

From political dogma to foreign policy: remapping Mao Zedong

Abstract

Mao Zedong is recognized as a pivotal leader who played a crucial role in liberating China and steering the nation towards a defined path. This paper aims to examine Mao Zedong's political ideology and his approach to foreign policy. It will analyze the impact of Mao's philosophy on contemporary Chinese politics and international relations, as well as his relevance in the 21st century. Mao's revolutionary approach was distinctive, characterized by unique concepts such as struggle, new democracy, and the cultural revolution. In the context of globalization, China has transitioned towards a market economy, indicating a divergence between its political and economic dimensions in the present day. This paper will outline the ways in which China has deviated from Mao's principles on various issues. A content analysis methodology has been employed for this study.

Keywords: Mao Zeong, China, cultural revolution, class struggle, new decocracy, political dogma, foreign policy

Volume 10 Issue 1 - 2025

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Received: April 12, 2025 | **Published:** April 24, 2025

Introduction

"Politics is war without blood, while war is politics with blood."

--Mao Zedong

Mao Zedong occupied a very significant place in socialist thought. The contribution of Mao is not only confined to theoretical discourse, instead, it is more applied. The role of Mao Zedong in Chinese liberation is considered a historic event. So, before going to say about Mao Zedong and his thought or path, there is a need for a brief outline of the Chinese society. China under the Han dynasty had a glorious history. At that time, China was a stable society with self-sufficient fertile land for agriculture, illustrious rural handicrafts as a base of the rural economy, and Confucianism as a philosophy. China under that dynasty was protected in every aspect from the outside world. But the scenario was changed under the Manchu dynasty; the dynasty was not capable of resisting the Western encouragement in China. In the eighteenth century, China under the Manchu dynasty was defenseless before the economic and military pressure of the colonial West. In that condition, China was divided into two groups: one who wanted to follow the modernization process of the West by importing Western culture and Western technology for rejuvenating the previous glories. Another group wanted to protect their society from the influence of the West. In that tussle, followers of the West won, and Westernization was started in China. However, under the impact of Western colonialization, a restless situation evolved across China.

One turmoil situation evolved across the country; no rulers were able to unify the country, only different centers of the military stayed, battles between various warlords was the common scenario, and the economy of the rural areas was suffering. In that turmoil, Mao Zedong formed his political opinion from 1915 to 1925 for the resurgence of China. In early life, the great leader was a nationalist, but the success of the Bolsheviks of Russia changed him and his ideas from a nationalist to a medical revolutionist. The universal nature of his thought and his way of revolution raised some contradictions. Mao emphasized particularity and discipline.¹ He belonged to a peasant family. He led the Chinese revolution and established Asia's first communist country. He was the founder of the People's Republic of China and chairman of the Communist Party.

Mao devoted himself to forming a political party to lead the class struggle based on a philosophical base. In his two famous essays entitled *On Practice* and *Contradiction*, Mao emphasized productivity following the Marxian argument.¹ One of the focal themes of his political philosophy is class identity and class struggle. It seemed that every person in society thinks through the prism of class and class consciousness. Mao reacted to all metaphysical views and supported only material dialectics. The uniqueness of Mao's political thought is the applicability of revolution in the Chinese context through an outlook of socialist democracy.² He argued for a cultural revolution for the upliftment of the nation. The political philosophy of Mao has been reflected through his seminal works, such as *New Democracy*, *On Coalition Government*, *The Present Position and Task Ahead*, *Peoples Democratic Dictatorship*, etc. Apart from combinations of Marxist and Leninist thought, his ideas have been reflected in his political thought.

Research objectives, research questions, and research method

This study is based on four research objectives: (1) To understand the ideas and philosophy of Ma Zedong. (2) To investigate the role of Mao in the upgrading of China. (3) To search the role of Mao in introducing a socialist system with a lot of challenges. And (4) to investigate the contribution of Mao Zedong in shaping the foreign policy of China. There are four research questions in this paper: (1) What are the central ideas of Maoist philosophy? (2) How did Mao contribute to the upgrading of China? (3) What was the role of Mao Zedong in introducing the socialist system in China? And (4) How did Mao contribute in shaping the foreign policy of China? The content analysis method has been applied in this study. Books, journals, and newspapers are used as sources of literature. Basically, secondary data has been used in this study.

Life sketch of Mao Zedong

The great Chinese leader Mao Zedong was born on 26th December 1893 in the village of Shaoshan in South Central China's Hunan province. His father's name was Mao Yichang. His father was a farmer as well as a grain dealer. He grew up in an environment where

the necessity of education was only for keeping records and accounts. At the age of 8 years old, he started schooling in a primary school situated in his native village, where he learned the basic knowledge of 'Confucian Classics.' At the age of 13 years old, Mao left school and started to work in his family's farms. But after some days, he left the family farm and moved to a neighboring province to study at a higher secondary school. Before returning to his studies, he served in the Republican Army for six months. In 1909, he was admitted to a secondary school in the provincial capital, Changsha, for further studies. In those days, living in Changsha, he was influenced by revolutionary ideology. In October 1911, Mao had been fighting against the Qing dynasty and spread his revolutionary activities to Changsha. He established a unit of the revolutionary army in Hunan, and as a soldier, he spent six months there. Spring 1912 was marked by the birth of the new Chinese Republic and the end of Mao's military service. In a secondary school, Mao studied history. He also spent a few months reading many of the classic works of the Western liberal tradition.

