Chairman Mao Zedong Biography

Chairman Mao was the charismatic and brutal leader of Communist China. Leading the Communist party to power in 1949, Chairman Mao set about establishing his unquestioned authority and power, sending China into turmoil. Millions suffered in his schemes and cultural revolution of the 1950s and 1960s.

Born in the village of Shaoshan in Hunan Provence, 1893, he started life as a humble farm worker. But, he rebelled against his father and went to Changsa to gain an education. After drifting through different careers he joined the fledgling Communist party in 1921 and rose through its ranks becoming leader by the 1940s. Mao was ruthless in his quest for power, willing to poison and kill rivals – whoever they may be.

He wrote his Little Red Book (1964)

“Every Communist must grasp the truth: Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”

He later showed no mercy in turning on old comrades from the Great March. In the late 1940s, Mao Zedong led the Communist party on the long march south and eventually defeated the nationalistic troops on Chiang Kar Chek.

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery. It cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.

– Mao Zedong (March 1927)

By 1949, Mao could proclaim the Peoples Republic of China and he became the undisputed leader.
For a brief time, in the 1950s, Mao appeared to open up society even inviting intellectuals to suggest criticism.

“Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend” is the policy for promoting progress in the arts and the sciences and a flourishing socialist culture in our land. (slogan used in One Hundred Flowers campaign, 1956)

However, this proved to be a feint and any criticism was used as an excuse to round up, punish or execute those considered to be disloyal to Mao.

This desire to root out opposition became a mania and young children were inculcated to denounce any teacher or adults which may have harboured ‘rightest’ beliefs. The cultural revolution destroyed the lives of millions of Chinese; many people were either killed humiliated, sent to labour camps or forced to live in rural areas. Mao created a climate of fear in which people feared to speak anything other than the official party line.

Through all this the cult of Mao grew, his image was everywhere and he became deeply revered as a supreme leader – especially amongst the young.

Mao’s economic policies were also disastrous. His decision to collectivise farm production led to a precipitous decline in agrarian output. This cause the massive famine of the 1960s. Chinese officials tried to hide the extent of starvation and foreign aid was not welcome.

It is estimated 70 million of Mao’s own countryman died at his hand either directly or indirectly through his policies. He died in 1976.