

History Revolutions: China
Teach Yourself Series
Topic 2: Historians views

SAMPLE

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Historical Inquiry

Revolutions are the great disjuncture of modern times and mark deliberate attempts at new directions. They share the common aim of breaking with the past by destroying the regimes and societies that engender them and embarking on a program of political and social transformation. As processes of dramatically accelerated social change, revolutions have a profound impact on the country in which they occur, as well as important international repercussions.

As revolutions involve destruction and construction, dispossession and liberation, they polarise society and unleash civil war and counter-revolution, making survival and consolidation of the revolution the principal concern of the revolutionary state. In defence of the revolution, under attack from within and without, revolutionary governments often deploy armed forces and institute policies of terror and repression. The process of revolution concludes when a point of stability has been reached and a viable revolutionary settlement made.

Revolutions in history have been reconsidered and debated by historians. The study of a revolution should consider differing perspectives and the reasons why different groups have made different judgments of the history of the revolution.

How to use this resource

This topic relates to Area of Study 1 and 2 of the Chinese Revolution between 1912 and 1971. Outcome 1 details what students are expected to expertly know in the development of the revolution within Area of Study 1. While Outcome 2 details what students are expected to expertly know in the post-revolutionary period within Area of Study 2. These outcomes will need to be demonstrated by students in School Assessed Coursework tasks and in the History Revolutions end-of-year examination.

Outcome 1

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse the **causes** of revolution, and evaluate the contribution of significant ideas, events, individuals and popular movements.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

Outcome 2

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse the **consequences** of revolution and evaluate the extent of change brought to society.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

In the exam you will be required to evaluate the usefulness of different sources on the causes of the revolution. You will be required to know different views on the revolution from a variety of historians and use these views to support your own view or to recognise the argument behind the causes of the revolution. You will also need to be familiar with the views of historians on the creation of the new society and to recognise arguments behind the success of the new society.

There are many prominent historians in the Chinese revolution. Two prominent historians on the revolution with some sample quotes are shown below.

These historians are used as examples for you as they tend to be polar opposites on the spectrum of analysing the revolution. When looking for different opinions on Mao Zedong, the Long March or even the Great Leap Forward you can almost be assured that the opinions of these authors will vary. Most other historians tend to fit somewhere in the middle.

Jung Chang & Jon Halliday

Books: *Madame Sun Yat-sen* (Halliday, 1986) *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (Chang, 1992) *Mao: the Unknown Story* (co-authored, 2005)

Perspective: Liberal revisionist, fervently anti-Mao

Jung Chang lived in China as a young girl and was greatly affected by the Cultural Revolution when her father was labelled as a rightist. She moved to Britain and married Jon Halliday and together they developed what is known as scar-literature. Scar-literature is usually anti-Maoist in sentiment written by people directly affected by the Communist regime.

Quotations:

“Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong], who for decades held absolute power over the lives of one-quarter of the world’s population, was responsible for well over 70 million deaths in peacetime, more than any other 20th century leader.”

“Mao claimed later that when he was a boy in Shaoshan he had been stirred by concern for poor peasants. There is no evidence for this. He said he had been influenced by a certain P’ang, who had been arrested and beheaded after leading a local peasant revolt, but an exhaustive search by Party historians for this hero has failed to turn up any trace of him. There is no sign that Mao derived from his peasant roots any social concerns or sense of injustice. Mao evinced no particular sympathy for peasants.”

Edgar Snow

Profession(s): Journalist and writer

Books: *Red Star Over China* (1937) *Red Star Over China: the Other Side of the River* (1962) *The Long Revolution* (1972).

Perspective: Pro-communist

Edgar Snow was a devout American Communist so his versions of key aspects of the revolution tend to always show sympathy to the Communists. He also had much of the information he acquired dictated to him by Mao and other leading Communists particularly at Yen-an, after the Long March.

Quotations:

“I found Mao living in a ‘modern’ three-room cave in the hills just outside Yen-an. I noticed again the unusual repose of the man; nothing seems to ruffle him. He is gradually acquiring a kind of benignity. He is pronouncedly less tense than Chiang Kai-shek.”

“Suddenly, on the southern shore, comrades began to shout with joy. ‘Long live the Red Army! Long live the Revolution!’ For the enemy was withdrawing in flight. More Reds now swarmed over the chains, and arrived to help put out the fire and replace the boards. In an hour or two the whole army was joyously tramping and singing its way across the river into Szechuan. Far overhead angrily and impotently roared the planes of Chiang Kai-shek, and the Reds cried out in delirious challenge to them.”

“The truth is that if I have written anything useful about China it has been merely because I listened to what I thought I heard the Chinese people saying about themselves. I wrote it down, as honestly and as frankly as I could.”

In the questions below you should look to use quotes from different historians in your responses. There are many different quotes that could be used within your own responses in an exam question so the more historian’s quotes you can use now and remember, will benefit you in the exam. Understanding the different perspectives of historians will give you a better idea of which historians quotes to look for when looking to use their views in your own response.

Some other prominent historians and publications are shown below-

Gray, J 1990, *Rebellions and Revolutions China from the 1880s to the 1980s*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Well-organised and accessible general reference; occasional discussion of alternative interpretations of events.

Hsu, Immanuel 1995, *The Rise of Modern China*, 5th edn, Oxford University Press, New York.

Useful general reference with analytical summaries at the end of each chapter; includes some extracts from documents.

Li, D (ed.) 1969, *The Road to Communism: China since 1912*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York.

Well-organised collection of documents with introductions placing them in a historical context.

