

= Early life of Mao Zedong =

The early life of Chinese revolutionary and politician Mao Zedong covered the first 27 years of his life , from 1893 to 1919 . Born in Shaoshanchong , Shaoshan in Hunan province , Mao grew up as the son of Mao Yichang , a wealthy farmer and landowner . Sent to the local Shaoshan Primary School , Mao was brought up in an environment of Confucianism , but reacted against this from an early age , developing political ideas from pro @-@ western literature . Aged 13 his father organised a marriage for him with Luo Yigu , the daughter of another land @-@ owning family , but Mao denounced the marriage and moved away from home .

In 1911 Mao began further education in the Hunanese capital of Changsha , where he came under the influence of republicanism , and became an admirer of republican revolutionary Sun Yat @-@ Sen. When the Xinhai Revolution broke out between republicans and monarchists , Mao signed up as a soldier , although conflict subsided and he left the army after six months . Seeing himself as an intellectual , he became heavily influenced by classical liberalism , and began studying at the First Normal School of Changsha , as well as penning his first publications . With Xiao Zisheng he co @-@ founded the Renovation of the People Study Society in April 1918 to discuss and perpetuate revolutionary ideas among students , before graduating in June 1919 .

= = Childhood = =

Mao biographer Lee Feigon asserted that Mao experienced " a relatively typical childhood " . He commented that it was for this reason that previous biographers had found it difficult to " find something fundamentally wrong with Mao from an early age " with which they had hoped to explain his later development into " a revolutionary tyrant " .

= = Birth : 1893 = = =

Mao was born on December 26 , 1893 in his familiar home in the rural village of Shaoshanchong in Xiangtan county , Hunan Province , part of south @-@ central China . Typical of many Hunanese villages , Shaoshanchong was situated in a narrow valley surrounded by mountains . Both the village and the nearest town , Shaoshan , were named for the local Shaoshan Mountain (" Music Mountain ") , a prominent feature in the local landscape with sacred associations for the region 's Buddhists . The village was inhabited by many individuals with the surname of Mao ; the Mao clan traced their lineage back to Mao Taihua , a warrior from Jiangxi Province who had moved to Xiangtan county in the mid @-@ fourteenth century after fighting for Zhu Yuanzhang 's military campaign to overthrow the Mongol @-@ governed Yuan dynasty .

Mao 's father , Mao Yichang , had been born in Shaoshanchong to a family of poverty before undergoing an arranged marriage to Mao 's mother , Wen Qimei , when he was fifteen years old . While Yichang had received two years of schooling and could read and write , conversely Qimei was illiterate . Serving for several years in the regional Xiang Army , Yichang saved up his wages and on leaving the army used these to pay off his family 's debts and purchase the lands that his father had sold . By the time of Zedong 's birth , Yichang owned two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half acres of rice paddy , which would have been considered a substantial amount by the standards of the region . Through frugal living and hard work , over the coming years he was able to purchase a further acre and employ two farm laborers , with his farm encompassing a cow shed , a grain storage hut , a pigsty , and a small mill . Expanding the family 's wealth , Yichang purchased mortgages on other peasants ' land , thus becoming their landlord , while also purchasing the grain from the poorest farmers in the village before selling it on for a profit at the county seat of Xiangtan . In doing so , he amassed a fortune of two to three thousand Chinese silver dollars at a time when the majority of China 's peasantry continued to live in poverty . This being the case , Mao biographer Philip Short could assert that the Mao family were " comfortably off " by the standards of the period .

According to the traditional lunar @-@ based Chinese calendar , Mao Zedong 's birth fell on the ninth day of the eleventh month of the Year of the Snake . After the birth , Mao 's mother ? who had

previously birthed two sons who had died in infancy ? was worried for his welfare , and consulted a Buddhist nun who lived as a hermit in the mountains for advice . The nun recommended that prayers be said for the child ; doing so , Qimei then prostrated herself at a local temple dedicated to the Buddhist Bodhisattva Guanyin , requesting that the Bodhisattva become Zedong 's foster @-@ mother .

