

In what ways did the Cultural Revolution bring about fundamental changes in China? Explain your answer with reference to the history of China in the second half of the 20th century.

Fundamental changes refer to significant differences between before and after something happens, characterizing a turning point. Spanning as many as 10 years, the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) had catastrophic consequences but also prompted the Communist Party to start important reforms that led to sweeping changes in China in political, economic, educational and diplomatic aspects. The situation changed completely after the Cultural Revolution.

In political aspect, China pursued class unity instead of having class struggles, showing fundamental changes. Before the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong '*took class struggle as the key link* 以階級鬥爭為綱' to eradicate corrupt and reactionary elements. For example, between 1952-52, he started the 'Three-Anti' and 'Five-Anti' Campaigns against corruption, stealing state economic information and other malpractices. Also, by drafting the *May 16 Notice* 五一六通知 in 1965, he called on the masses to fight against '*capitalist roaders* 走資派' and '*revisionists* 修正主義分子' with Liu Xiaogi as the main target. These purges led to the Cultural Revolution, which taught the Chinese a painful lesson. During the ten years of political struggles, there was enduring paralysis affecting party, national and regional government institutions. Also, politicians with dishonest intentions such as *Lin Biao* 林彪 and the *Gang of Four* 四人幫 started repeated coups and struggles, creating the '*San Xin Weiji* 三信危機' that threatened the communist rule. After the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping realized that class struggle worked against China's modernization with the instability caused. Therefore, at the *Third Plenum of the 11th CCPCC* 第十一屆三中全會, he abandoned the principle of 'taking class struggle as the key link' and asked for collective efforts of the officials and people to build the economy, stabilizing China politically in a gradual way. Comparatively speaking, China before the Cultural Revolution was politically unstable due to relentless class struggles started by Mao against the opposition, but there was political stability after the Revolution since the painful lesson prompted Deng to abandon class struggle as the key link and ask for class unity in favor of economic development. Therefore, the Cultural Revolution did transform China politically.

In economic aspect, China adopted the Reform and Opening Up policy instead of remaining self-contained, displaying fundamental changes. Before the Cultural Revolution, China had a *self-sufficient* 自給自足 economic model that relied on *collective* 集體化 production for higher productivity. For example, *Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives* 農業生產合作社 were established during the *First Five-Year Plan* 一五計劃(1953-57) to strengthen cooperation among peasants, and the nationwide iron and steel production campaign was launched during the *Great Leap Forward* 大躍進 to start large-scale steel production with the manpower and technique possessed by China. Despite Liu Xiaogi's policy of '*three freedoms and one fixed quota* 三自一包' (1961-65) for more flexibility in agricultural production, China remained economically self-contained and had loose trade ties with other countries. However, during the Cultural Revolution, political purges diverted people's attention from economic development and cost China as much as 500 billion yuan in national income. After the Cultural Revolution, Deng was determined to revive China's economy by abandoning the self-sufficient model and proposing the *Reform and Opening Up policy* 改革開放 in 1978, under which cities like *Shenzhen* 深圳, *Guangzhou* 廣州 and *Xiamen* 廈門 were successively opened up for foreign trade. In addition, he relaxed control over the economy as exemplified by the *household responsibility system* 農業承包制 adopted in 1978 that replaced the collective production mode. The system allowed peasants to sell their surplus crops in the market, giving a great boost to China's economic development. Comparatively speaking, China before the Cultural Revolution held to self-containment and collective production, but the country became flawed with problems after the Revolution and Deng adopted the Reform and Opening Up policy and promoted individualization in production to increase economic ties with other countries and boost economic growth. Therefore, the Revolution was clearly a turning point for the country's economic model.

In educational aspect, China changed from disregarding education to emphasizing it, showing fundamental changes. Before the Cultural Revolution, education received little attention since Mao relied on the power of the masses instead of professional expertise to promote modernization. For example, the *Great Leap Forward* 大躍進 was characterized by its lack of skills and technique as well as the reliance on the masses. It was true that Liu Xiaogi recognized the importance of education and released some intellectuals who were once branded ‘rightists’. Nevertheless, as soon as the Cultural Revolution started, knowledge was deemed the source of reactionary thoughts and sayings like ‘*study is useless, the more you study the more stupid you become* 讀書無用，愈讀愈蠢’ prevailed across the country. Students gave up their studies with no knowledge or professional skills acquired. The enormous adverse impact gave Deng a clear message that China could not become strong without education foundation. Therefore, after the Revolution, Deng recognized the importance of education and stressed that education was the prerequisite of the *Four Modernizations* 四個現代化. Not only did Deng restart 60 key universities, but he also added 28 other higher educational institutions to the list to make the total number of key universities 88 in 1978. In addition, he ensured universal access to education with the *Compulsory Education Law* 義務教育法 of 1986 that guaranteed 9 years of tuition-free education. Comparatively speaking, China before the Cultural Revolution disregarded education and had stagnant development in this field, but the painful lesson from the Revolution prompted Deng to put emphasis on education and regard it as the foundation for national development, leading to improvements in basic and higher education. Therefore, the Cultural Revolution brought about fundamental changes in China in educational aspect.

In diplomatic aspect, the Cultural Revolution was the turning point when China abandoned diplomatic isolation for multilateral diplomacy. Before the Cultural Revolution, China adopted a unilateral foreign policy by building close relations with only communist countries and staying hostile towards the capitalist ones. For example, China joined the *Korean War* 韓戰(1950-53) against South Korea and the US and had worsening relationship with the West as a result. Worse still, in the late 1950s, Mao disagreed with Soviet leader *Khrushchev* 赫魯曉夫 and the Sino-Soviet split was resulted. During the Cultural Revolution, China displayed strong anti-Western sentiments at first with the Red Guards, who linked all foreign things to capitalism, attacking foreign legations. As a result, the relations between China and other countries were in deep freeze. It was the complete isolation that forced Mao to improve China's foreign relations since the early 1970s. For instance, China used *Ping-Pong diplomacy* 乒乓外交(1971) to improve its relationship with the US and established official diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972, rebuilding its ties with other countries. After the Revolution, the CCP gave up class struggle as the way of developing the country and introduced the Reform and Opening Up policy, which led to further improvement in the relationship between China and other countries. For example, the normalization of *Sino-Soviet* 中、蘇 relations took place in 1985 and China's official diplomatic relations with *South Korea* 南韓 were established in 1992. By the end of the 20th century, China resumed diplomatic relations with major countries and was on the way to multilateral diplomacy. Comparatively speaking, China before the Cultural Revolution was rather isolated and had bad relations with various countries, but the Revolution caused complete diplomatic isolation that forced the Chinese government to improve its relationship with other countries and led to active efforts to achieve multilateral diplomacy during the Reform and Opening Up period. Therefore, the Cultural Revolution did bring about fundamental changes in China's diplomacy.

In conclusion, the Cultural Revolution was undoubtedly a '10-year disaster' for China, but the Deng regime drew a lesson from it and made various important reforms to transform China fundamentally in the above aspects. The Revolution was therefore an important turning point in modern Chinese history.

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