Mao entered the first Normal School in Changsha in 1913 and studied there until five years after graduation.^{1,3} In 1918, Mao graduated from a normal provincial school in Changsha. During his study, he studied literature, philosophy, Chinese history, and Western ideas. Since school life, he was associated with various student organizations. The political orientation of Mao was manifested during his school days. In 1917-18, the New People's Study Society was founded, and Mao was associated with this organization. Like Mao, later on, many of the members joined this organization. Marxism was unknown in China before 1917, but after the success of the Bolshevik movement in Russia, Chinese intellectuals were influenced. But in 1918, Mao encountered Marxism in Peking, where he obtained a job as an Assistant librarian.^{1,3} Nationalism flourished in China as a real force with the May Fourth Movement in 1919.

As a student at Peking University, he was closely associated with the May Fourth Movement. But at the time, working as a librarian, he came under the influence of Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, who were the main characters of the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China. In effect, in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in Shanghai city, where Mao Zedong was present as a member of a total of thirteen members present. The life of Mao Zedong was full of experiences. His experience with socialism materialized in 1949. The synthesis of his experience was institutionalized after 1949. He occupied a significant place in the country's resurgence through his revolutionary path. Through cultural revolution and new democratic ideas, Mao initiated social change. He contributed a lot to the economic development of the world's most populous country. Mao played a multidimensional role in the Chinese independence movement through his theory, ideology, politics, and performance as a soldier. The great communist leader died on 9th September 1976 in Beijing.

Mao on class struggle

Class serves as a fundamental concept within Marxist theory. Maoism, the ideological framework established by Mao Zedong, aligns with classical Marxism in recognizing class as a central theme. While classical Marxist theorists approached the definition of class primarily from an economic standpoint, Mao expanded this definition to include a super-structural perspective, focusing on political behavior and ideological beliefs. Importantly, Mao's interpretation of class does not conflict with the classical Marxist understanding. He placed greater emphasis on subjective elements in determining class affiliation, as opposed to purely economic criteria. The year 1957

marked a pivotal moment in Mao's evolving perspective on classes as political and ideological entities, as well as the dynamics of class struggle during the socialist transition.⁴ Mao characterized classes as engaged in a struggle manifesting in political and ideological dimensions. He asserted that class struggle persisted throughout the socialist transition until the realization of socialism. However, during this period, the conflicts between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry, as well as between the proletariat, were viewed as non-antagonistic. In his 1957 essay "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People," Mao articulated that while socialist victory had been attained in China and the construction of socialism was underway, contradictions would still exist—both with adversaries and among the populace.^{1,5}

He outlines the various contradictions present among different social groups, including those within the working class, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia. He also highlights the contradictions that exist between the working class and the peasantry, as well as between workers and peasants on one side and intellectuals on the other. Additionally, he discusses the contradictions between the working class and other segments of the working population in relation to the national bourgeoisie, as well as the internal contradictions within the national bourgeoisie itself, among others.

Mao posited that the contradictions between the national bourgeoisie and the working class exemplify the broader conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, characterizing them as inherently antagonistic. However, he contended that these antagonistic contradictions could be transformed into non-antagonistic ones in China through appropriate management and resolution. He asserted that the nature of contradictions in a socialist society differs fundamentally from those in traditional capitalist societies. In capitalist contexts, class struggle is inevitable and can only be resolved through a socialist revolution. In contrast, the contradictions within a socialist society are non-antagonistic and can be addressed internally by the society itself. In the Chinese context, the capitalist class is defined primarily through the lens of ownership relations. During his address at the Zhengzhou Conference, Mao described the Chinese peasantry as "the owners of their labor, land, and means of production," which include seeds, tools, irrigation systems, forests, and fertilizers, thereby asserting their ownership over the products of their labor. Mao viewed the peasantry during the socialist era as a class in transition towards becoming part of the working class.^{4,6} Within Maoist thought, ownership evolved from individual to collective forms, and ultimately to ownership by the entire populace. He argued that this transformation would reduce class distinctions between workers and peasants, leading to the emergence of "collective peasants" who would eventually become "workers on state farms." Mao emphasized the necessity of continuing the struggle against both domestic and foreign class adversaries, asserting that class struggle also manifests within the dynamics between the government and the populace.

He analyzed the dynamics of class struggle within the interactions between the government and the populace. According to classical Marxist theory, the state functions as an instrument of class oppression, predominantly governed by the bourgeoisie. In this framework, the government is perceived as a system that includes the military, prisons, and other mechanisms employed by the bourgeoisie to exert control over the proletariat. He regarded class struggle as an ongoing phenomenon present in all societies, including those transitioning towards socialism. He consistently advocated for mass education as a means to enhance class awareness among the general population. In this regard, he supported the dissemination of mass education as essential for the advancement of the class struggle. He championed

a socialist-oriented education for the masses to promote socialist ideologies. In this context, Mao emphasized the need to implement a socialist educational model to strengthen the class struggle in China.