Several biographers have suggested it likely that local traditional customs would have been observed after the birth ; in this circumstance , a rooster would have been presented to his parents , while Mao would probably not have been bathed until three days after the birth , an event which would have been the first culturally @-@ appropriate opportunity for guests to view the child . The child 's father was expected to add onion and ginger to the bath water , symbolizing mind and health , while also providing sacrifices to the spirits of the ancestors . A Daoist fortune @-@ teller was then employed to draw up a horoscope for the child , which revealed that he was lacking in the water element ; Mao was therefore given the personal name of Zedong because according to Hunanese custom the character of ze (" to anoint ") was deemed to correct this deficiency . The character of ze however had a dual meaning ; as well as referring to moisture , it also implied kindness and beneficence . Yichang chose the latter part of his son 's name , dong (" east ") , so that the child 's name would mean " benefactor of the east " .

According to traditional custom , the child was also given a second , unofficial name to be used on specific ceremonial occasions ; this was Runzhi (" Dewy Orchard ") . His mother gave him a third name , shisanyazi (" the Third Child Named Stone ") , which reflected that he was her third child while also protecting him from misfortune and linking to the protection offered by Guanyin . If traditional Hunanese customs were adhered to , the baby 's head would have been shaved after four weeks , with a small tuft of hair left on the crown and at the nape of the neck ; it was at this point that the child would have been officially given its name . According to tradition , visitors probably would have gathered for this ceremony , bringing gifts of money , pork , fish , fruit , and decorated eggs .

= = = Growing up : 1893 ? 1900 = = =

The Mao family lived in a clay @-@ brick farmhouse which had been constructed in 1878 , although Yichang oversaw its extension during Zedong 's boyhood . They occupied the eastern wing of their house , with the neighboring Zou family living in the western half . The building was large enough for Zedong to be allocated his own bedroom ; a rarity at the time . In front of the house was a pond and a rice paddy , while pine and bamboo groves grew behind the building . Aside from his parents , Mao lived at home with his paternal grandfather , Mao Enpu , until the latter 's death when Mao was ten . Mao 's paternal grandmother , Liu , had died in 1884 , nine years before his birth . When Zedong was two years old , his mother gave birth to her fourth child , Mao Zemin , with a further son , Mao Zetan , being born when Zedong was eleven . She also gave birth to two daughters , both of whom died in infancy , although soon after Zetan 's birth the couple adopted a baby girl , Zejian , who was the daughter of one of Mao 's paternal uncles .

As was common at the time , Mao began embarking on farming activities aged five or six , being instructed to watch over the cattle and tend to the ducks . Mao 's habits were heavily influenced by his peasant background ; biographer Stuart Schram suggested that this took the form of a " lack of social graces and of a concern either for comfort or appearances . " In later life , Mao would never become accustomed to the use of a toothbrush , instead retaining the habit of washing his mouth out with tea . Similarly , he continued to prefer cleaning himself with a steaming towel than with soap and water , again reflecting his peasant upbringing . Further , it was from traditional Hunanese cuisine that he developed his lifelong love of spicy food .

Qimei was a practising Buddhist , and encouraged her sons to follow Buddhist teachings ; embracing this faith , Zedong often accompanied her on visits to the local Buddhist temple , influencing her hopes that he would become a monk . Conversely , Yichang was largely irreligious , although after surviving an encounter with a tiger , gave offerings to the gods in thanks . According to Mao 's account , Yichang was a staunch disciplinarian , and would beat his children as

punishment for disobedience and a perceived lack of filial piety , with Mao describing the beating he received on one occasion when he humiliated his father in public . He added that his mother would often try to protect her children from these beatings .

During the 1930s , Mao would claim that he resented his father , viewing him as stingy and unaffectionate . He contrasted this with the affection he received from his mother , thus adopting a Marxist dialectical perspective by dividing the family into two camps : his mother and himself on one side , his father on another . Biographers have interpreted this filial relationship in different ways ; while Jung Chang and Jon Halliday stated that " Mao hated his father " , conversely , Schram pointed out that even in Mao 's accounts of Yichang , his description is nuanced , and " not simply one of unrelenting hatred " . Ross Terrill suggested that " Behind Zedong 's expressed hatred of his father was an unacknowledged identification ; he was driven to become an authoritarian like his father , and on a far grander scale . " Feigon has questioned the veracity of Mao 's account of this issue , suggesting that the alleged bad relationship between the two was " probably overstated " ; highlighting that Yichang clearly went to great efforts to financially support his son , Feigon also noted that the anti @-@ father trope was " wildly popular among young Chinese intellectuals " during the 1930s , and that Mao 's account hence may well be a reflection of this rather than reality .

