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| The ‘Rectification of conduct’ Campaign 1942-4 |  | History  Mao’s period  Grade 12 |
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What methods did Mao use to enforce his authority at Yanan?

For all its claims to be a movement of liberation, the brand of Communism that Mao developed at Yanan was fundamentally oppressive.

Discipline and obedience to instructions were required to all those living under it. In one sense this was understandable, given that the regime was engaged in a constant fight for survival against both the Japanese and the GMD. But it went deeper than that.

Mao had begun to manifest a belief that was to become a dominant feature of his outlook- the notion of **revolutionary correctness** (*the idea that Chinese Communism- Maoism- was a body of political, social and economical truth which all CCP members had to accept and live by).*

He held that, unless the party maintained a constant struggle against wrong thinking, the revolution would be betrayed from within.

For Mao, an obvious dander was that those responsible for running the party would become a bureaucratic, self-justifying elite. To fight this tendency, in 1942 he launched the ‘Rectification of conduct’ campaign. Party members were to engage in public self-criticism. To assist them in their search for revolutionary truth they were obliged to study prescribed texts, among which Mao’s own writings figured prominently.

The chief organizer of the rectification campaign was Mao’s head of security **Kang Sheng**. A frightening figure, who dressed totally in black and rode a jet-black horse, Kang, asserting that 70% of the party were infected by **revisionist** (*Reactionary, anti-party thinking)* ideas, made it his task to expose and punish them. In Mao’s name, Kang ordered the arrest of some 1000 CCP members, many of whom were subsequently imprisoned and tortured.

Peter Vladimirov, a Russian Comintern agent, described the oppressive atmosphere that he observed at first hand in Yanan:

*“Party discipline is based on stupidity rigid forms of criticism and self-criticism. The president of each*

*cell decided who is to be criticized and for what reason. In general it is a communist who is attacked*

*each time. The accused has only one right: to repent his ‘errors’…. The cruel method of psychological coercion*

*that Mao calls moral purification has created a stifling atmosphere inside the party in Yanan. A number*

*of party activists in the region have committed suicide, have fled or have become psychotic.*

Vladimirov was not exaggerating the psychological effects of the rectification campaign. 60 Communist Party official committed suicide rather than undergo public humiliation. Mao did relent a little in the light of such grim news and lessened the severity of the campaign, but he was in no way apologetic about the need for the rectification process itself.

He curtly dismissed suggestions that individual suffering should be allowed to modify party policy.

Notable victims of the rectification campaign were **Wang Shiwei** and **Ding Ling**. Wang was a brilliant young Communist writer who in 1942 published an article heavily critical of members of the CCP who lived comfortable lives in Yanan while Red Army comrades were dying in the struggle against the Japanese and the GMD. For this, he was rounded on by those party officials who felt they had been implicitly accused. Mao, angered by Wang Shiwei’s charge that he as leaser was deporting himself irresponsibility with pretty young women, backed the officials and chose to attack Wang as representing the **intellectual class** he despised.

Initially, a number of other writers came to Wang’s defence. One of these was the feminist Ding Ling, who had joined the CCP only to be shocked by what she regarded as the party’s hypocrisy in relation to the principle of female equality.

The CCP claimed to treat women as equals, but her experience was that women in the party were in practice treated as inferiors. However, when Ding made her findings public she was brought before a party gathering and accused of insulting the CCP. She broke under the pressure, withdrew her previous criticisms and also abandoned Wang Shiwei. Left friendless, Wang was then subjected to a **show trial** (*public hearings in which the accused is paraded as an enemy of the people)* at which he was accused of ‘anti-party thinking’. He resisted bravely, refusing to retract what he had written. But, his courage earned him a life sentence and eventual execution in 1947 on Mao’s personal order. His body was chopped into small bits and thrown in a well.

Wang Shiwei’s disgrace had the intended effect. It put the frighteners on the CCP’s officials. Between 1943 and 1944, leading party members came forward and engaged in public self-criticism. It was an extraordinary spectacle. Expressing contrition for past mistakes, they pledged total loyalty to Mao Zedong and the party. Even Zhou Enlai admitted to having previously been dilatory in supporting Mao.

**Consequences of the Rectification Movement**

* Mao had rid himself of opposition and consolidated his position as leader.
* Mao had finally triumphed over the pro-Moscow wing of the party.
* Mao had begun to move towards **cult status** *(a position that entitles the holder to a special veneration among the people)* in Yanan.
* Chinese Communism was now so closely identified with Mao personally that it had become Maoism.
* Mao’s election as Chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP in 1943 was a formal recognition of his dominance over the Party.
* By 1945, when the Japanese war came to an end, Mao was being regularly referred as the **‘great helmsman**’ (*a reference to Mao’s supposed wisdom and ability in guiding the ship of state)*