Mao's concept of New Democracy

The concept of new democracy has been analyzed in his famous book, *Peoples Democratic Dictatorship*. Mao explained about new democracy in his classic essay 'On New Democracy' in 1940. The social structure of then-China was different from Soviet Russia and East European countries. China was a country where class characteristics as Soviet Russia was not existing. China was a semi-colonial country where the domestic bourgeoisie and imperialist bourgeoisie dominated the society. People of China were organized along with the domestic bourgeoisie against imperialism under the nationalist Kuomintang party. Mao did not have any faith in the domestic bourgeoisie, but he understood that there was a need for a nationalist movement first in the country under the leadership of the nationalist party, where the domestic bourgeoisie would play an important role. However, in a long strategy, Mao aimed to establish socialism in China. In this context, he allied with the nationalist party and captured the power of the Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia border region of China by establishing a united front government. In this way, he expanded communist ideology and was able to call for a socialist revolution in China in the line with the Chinese way.

According to Mao, the Chinese revolution is comprised of two distinct phases: the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution, each representing a unique revolutionary process. The concept of democracy in this context does not align with traditional Euro-American models; rather, it is classified as a new form of democracy. This new democracy serves as a transitional phase between the conventional capitalist republics of Europe and America and the socialist republics modeled after the Soviet Union, governed by the dictatorship of the proletariat. New democracy is characterized as a theoretical framework and represents the pinnacle of revolutionary strategy, encompassing the revolutionary period in China from the 1930s to the early 1950s. The Chinese Communist Party (CPC) has articulated specific political, economic, and cultural dimensions of this new democracy. In the context of Maoism, Chinese democracy is innovative, encompassing political, economic, and broader societal aspects. Politically, it introduces a system of universal and equal suffrage that transcends distinctions of gender, religion, wealth, or educational background.

From an economic perspective, significant industrial, financial, and commercial enterprises would transition to state ownership, while the Republic would neither seize capitalist private property broadly nor impede the growth of capitalist production that does not "dominate the livelihood of the people".⁷ At this juncture, socialist agriculture would not be fully realized; however, various cooperative enterprises emerging from the principle of "land to the tiller" would incorporate elements of socialism. Culturally, the concept of new democracy was associated with the advancements of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and indigenous traditions, particularly popular culture, standing in contrast to the prevailing bourgeois ideas tainted by imperialism. Within this framework of new democracy, the party's ideology and propaganda would prioritize critiques of feudalism and imperialism, relegating communist ideas to a secondary position, thereby "preparing the ground".^{7,8} Initially, the Chinese revolution represented a novel form of bourgeois-democratic revolution, which has since integrated into the broader proletarian-socialist world revolution. It would not culminate in a capitalist society under the control of a Chinese bourgeoisie but rather lead to the formation of a

new democratic society governed by a coalition of all revolutionary classes in China, with the Chinese proletariat at the forefront.¹ In summary, Mao aimed to establish a system within the framework of new democracy, where land reform, nationalization of banks and industries, and alternative scientific cultures would coexist alongside individual property rights.

The era spanning from the 1930s to the mid-1950s is referred to as the period of new democracy in China. However, a significant historical transformation took place between 1953 and 1956, marking the onset of a transition towards a socialist society. A notable event occurred in 1957 when the 'New Democracy Youth League,' a faction of the Chinese Communist Party, was rebranded as the 'Communist Youth League,' a change that had initially been made in 1949. It is important to note that for nearly two decades, New Democracy played a minimal role in the policies of the Chinese Communist Party. Nevertheless, in 1978, New Democracy began to experience a revival alongside new structural reforms in China. Following this year, the Chinese Communist Party implemented reforms that introduced a mixed economy, combining private national capital with state management and oversight. This period also saw the emergence of a new cultural policy that fused contemporary Communist culture with traditional legacies, commonly referred to as popular culture. In 2011, the Wen administration once again emphasized the importance of reviving the principles of new democracy in China. Scholars Liu Yuan and Zhang Mushing have identified parallels between the 'Chongqing Model' of 2011 and the 'Socialist New Democracy Movement' of the early 1950s. As Zhang articulated, "only the CCP can save China; only New Democracy can save the CCP".^{7,9} This statement underscores the continued relevance of 'New Democracy' in contemporary China.

The Idea of the cultural revolution and strategy

The idea and implementation of the revolution by Mao can claim uniqueness for having a cultural dimension. The cultural revolution has an ideological echo of the political and economic revolution. In China, there was a united front to organize a cultural revolution. Historically, the contributions of the united front in organizing cultural revolution can be divided into four different phases-(1) First Phase (1919-1921), (2) Second Phase (1921-1927), (3) Third Phase (1927-1937), and (4) Fourth Phase (1937-1949). The idea of a revolution by Mao Zedong was different from others. Through speeches, writings, and activities, the cultural revolution was introduced by Mao. Mao realized that without cultural identity and its upliftment, socio-economic or political change cannot occur. Once, China was a rich cultural civilization. At the time of the Han dynasty, China was the culturally and socially richest civilization in the world. The Chinese rich cultural heritage was realized by the people in the political and economic, and cultural fields. But during the imperialist rule, by the impact of Western culture, many Chinese people forgot their own culture and dignity. In their psyche, the idea of slave ideology was increased within the Chinese communities. In that situation, the emergence of Mao as a leader of the Chinese people on the belief of Marxism has taken an important role in the revitalization of Chinese society by injecting scientific communist culture among the people of China.

