Community Classroom
University of Arizona

The Life and Times of Mao Zedong: China in Revolution

Wednesdays, 5:00-7:00 p.m.  
January 8 – February 5  
Dunbar Pavilion

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Introduction

It is difficult to understand China today without understanding the China of Mao Zedong. Over the course of Mao’s lifetime China experienced imperial rule, warlordism, republicanism, and ultimately communism. The country experienced famine, invasion, and civil war. And through this all, Mao led an insurgent movement that allowed China to “stand on its own two legs.” Governing, however, was at least as challenging as making revolution. The challenge of rule would be summed up by the official government assessment of Mao after his death: Mao was a great revolutionary leader, but made mistakes governing China. This course examines the grand sweep of 20th Century Chinese history through the lens of Mao’s life – a life that was complex and often contradictory, but one that ultimately left a lasting legacy for today’s China, and the world.

Historians of modern China contest the meaning of Mao and Maoism, but few would likely argue with Life Magazine’s “100 People of the Millennium” that listed Mao at #28. The course also will examine this historical legacy to surface the meaning of Mao in today’s China – a China that resonates with Maoist goals, namely a country of wealth and power, but differ significantly in the social and cultural means towards those ends.

Learning Goals

At the end of the course, you will be conversant with the major currents of 20th Century Chinese history. You will be able to:

a) place major figures, events, issues in historical and international context
b) appreciate continuity and change in 20th Century China
c) evaluate the role of the individual (i.e., Mao) in “making” history

Course Structure

Although our meetings will largely be lecture in format, I want to encourage all of you to raise questions, and for us to have discussion when possible.

Recommended Texts

As you might guess, any attempt at interpreting such a towering figure as Mao is going to lack in some dimension. At the same time, a very tangible problem is sources. There are many sources of information in the public realm on Mao, but there are also sources that remain inaccessible, primarily in China. Another challenge is that a superb biography in English requires an author to have the facility to read
Chinese sources in their original to capture subtleties and shades of meaning. For all these reasons, and likely more, personally I have not found a biography that I would label as comprehensive. That said, there are two options that I can offer that are reasonably satisfying:


**Schedule**

January 8  **Baby Mao & the ‘Old Man of Asia:’ China at the End of the Imperial Era** (1840-1905)  
+ External and Internal Challenges: Imperialism and Civil War  
+ Strengthening China to Save the Imperial System  
+ The Sino-Japanese War of 1895  
+ The Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1900  
+ Last Gasp for the Qing: The 1905 Reforms  
+ The Revolution of 1911

January 15  **Mao as Young Man and Revolutionary: Republican China** (1911-1949)  
+ The Warlord Period (1916-1926)  
+ The Nationalist Hopes of the Nationalist Party and Chiang Kai-shek  
+ Japanese Invasion and the War in the Pacific (1937-1945)  
+ Civil War

+ Transition to Rule  
+ The First-Five Year Plan (1953-1957)  
+ The Hundred Flowers Movement and the Anti-Rightist Movement (1958-1960)  
+ The Great Leap Forward (1958-1960)  
+ The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)  
+ The Death of Mao (1976)

January 29  **Catching Cats of Any Color: The China of Deng Xiaoping**  
+ The end of Maoism?  
+ The Four Modernizations  
+ Diplomatic Openings  
+ Assessing Mao  
+ Socialism with Chinese Characteristics  
+ Dissent in Post-Mao China: “Democracy Wall” and 1989

February 5  **The Legacy of Maoism for Contemporary China**  
+ Xin Jinping and Mao  
+ Embracing the Past  
+ Creating a “harmonious society”  
+ China and the U.S.  
+ Reversing the China Consensus in U.S. Foreign Policy