

Mao
A Very Short Introduction

By Delia Davin

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- How did Mao's family background influence his character?
- Was Mao ever an idealist?
- How did Mao make Marxism relevant to China?
- Mao's writings show a considerable concern with the position of women and with the liberation of women. Is it surprising that his personal life shows little consistency with this concern?
- Why were the lives of Mao's wives and children so hard?
- Why was Mao so angry about Khrushchev's attack on Stalin at the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union?
- Mao emphasized the importance of the role of peasants in the Chinese revolution. Why then did workers benefit so much more than peasants from the changes that took place after the establishment of the People's Republic?
- Why did Mao launch the Great Leap Forward and why was he so reluctant to abandon it?
- Why was Mao so determined that China should have its own nuclear weapons?
- Why did Mao launch the Cultural Revolution? Is it best understood as a leadership power struggle or a mass movement?
- Why was it so difficult for the authorities to explain Lin Biao's death? Was the Lin Biao incident a turning point in Chinese history?
- Why, after so many years of attacking US imperialism, did Mao welcome Nixon's visit to China and the improvement of relations with the United States that it symbolized?
- Was Mao in any sense a Chinese nationalist?
- Why did Mao have such difficulty in selecting a successor?
- Why was Mao able to hold the balance of power between the contending factions of his would be successors, even when he was unable to walk or speak coherently? Why did others attempt to take power only when he had died?
- Why did Deng Xiaoping refuse to negate Mao's legacy, even though he himself had suffered so much at Mao's hands?
- Why is Mao still officially venerated in the People's Republic and why at the popular level is he still often considered a great leader?

Other books by this author

Internal migration in Contemporary China (Macmillan, 1999)

Mao Zedong, A Life (Sutton, 1997, reprinted by History Press 2009)

With W. Jenner (Eds.) *Chinese Lives: an Oral History of Contemporary China* (Pantheon, 1988; Macmillan, 1988; Penguin 1989)

With E. Croll and P. Kane (Eds.) *China's One Child Family Policy* (Macmillan, 1985)

Further reading

Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung (Foreign Languages Press, 1967). A 'condensed Mao' carried by almost every Chinese during the Cultural Revolution and known in English as

the Little Red Book. Available online at
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/>

Philip Short *Mao, A Life* (Henry Holt, 1999) Lengthy, thoroughly researched and readable.

Jung Chang and Jon Halliday *Mao, the Unknown Story* (Random House, 2005) Best-selling, unremittably hostile biography that was well received in the general press but heavily criticised by academic reviewers.

Gregor Benton and Lin Chun (Eds.) *Was Mao really a Monster? The academic response to Chang and Halliday's Mao: the Unknown story* (Routledge, 2010). A collection of critical reviews of Jung Chang and Jon Halliday's bestseller.

Roderick MacFarquhar, and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*. A detailed study of Mao's last two decades.

Maurice Meisner, *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait* (Polity Press, 2007). Focuses on Mao's 'sinification of Marxism'.