Mao Zedong was a prominent leader in China who sought to create a new nation guided by his interpretations of classical Marxism. In this framework, he envisioned a cultural revolution aimed at transforming the cultural landscape of what he perceived as a backward populace through the establishment of cultural organizations. This initiative was rooted in elite political strategies. Mao aimed to eradicate illiteracy to enhance political engagement by promoting reading, writing, and

discussions on civic issues. His cultural revolution manifested as a series of practices within the realm of mass politics. The objective during Mao's tenure was to convert illiterate workers and peasants into politically conscious individuals capable of exercising the "four great freedoms." Following the dissolution of the United Front with the Nationalist Party in 1933, the provisional government led by the Communist Party of China developed an educational policy designed to elevate the class awareness of workers and peasants, facilitating mass mobilization across Chinese society. Grassroots party committees at the district and township levels were assigned the responsibility of creating and executing an anti-illiteracy program aimed at empowering ordinary workers and peasants in China.

In 1934, Mao indicated that the cultural revolution was being effectively implemented across the Communist-controlled revolutionary base areas, serving as a crucial strategy to enhance popular mobilization in the revolutionary effort.^{10,11} In essence, the cultural revolution refers to the transformation of educational and recreational activities that accompanied collectivization. During his address titled 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People' on February 27, 1957, Mao articulated key concepts relevant to the cultural revolution. He first described a conflict between proponents of socialism and capitalism, which he anticipated would continue in the nation for an extended period, ultimately to be resolved through dialogue, critique, and rational discourse.

The second narrative focused on the necessity of addressing contradictions in ideological and political efforts, emphasizing the need for enhancement in this area. This approach aligns with the Chinese Communist Party's initiative to educate the working classes within the framework of socialist culture. Mao's assertions significantly influenced the Party's execution of the cultural revolution. In this regard, a national conference organized by the Education Ministry in 1958 established guidelines for implementing a cultural revolution across the nation. The five primary objectives included a comprehensive literacy campaign, the expansion of primary education, the creation of agricultural middle schools, the enhancement of teacher training, and a complete reform of the educational system to align with the requirements of socialist development. During the second plenum of the Eighth Party Congress in 1958, Liu Shaoqi emphasized the importance of concurrently advancing political, economic, and ideological dimensions through the socialist revolution, asserting that this is crucial for the progress of both technological and cultural revolutions. Shortly thereafter, on June 9, the People's Daily declared the commencement of the "cultural revolution," stating that it is a movement aimed at transforming the culture of all working individuals (Thornton, 2019).^{10,11}

In this context, it is essential to provide a detailed account of the Cultural Revolution in China. This significant period is deeply rooted in the ideologies of Mao Zedong. The Cultural Revolution officially commenced in the summer of 1965, sparked by a dispute surrounding the play "Hai Jui Dismissed from Office" by Wu Han, which featured a sixteenth-century civil servant who openly criticized the emperor.¹ The movement gained momentum in August 1966, particularly within universities, where a widespread campaign aimed to purge individuals labeled as 'rightists,' reaffirm the centrality of Mao's thoughts, diminish the emphasis on specialization, and impose strict limitations on examinations. During the August 1966 plenum of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao and Lin Biao called for a revival of the policies from 1958-59, despite opposition from Liu and Deng. The initiative sought to expose party leaders who were perceived as adhering to capitalist ideologies. This movement, commonly referred to as the 'Red Guards movement,' originated

from internal party conflicts but eventually resonated with the broader populace. University students, known as the 'Red Guards,' initiated protests against government policies through mass demonstrations in Beijing. They embarked on extensive efforts to boost industrial production and enhance agricultural yields, emphasizing the critical role of the masses in achieving the movement's objectives.

Throughout the entire process, the revolutionaries adhered to Mao's ideology. As the movement began to spiral out of control, Mao assumed responsibility for the turmoil, stating, "I am responsible for this havoc," while assuring party members that there was no intention to overthrow them. However, in January 1967, he intensified the movement by introducing the slogan "seize power",^{1,12,13} which signified the creation of a new political authority to supplant the existing one. This event took place in Shanghai in December 1966, aiming to extend the cultural revolution to the workforce. A surge of mass protests and strikes erupted across the industrial sector, demanding higher wages and improved working conditions. Consequently, the cultural revolution and its philosophical underpinnings began to take root in Chinese society.

