necessary for Mao Ze-Dong's political survival? It can be answered in quite a few different ways, as there were both positives and negatives throughout the Cultural Revolution for Mao. The clearest positive is that Mao regained his position as Chairman of the CCP until his death, which then leads onto the question of whether his position in the Party was under threat. Mao's position in the party was diminishing throughout the time he wasn't Chairman, and the policies he had put in place were changing under Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping's leadership. So, in the short term the Cultural Revolution was very necessary for Mao's political survival.

However, in the long term the Cultural Revolution didn't accomplish the goals that Mao wanted it to. After his death, the CCP again disintegrated into factions and Deng Xiaoping again emerged as the leader of the CCP eventually. During his reign, the policies that Mao attempted to create during and after the Cultural Revolution to continue his legacy were changed to the "Soviet-style capitalist restoration" that Mao so wanted to prevent.

### Section 3: Reflection

The reflection question that will be discussed is whether or not descriptive words that carry value judgments should be used when writing about history, or whether they should be avoided. This question is relevant to this investigation due to the grave consequences that China faced during Mao's rule, during the Cultural Revolution but perhaps moreso during the Great Leap Forward. These consequences are often described with value judgments when they are being discussed, quoting from Lynch's "The People's Republic of China 1949-76", "The young people responded with an idealistic enthusiasm that soon deteriorated into a brutal fanaticism." The use of "deteriorated" and "brutal" in this sentence does allow the reader to get a better understanding of what happened, however it is also a word that carries heavy connotations - as most adjectives do.

This leads to my view on this reflection question, I believe that descriptive words should be kept to an absolute minimum when writing about historical events such as the Cultural Revolution. The events should be described in the most unbiased way possible, thus avoiding descriptive words that carry connotations whenever possible. The above quote from Lynch can instead be written, "The young people responded with enthusiasm, eventually leading to rioting and protesting." This sentence carries much less connotations than the prior one, while still giving the reader the relevant information - allowing them to form their own opinion on the subject free from any bias on the author's part.

Descriptive words are a great way for the author to let the reader get an understanding for the events taking place due to the connotations that the words provide. However, these same connotations are the crux of the issue when using descriptive words to describe a historical event - that the author's biases are expressed within the text.

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