= = = Shaoshan Primary School : 1901 ? 06 = = =

Yichang was keen for his eldest son to gain a basic education rooted in Confucianism , the dominant moral ideology of Chinese society ; he deemed a knowledge of Confucian teaching to be essential in allowing his son to develop key business and administrative skills . His hope was that Zedong would gain an apprenticeship with a Xiangtan rice merchant before taking over the family business and supporting his parents during their old age . Yichang was particularly adamant on the need to learn about Confucianism after losing a lawsuit over a parcel of land ; he believed that his opponent had been victorious in the dispute as a result of their ability to quote the sayings of ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius throughout their argument .

Thus , from the age of eight , Mao was sent to gain a basic education at the private Shaoshan Primary School . Adopting a traditional syllabus and method of education , the school emphasised the copying and recitation by rote of a series of classical Chinese texts preaching Confucian morals : the Three Character Classic , the Book of Names , the Thousand Character Classic , the Odes for Children , the Filial Classic , and Filial Learning . Perceived failure or disobedience resulted in beatings with a bamboo rod from the teacher , who like Mao 's father was a stern disciplinarian . Disliking this mode of education , Mao later asserted that " I hated Confucius from the age of eight . " Although expressing his dislike for them , Mao nevertheless accepted the utility of learning these texts , finding himself able to win arguments ? including those against his father ? by the selective use of Confucian quotations .

Far more to Mao 's liking were the accounts of war and banditry found in the Four Great Classical Novels , including Romance of the Three Kingdoms , Journey to the West , and Water Margin ; while also steeped in Confucian morality , they emphasised the need to fight for justice in society , and it is possible that these texts inspired his interest in history . According to his later account , it was at this point that he attained a strong belief in justice ; he began to divide his lunch in two to share with a poorer boy who could not afford food . On another occasion , he got into a physical fight with an older classmate ; this greatly upset his mother , who held pacifist beliefs . According to his later account , at one point he rebelled when the teacher tried to punish him for disobedience ; rather than permitting himself to be beaten with a rod , he marched out of the school and into the wooded mountains . He remained there for three days , until being discovered by a family member and brought home .

Despite this education , biographers Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine commented that the " moral @-@ ethical precepts of Confucius seem to have left not a trace in his soul " . Conversely , biographer Philip Short asserted that for Mao , as for all Chinese children who went underwent traditional education , these Confucian texts " fixed the underlying pattern of [his] thought for the

rest of his life " . Short went so far as to suggest that Confucianism would prove to be " at least as important to [Mao] as Marxism " , noting that even in later life , Mao 's speeches contained a greater number of quotations from Confucius and other ancient Chinese philosophers than from major Marxist theoreticians Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin .

= = = Marriage and secondary education : 1908 ? = = =

Aged thirteen , Mao left Shaoshan Primary School , pleased to have gotten away from what he saw as its oppressive atmosphere . The decision had been made by his father , who wanted Mao to devote his attentions to the family business by working on the farm and managing the financial accounts . However , relations between him and his father became increasingly strained . Mao continued to read in his free time , often staying up late at night in his bedroom to read by candle light ; this angered his father , who saw recreational reading as an unproductive pursuit . At this point he read a book which inspired his interest in politics : Zheng Guanying 's Sheng @-@ shih Wei @-@ yen (" Words of Warning to an Affluent Age ") . Published in 1893 , the book lamented the deterioration of Chinese power in East Asia , and argued for technological , economic and political reform , believing that China could be strengthened if it abandoned its absolute monarchy and politically modelling itself on the representative democracies and constitutional monarchies of the Western world . His political views were shaped by protests ? led by the Gelaohui , or Elder Brother Society ? which erupted following a famine in Hunanese capital Changsha ; Mao supported the protesters ' demands , but the armed forces suppressed the dissenters and executed their leaders . The famine spread to Shaoshan , where starving peasants seized his father 's grain ; disapproving of their actions as morally wrong , Mao nevertheless claimed sympathy for their situation .