This surge of grassroots activism was relatively brief, as officials at all levels prioritized economic recovery. The leftist students and young faculty from China's prestigious universities embraced the initial phases of the great proletarian cultural revolution. This initiated a process of radical educational reform that encouraged individuals to express their views openly, fostering an environment where they felt empowered to speak, criticize, and engage in debate. Over time, the notion of the cultural revolution as an ongoing process faded from official rhetoric, replaced by more managerial concepts such as "cultural development," "cultural creation," and "cultural construction." In the shift from a revolutionary party to a governing party, the Chinese Communist Party has supplanted the Mao-era practices of cultural transformation with a broader, depoliticized agenda of cultural governance aimed at legitimizing and sustaining the current state system.

Mao's idea of war

Mao believed in and applied his ideas in operating war. As the commander in chief of the army, he applied the tactics of guerrilla warfare in the countryside. The contribution of Mao to the Chinese liberation movement is highly appreciable. He was able to unite and organize about 600 million people in the liberal movement. In a true sense, Mao was a great mass leader. He also posed a threat to the Soviet Union with two hundred people. National interest always got priority over bilateral friendship. Mao Zedong's war of resistance theory is quite helpful to understand the grand strategy of China. The concept of war in Mao's discourse has been coined as 'a self-described active defense strategy. In Mao's idea, the war of resistance has been described as the means of stability, modernity, and sovereignty of China. Indeed, there was a great challenge for Mao to maintain domestic political coherency, maintenance of law and order, and internal stability. The strategy for internal and external wars of China includes its diplomatic and military strategy.

Domestically and internationally, Mao wanted to achieve the goals of the government through revolution.¹⁴ Considering Japan as a potential security threat, Mao delivered a lecture in 1938 on "*Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan*". The connotation of guerrilla war was different for Mao. To Mao, it was not a revolutionary war. Rather, it is a supplementary war of resistance. Mao recommended that the National Army of China be designated for conventional warfare; on the other hand, the Red Army was assigned

for guerrilla warfare. Mao believed that the resistance war should occur in three different phases. In the first phase, defensive measures are to be taken by the national army. In the second phase, both sides will stock arms and take the strategy of a standoff. The guerrilla strategy will be used as the initial strategy against the enemy. In the third phase, the army will use offensive strategies. In this phase, the guerrillas will destroy the invader's logistical centers.

Mao's assessment of Japan, Fascism in Italy, the unimpeded force of capitalism, and the national bourgeoisie of China led him to think of a new strategy of war. As a warrior state, the presence of Japan in the Far-Eastern region was also alarming for the security of China. Mao was also concerned about powerful atomic states. So, he had to take communist strategies for the security of China in a new dictum. Initially, the Chinese internal and external security was vulnerable. Therefore, through the use of the strategy of guerrilla warfare, Mao wanted to ensure internal safety and security and external as well. Initially, Mao's strategy of war was more political than military.

The Chinese government progressively increased its military budget to support the revolutionary strategies of the People's Liberation Army. In China's context, the war of resistance and national reconstruction are closely linked. Mao formulated an impressive strategy centered on a people's war and devised approaches that could be integrated with the operations of the regular army. The Communists' collective efforts to engage the masses beyond political matters facilitated civil-military collaboration. The populace not only rallied behind the liberation war led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) but also showed a willingness to embrace Communist ideology and the associated political framework. The history of the twentieth-century revolutionary movement demonstrates the validity of many of Mao Zedong's strategic concepts, which were applied in both theory and practice during national liberation struggles across various regions of the world.

Methods of leadership

Mao believed in disciplined and dedicated leadership. He wanted to implement the principles of democratic centralism in the communist party. He argued for loyal, courageous, conscious, and laborious leadership within the party. The leaders of the communist party should mobilize the Chinese working class and laboring people. Schram SR,^{15,16} argued that charisma cannot be manufactured. It is earned by a leader through remarkable personal qualities. In the case of Mao, the quality of charismatic leadership was shown in his early career. Many appreciative adjectives are used about Mao, such as 'great leader', 'great teacher', 'great supreme commander, etc. Right from organized peasant organization in 1925, he played a leading role to lead the guerrilla groups, using unique techniques in the Red Army during the long march. After being the head of the state of PRC, he genuinely took on challenges to overcome internal socio-economic hurdles. He successfully performed his role as a nationalist leader by centralizing power. During his regime (1949-1956), Mao was an extremely appreciated political leader in China.¹⁷ He warned to establish a corruption-free administration. Mao was aware of the effects of peasant movements and the possibility of hazards. He had given a message to the government officers to be disciplined, honest, and hardworking.¹⁸

He attempted to remove the social classes and articulated the line of the enduring revolutionary struggle for socialism. As the national leader, he emphasized mass enthusiasm and mobilization. He realized that socialist construction cannot occur successfully without mass mobilization. His method of leadership was unlike Burns. He had

strong surveillance of peoples' needs, activities, satisfaction, etc. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of leadership must be adjudicated by the satisfaction and will of the people. The contribution of Mao in ensuring equality in job sectors. He eliminated the discrimination between men and women in the job sector of jobs. This was a liberal outlook of Mao regarding the emancipation of women. From the traditional role of women, Chinese women were uplifted in the field of higher education, societal status, and jobs. Mao considered women as the half of the sky. The contribution of Mao in motivating women in the workforce is unprecedented. As the leader, he realized that without empowering women as a nation, China would not be able to ensure its enduring progression. He believed in strong and coherent leadership. In the 1950s, it was believed that collective efforts were the best way to a brighter future for the country. In the initial period, Mao stressed moral leadership. Mao had been able to combine both ideological and charismatic qualities creatively.