Meisner, M 1986, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic*, The Free Press New York.

Revised and extended edition of 1977; valuable analysis of the Yanan period on the development of Maoism.

Spence, J 1981, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution 1895 to 1980*, Penguin, New York.

History through the eyes and experiences of writers and intellectuals.

Importantly, you should use your text book and a variety of other sources to answer the questions in this topic. Your answers should be extensive using the number of lines provided as a guide to respond. Within your responses you should include key evidence to support your explanation. This will give you some of the skills you will need to complete the History Revolutions end-of-year examination and School Assessed Coursework tasks which require, for the most part, precision in extended written responses.

The sample responses that are provided at the end of the topic questions are not unique. They are deliberately quite general in order to cover a wider variety of information that students may produce during the course of their investigation. You should not look to the sample answers to judge yourself in a right or wrong type of context but use them to give a guide to your understanding of the concepts explored.

Solutions to Review Questions

1. a)

- Sun Yat-sen relinquished his Presidency in favour of ex-Qing General Yuan Shikai as a trade off for Yuan forcing the abdication of the Qing.
- Sun provided the popular and easy to comprehend revolutionary principles of Nationalism, democracy and livelihood. The *Three Principle's of the People*.
- Sun Yat-sen transformed his revolutionary movement, the *Tongmenghui* into a political party, the Guomindang by 1912.
- Sun set up the Huangpu Military Academy to train the armed wing of the Guomindang to fight against warlords after 1916.
- Sun created the First United Front against the warlords with the Communists in 1923. He also secured international help from the Soviet Union's Comintern.
- Sun died suddenly in 1925.

b)

- Sun played a pivotal role in bringing down the Qing and unifying the country by dealing with Yuan Shikai to create a constitutional republic. Sun unselfishly gave up the Presidency in favour of Yuan and in turn Yuan dealt with the issue of the Qing. The fact that Yuan had outmaneuvered Sun was an unfortunate result of this.
- Sun was instrumental in militarising the Guomindang and forging a relationship with the Communists that in turn helped to defeat warlords after his death in 1925.
- Some historians believe Sun's greatest legacy was his ideas. The *Three principles of the people* would provide a blueprint for the revolution that revolutionary leaders such as Mao Zedong would attempt to implement by 1949.
- Another point of view is that Sun had been naïve and too trusting of Yuan Shikai. Sun should have realised that Yuan had no intention of leading a democracy and this pushed China into the period of dictatorial rule by Yuan and then fragmentation by the warlords.

2. a)

- Mao retreated to the Jiangxi Mountains along with other CCP members in the years after the 1927 Shanghai Massacre and White Terror purges. Mao and Zhu De formed the Red Army and set up the soviet of over 3 million by forging links with the peasantry.
- Mao believed that the peasantry was the true revolutionary class and not the proletariat as dictated by Marxist doctrine. Mao helped instill policies of land redistribution for peasants and used guerrilla tactics as a basis to protect the soviet against attack from the Nationalists.

- Mao was replaced in October 1932 as leader of the soviet and as Red Army commander being accused by the party hierarchy of reckless adventurism.

b)

- Mao used the Jiangxi soviet to form the Red Army and forge further links with the peasantry. His leadership at Jiangxi was circumstantial as CCP leaders were held up hiding in the cities. Mao founded the ideals behind the relationship between the Red Army and the peasants and worked closely with Zhu De to create a blueprint for an ideal communist society.
- Another point of view is that Mao had less influence on the soviet than has been reported later on. Mao also used repressive measures and purges to consolidate control. Mao was moved aside through necessity once the true CCP leadership, the *28 Bolsheviks*, arrived from Shanghai. For many historians this was the beginning of Mao's lust for control and power at the cost of people's freedom.

3. a)

- The Nationalist decade provided a return to a largely unified China. Chiang Kai-shek had established himself as leader and would oversee transition to a constitutional republic. For the people there were some popular reforms and modernisations; however the New Life Movement contributed to a reversion to some traditional aspects of Chinese society to balance the progressive ideas that had enveloped society since the New Culture Movement of the 1920's.
- Chiang also dabbled in quasi-fascist policies as a means to control society and create stability by 1937. The people had become frustrated over Chiang's inability to deal with the emerging threat of the Japanese who had invaded Manchuria by 1931 whilst continuing his attack on the communists during the 1930's.

b)

- The prevailing view is that the regime suffered as a result of incompetent leadership. It was Chiang Kai-shek's reluctance to move through the steps of *political tutelage* and his hold on power that affected the regime greatly. The New Life Movement was another mechanism that was used to control the population. Largely Chiang was not able to achieve any of Sun's *three principles* and nor did it appear that he was trying. The regime was corrupt and criminal activity was rife.
- A more sympathetic view of the regime is one that recognises the crises that China found itself in after 1931 with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Furthermore although living standards had not improved as fast as many would have hoped, it had been better than that previous. Some attempts with limited success on modernisations in the industry and better relations with foreign powers had brought China into the international community.

4. a)

- Chiang Kai-shek was a popular leader of the Nationalist regime; however his support would diminish over time as he moved away from the ideals that the Guomindang were founded upon.
- Chiang made little attempt to implement democracy in China or move through the stages of political tutelage as a blueprint plan to transform China into a democratic constitutional republic.
- Chiang dabbled in quasi-fascist policies that took on some of the more authoritarian measures to keep control of society.
Chiang did little to improve the livelihood of the peasantry as he rejected the idea of land reform and protected his support of the bourgeois class. Taxes increased heavily as the regime struggled to control the weak Chinese economy.