Yichang decided to organise an arranged marriage for Mao , selecting for him the seventeen @-@ year @-@ old Luo Yigu , the daughter of a local landowner . Although unhappy with the arrangement , Mao agreed to go through with the marriage , with the wedding taking place in 1907 or 1908 . According to his later account however , he never consummated the marriage and refused to live with Luo . Instead , he claimed that he made use of connections with his maternal family to leave his parental home and move in to the house of an unemployed student in Shaoshan , where he lived for a year . There , he continued his reading , enjoying tales of ancient Chinese rulers such as Sima Qian 's Records of the Grand Historian and Ban Gu 's History of the Former Han Dynasty . He was also influenced by Feng Guifen 's Personal Protests from the Study of Jiao Bin , which had been compiled in 1861 . Like Guanying 's book , it called on China to adopt foreign techniques to strengthen itself , and to use them to defend itself from foreign aggression . Mao also read a pamphlet by the Chinese revolutionary Chen Tianhua , which recounted China 's loss of sovereignty to Japanese and European imperialists ; Mao claimed that this was a great influence on him , for after reading it " I felt depressed about the future of my country and began to realize that it was the duty of all the people to help save it . " Meanwhile , Luo was locally disgraced and eventually died of dysentery in 1910 , while Qimei moved to live with her brother 's family in her native village of Xiangxiang .

In the autumn of 1910 , Mao requested that his father permit him to attend the Dongshan Higher Primary School , which was located fifteen miles from Shaoshan ; unlike the Shaoshan Primary School , this establishment taught modern subjects such as natural sciences . Yichang agreed to fund his son 's tuition and dormitory space , and so the sixteen @-@ year @-@ old Mao set off to Dongshan with his older cousin , Wen Yunchang , who was also enrolled there . His two best friends at the school were Yunchang and Xiao Zizhang (also known as Xiao San) , who would later join Mao in the communist movement and would become one of his first biographers . However , he was bullied for being rural and unsophisticated by many of his classmates , who were typically the sons of wealthy landlords from Xiangxiang district . He nevertheless proved to be a successful student , gaining the respect of his teachers through hard work , an ability to compose essays in the classical style , and voracious reading . Here , he first learned about geography , and increased his knowledge of ancient Chinese history . He began to read too about foreign history , coming to be particularly influenced by a book titled Great Heroes of the World , through which he learned about ?

and was inspired by ? the military prowess and nationalistic fervour of American George Washington and Frenchman Napoleon Bonaparte . Schram believed that it was here , at this school , that " we can date the real beginnings of Mao 's intellectual and political development " . Mao remained at the school for seven or eight months , before deciding to enroll at a middle school in the provincial capital of Changsha .

= = Early adulthood and politicization = =

= = = The Xinhai Revolution : 1911 ? 1912 = = =

In 1911 , Mao convinced his father to allow him to attend middle school in Changsha . The city was " a revolutionary hotbed " , with widespread animosity towards the absolute monarchy of Emperor Puyi . While some advocated a reformist transition to a constitutional monarchy , most revolutionaries advocated republicanism , arguing for an elected presidency . The primary figurehead behind the republican movement was Sun Yat @-@ sen , an American @-@ educated Christian who led a secret society known as the Tongmenghui . At Changsha , Mao came under the influence of Sun 's newspaper , The People 's Independence (Minli bao) , penning his first political essay , which he stuck to the school wall ; later admitting it was " somewhat muddled " , it involved the creation of a republic governed by Sun , but with concessions made to the moderates by having Kang Youwei as premier and Liang Qichao as minister of foreign affairs . As a symbol of rebellion against the Manchu monarch , he and a friend cut off their queue pigtails ? a sign of subservience to the emperor ? before forcibly cutting off those of several classmates .