Mao on economy

Mao Zedong's idea of a national economy focused on socialization and equalization. In arguments on the country's political economy, uniqueness was found. He strongly argued that the wealth and property of the country must not be owned by a few people. Mao was never permitted to control the economy of the country by the handful of capitalists and landlords. He believed the livelihood of the people cannot be controlled by the capitalists and rich people. It will create economic disparity, and society will be sharply divided into 'haves' and 'have-nots'. He was against European and American-typed economic systems. He even opposed allowing a semi-feudal society in China. In New Democracy, the economy will be nationalized. The large banks, industries, commercial enterprises, railways, and airlines will be state-owned and state-controlled. In the new democratic republic, all of the state enterprises should be based on a socialist character. In the first three decades, the Chinese economy was controlled by the Communist Party, which was fundamentally different than liberal market economy-based ideas.

As the first Asian socialist country, from the very beginning, Mao had taken an approach to a non-market economy. He could not use the massive human resources for importing goods and services to other countries. The Soviet-type system was introduced in China. From the beginning of the 1950s, China introduced the centrally controlled planning commission, which was not favorable for the flourishing of large-scale industries and commerce. Agriculture was not connected with the industry. The communes of the rural people had no role in accelerating the national economy. Through the rationing system, agricultural products were collected by the government, and a small portion of agricultural products was allocated to households through markets. The centralized economic policy was responsible for the economic disaster from 1959 to 1961. From 1966 to 1976, the Chinese government emphasized cultural revolution to achieve a political goal. The stress of the Cultural Revolution disrupted economic growth. During that time, the Chinese economy was confined.

The Chinese government was not desperate to export its products using a huge labour force. Due to a closed-door economic policy, China had witnessed a low rate of economic growth. In early 1960, the government of China had stopped publishing data on the economic performance of the government. Due to the poor economic performance of the government, many people are experiencing famine. From 1959 to 1961, about 30 million people in China died due to famine. Describing the institutions was easier than measuring performance because, from 1958 to 1960, China published data that grossly exaggerated China's economic performance. Due to the

centralized socialist order, the Chinese economist had to follow the party line regarding the publication of actual economic data of the government. During the regime of Mao, no negative policies and strategies were published publicly. Despite having the surveillance of the government in publishing economic data and other research work related to the Chinese economy, some economists tried to publish the real scenario of the Chinese development.

Patnaik U,¹⁹ has mentioned that after achieving its independence, China had to struggle a lot to develop its economic system. Under the strict economic policy of Mao, the Chinese people toiled a lot over the decades. Now, China is enjoying its dividends. The PRC is the largest economy in the world today. During the period 1949-1979, by applying Mao's 'socialist market economy', the Chinese economy has been progressed a lot. Mao had taken a unique strategy from the early fifties through pursuing a policy of balanced growth. He wanted to ensure equal development in the agricultural and industrial sectors. The essential precondition for the entire development process was to implement a comprehensive land reform act. It was a very cannoning task for Mao to redistribute lands from the hand of landlords. In a newly introduced egalitarian system, the key contribution of Mao was to ensure economic and social development.

Mao and the Peasantry

Mao's obsession with the peasantry is one of the most documented issues in the history of the Chinese Communist movement. Before 1926, Mao was a bureaucrat charged with coordinating the works of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) and the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT). The peasant movement was initially started in Hunan province. Mao, as an expert on peasantry recognized by China Communist Party, returned to Hunan in 1926. He spent August 1926 to May 1927 in Hunan with peasants of the region. Before coming back to the Hunan province, he was an orthodox Marxist. As an orthodox, he wrote in his article entitled 'Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society' that "to sum up, it can be seen that our enemies are all those in league with imperialism – the warlords, the bureaucrats, the comparator class, the big landlord class, and the reactionary section of the intelligentsia attached to them. The leading force in our revolution is the industrial proletariat. Our closest friends are the entire semi-bourgeoisie, their right-wing may become our enemy and their left-wing become our friend – but we must be constantly on our guard and not let them create confusion within our ranks".²⁰ But within the last quarter of 1926, he changed his previous conception and tried to understand that the central role in the revolutionary movement would be played by the peasants.

He understood that the role of peasants is more important than workers of the revolutionary movement in China. So, after coming back to Hunan, his first task was had mobilize peasants from anti-urban biases for strengthening coordination between urban and countryside by making a bridge between rural peasants and the urban proletariat. He understood that only the rural economy would be able to strengthen the economy and society of new China. So, he wanted to change the rural society and economy of China with the help of the peasantry. He understood that the total anti-modern and utopian instincts of socialism were a hindrance in the process of socialism. In that context, he was immensely dependent upon the peasant class for organizing a strong revolutionary movement for new China. He spent most of the time with tenants, whose size of the land was very small.