Inspired by Sun 's republicanism , the army rose up against the emperor across southern China , sparking the Xinhai Revolution . Changsha initially remained under monarchist control , with the governor proclaiming martial law to quell protest . When the infantry brigade guarding the city defected to the revolution , the governor fled , leaving the city in republican hands . Supporting the revolution , Mao joined the rebel army as a private soldier , but was not involved in the fighting . The northern provinces remained loyal to the emperor , and hoping to avoid a civil war , Sun Yat @-@ sen ? proclaimed " provisional president " by his supporters ? compromised with the monarchist general Yuan Shikai . The monarchy would be abolished , creating the Republic of China , but the monarchist Yuan would become president . The Xinhai Revolution over , Mao resigned from the army in 1912 , after six months of being a soldier . Around this time , Mao discovered socialism from a newspaper article ; proceeding to read pamphlets by Jiang Kanghu , the student founder of the Chinese Socialist Party , Mao remained interested yet unconvinced by the idea .

= = = Fourth Normal School of Changsha : 1912 ? 1917 = = =

Returning to education , Mao enrolled and dropped out of a police academy , a soap @-@ production school , a law school and an economics school . His father only approved of the latter , but the lectures were in English , which Mao didn 't understand , and so Mao abandoned it for the government @-@ run Changsha Middle School ; he soon dropped out of this too , finding it rooted in Confucianism . Undertaking his studies independently , he spent much time in the Changsha public library , reading core works of classical liberalism such as Adam Smith 's The Wealth of Nations and Montesquieu 's The Spirit of the Laws , as well as the works of western scientists and philosophers such as Charles Darwin , J.S. Mill , Jean @-@ Jacques Rousseau , and Herbert Spencer . Viewing himself as an intellectual , years later he admitted that at this time he thought himself better than working people . Inspired by the work of Friedrich Paulsen , the liberal emphasis on individualism led Mao to believe that strong individuals were not bound by moral codes but should strive for the greater good ; that the end justifies the means . Seeing no use in his son 's intellectual pursuits , Mao 's father cut off his allowance , forcing Mao to move into a hostel for the destitute .

Desiring to become a teacher , Mao enrolled at a teacher training college , the Fourth Normal School of Changsha , which had high standards , yet low fees and cheap accommodation . Several

months later , it merged with the First Normal School of Changsha , widely seen as the best school in Hunan . Befriending Mao , Professor of Ethics Yang Changji urged him to read a radical newspaper , New Youth (Xin qingnian) , the creation of his friend Chen Duxiu , Dean of the Faculty of Letters at Peking University . Although a Chinese nationalist , Chen argued that China must look to the west , adopting " Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science " in order to cleanse itself of superstition and autocracy . Mao published his first article , " A Study of Physical Culture " , in New Youth in April 1917 , instructing readers to increase their physical strength to serve the revolution . He joined The Society for the Study of Wang Fuzhi (Chuan @-@ shan Hsüeh @-@ she) , a revolutionary group founded by Changsha literati who wished to emulate Wang Fuzhi , a philosopher who symbolized Han resistance to Manchu invasion .

In his first school year , Mao befriended an older student , Xiao Zisheng ; together they went on a walking tour of Hunan , begging and writing literary couplets to obtain food . A popular student , Mao remained active in school politics , and in 1915 was elected secretary of the Students Society . He used his position to forge an Association for Student Self @-@ Government , leading protests against school rules . In spring 1917 , he was elected to command the students ' volunteer army , set up to defend the school from marauding warlord soldiers , arming these troops with makeshift bamboo spears and wooden rifles . Increasingly interested in the techniques of war , he took a keen interest in the events of World War I , but also began to develop a sense of solidarity with workers . Mao undertook feats of physical endurance with Xiao Zisheng and Cai Hesen , describing themselves as the " Three Heroes , " a sobriquet taken from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms . With other young revolutionaries they formed the Renovation of the People Study Society in April 1918 to debate Chen Duxiu 's ideas . Desiring personal and societal transformation , the Society gained between 70 and 80 members , including some females , many of whom would go on to join the Communist Party . Mao graduated in June 1919 , being ranked third in the year .