He observed that the tenants who depended on the landowner's land enjoyed 50 percent of the production, and landlords took another 50 percent of the production from their tenants as ownership of the lands and capital. At that time, warlords also imposed a heavy tax

on the peasants. The situation led to tenants being bankrupted, and landlords recruited such peasants as warlords' armies. That situation led to the peasant movement in China. The situation was the reality across rural China. So, the peasant movement spread across China from village to center. The peasant movement in China was organized from the district level to the central level under the leadership of peasant leaders.

The basic objective of the present movement was to overthrow the feudal rule of the local oppressors and evil elites. As per Mao's version, cooperative and coordinating principles are required in organizing the present movement, which was present in the then China. If we study his famous writings and reports related to the peasant movement, we can reach an understanding of the role of the peasantry in making a new China. In this regard, Mao's famous Report 'On an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan' is considered the groundwork of the peasant movement in China, which deals with the role of the peasant in the movement. He explained anti-landlord measures taken by the peasants of Hunan as "several hundred million peasants will arrive like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants, and evil gentry into their graves".^{21,22}

As per Mao, poor peasants were the main force in the fight against all in the countryside. He described poor peasants as 'vanguards of revolution'.^{21,22} In 1939, Mao stated that 'the positive or negative attitude of the middle peasants is one of the factors determining victory or defeat in the revolution, and this is especially true after the agrarian revolution when they become the majority of the rural population'.²³ As per the direction of Mao, the peasants played a significant role in spreading education in rural areas, resulting in rapid improvement of their cultural level. In that way, rural China will lead China's society.

If we studied Mao's famous report on 'An Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan', which explained the role of the Hunan Peasant Association, we have understood the role of peasants in the Chinese revolutionary movement. In his report, he asserted that the current rise of the peasant movement represents a monumental occurrence. In a remarkably brief period, hundreds of millions of peasants from China's central, southern, and northern provinces will converge with the force of a tempest, akin to a hurricane an unstoppable and fierce power that no authority, regardless of its magnitude, can restrain. They will break free from all constraints that bind them and advance resolutely on the path to liberation. This movement will eradicate all imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants, and malevolent gentry. Each revolutionary party and every comrade will face scrutiny, ultimately being either embraced or rejected based on their decisions.^{21,22}

Contribution to socialist thought

In the late 1950s, Mao ordered the Great Leap Forward, finally instigating widespread interruption and food shortages. Mao believed in a personality cult and centralization of power. To remain in power, he toppled one of his competitors after another in the party. Mao made a great contribution to changing Chinese society and economy. He introduced new democracy, cultural revolution, and nationalization of big enterprises, and abolished bourgeois from the country. During his time, China achieved massive economic growth. Noumoff SJ,²⁴ argued that Mao's contributions to socialist thought can be divided into two basic themes—firstly, stages of revolutionary transformation, and secondly, the give a clear-cut doctrine on productive relations in a semi-feudal society. Mao deserves more appreciation for implementing

the socialist system as the first country in Asia. At the same time, Mao's doctrine of socialism has helped a lot in the enrichment of Socialist Literature. His idea of revolution was different than Lenin's idea of revolution. He applied revolution in the context of China, and he tried to put some strong arguments for implementing revolution in China. His idea of the political economy added a new avenue to socialist thought. Selden M,²⁵ argued that Mao's leadership of the great proletarian cultural revolution and the great forward leap were indeed valuable contributions to socialist thought. His contribution is a combination of theory and practice. He had to cross a lot of hurdles to uplift the poor economy of China within a strict socialist structure.

Mao Zedong (1893-1976) is remembered as China's supreme exponent of Marxist and Leninist thought and the paramount leader. His contribution to socialist thought and theory is unprecedented. His rise from a junior party leader to a national leader gives us a lesson about the quality of leadership. Author of Maoism. Mao believed in a personality cult. His writings and doctrine are applied by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) today.²⁶ Mao was born a revolutionary. The idea of nationalism, socialism, and economic development was sparked by this revolutionary thinking. The Chinese system is still following the intellectual input of Mao. Mao contributed a lot to socialist thought regarding the nature and art of leadership. The applicability of Maoist ideology has been noticed in India, Nepal, Vietnam, in some Latin American countries. His mechanism in implementing the social learning process and his idea on the superstructure are the assets of socialist thought. Mao's famous book entitled 'On New Democracy' is the most insightful contribution. This book was very popular among urban readers. In the 1950s, Mao contributed a lot with his idea for the People's Republic. This concept was principally practical. In the early 1950s, his contribution to anti-corruption campaigns was highly solicited.²⁷

Mao believed in self and mutual criticism. Mao's famous slogan was 'to rebel is justified. This slogan was misused by Red Guard youth teams. They terrorized communities through this slogan. Another message of Mao was 'learn from the masses'.²⁸ Mao was aware of the cost of resisting 'revisionism'.²⁹ Mao was the supreme contemporary Marxist. He successfully combined the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the application of Chinese and world revolutions.³⁰

Mao in shaping foreign policy of China

The contribution of Mao is not only confined to providing a new dogma for a newly created socialist state. When China was born then the global political milieu was going through a transformation to adopt a new system that was based on a bipolar power-equated play. In foreign policy, from the very beginning, Mao tilted with the erstwhile USSR. Later on, it extended its friendship with other socialist states, such as Cuba, North Korea, etc. Mao maintained a distance from the capitalist bloc, especially from the USA. The ideology played a key role in the foreign policy of China. India was the second country in the world which recognize China as an independent country. The policy of Pancasila was adopted by both New Delhi and Beijing as a gesture of friendship and peaceful coexistence. However, due to the Chinese expansionist policy, the friendship between India and China did not last long. China attacked India twice in 1962 and 1965, which was unexpected by India.³¹ China gradually became ambitious under the leadership of Mao to exercise its power in global politics. After becoming a permanent member of the Security Council of the UNO, Mao Zedong realized to make a separate entity in global politics. However, in the earlier stage, the economic diplomacy of Mao Zedong was not properly shaped and effective. Due to being an ago-based economy, no such significant industrial manufactured

goods were exported by China during Mao's era. The ideology played a pivotal role that led China to keep its distance from the USA. Over the last few years, more specifically, from the first term of Donald Trump, the trade war between China and the USA started in 2017.³² However, this trade completion between Beijing and Washington has an old history that implicitly developed during Mao's time. Today, China has successfully exercised its economic diplomacy across the globe. The over emphasize on ideology-based foreign policy has been declined in China. In this context, Mao has been irrelevant in China's present foreign policy.

Critical assessment and conclusion

Mao Zedong, the icon of China, played a key role not only in modernizing China but also in societal change and strengthening Chinese security. Specifically, the contribution of Mao Zedong can be mentioned through some aspects—firstly, Mao took a path of self-reliant economic policy which was free from external intervention. Secondly, feeding billions of people was a hard task in Mao's time. Hunger, poverty, and famine were the basic challenges of Chinese society at his time. By implementing welfarism and equal distributive policy, he tried to resolve these problems. Thirdly, implementing a land reform policy by breaking through the feudal system was not a very easy task for Mao. To eliminate economic discrimination in an agricultural-based society, it was needed to make happy to the economic interest of the peasants. The question of peasant interest was excellently addressed by Mao through land reforms. Fourthly, in a semi-feudal society, he successfully tried to ensure that both heavy and small-scale industries generated indigenous capital and jobs. Fifthly, the elimination of capitalist control over the national economy was a challenge to Mao. He succeeded in introducing an egalitarian and participatory society.³³ Sixthly, Mao wanted to connect the Chinese revolution with the global proletariat-socialist revolution. The world view of Mao on revolution had brought a uniqueness. Finally, Mao introduced the new concept of revolution (cultural revolution) and also introduced a new concept of democracy within an egalitarian structure (new democracy). Despite having criticism of his way of ruling, there is no doubt about his charismatic and bold leadership. Without ironic rules and regulations, it was impossible to mobilize the huge population of a backward society.

The ideas and activities of Mao Zedong have contributed to some new dimensions in political thought. Many of his ideas and strategies were unique. The applicability of socialism in the manner of 'new democracy' can claim novelty. His works have been both appreciated and criticized. Some of his strategies were not successful. Mao's initiative of the Great Leap Forward (1958-62) was unsuccessful. It considerably weakened Mao's position in the Communist Party. Party factionalism was intensified in the last phase of his life. He led the peasants and workers to organize the great revolution and cultural revolution. He realized that integrating the slipping society of China is a tough job. He took a lot of hazards to organize the proletariat revolution in an agricultural-based, backward, and unequalitarian society. He believed that revolution is a continuous process and to be it alive. He advised identifying the hidden enemies in the party and intellectual circles and eliminating them.

Peace is one of the perpetual ideas. The contribution of Mahatma Gandhi is highly respected by the global community for his contribution to global peace. Most regions of the globe, including South Asia, are facing problems in peacebuilding.³⁴ Mao did not contribute anything towards global peace. There is no impact of Mao in the foreign policy of China towards South Asia, especially peace building. Only economic dominance has been reflected by the

contemporary Chinese leaders not only in South Asia but also most of the reasons of the world. From the perspective of China, no doubt that a charismatic leader like Mao was needed for China to unite the scattered Chinese people. Initially, the entire third world people were inspired Mao. But neutrally speaking, in a brought sense, Mao was not able to be a global leader with a broader spectrum. From political dogma to foreign policy, the narrow national interests and power have been reflected in the activities and writings of Mao Zedong. The unprecedented COVID-19 originated in Wuhan of China, in early 2020.³⁵ The entire world has been affected by it. Unfortunately, the Chinese government never apologized for it. The desperate attitude of the Chinese foreign policy has originated from Mao and is continued by the present President also. However, China changed the original shape of Mao's foreign policy after his death. Political economy plays a significant today's world.³⁶ Economic liberalization has been the key motto of China, where rigid principles of Mao's dogma have been diluted.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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