

= Luo Yixiu =

Luo Yixiu (simplified Chinese : 罗一秀 ; traditional Chinese : 羅一秀 ; October 20 , 1889 ? February 11 , 1910) , a Han Chinese woman , was the first wife of the later Chinese communist revolutionary and political leader Mao Zedong , to whom she was married from 1908 until her death . Coming from the area around Shaoshan , Hunan , in south central China ? the same region as Mao ? her family were impoverished local landowners .

Most of what is known about their marriage comes from an account Mao gave to American reporter Edgar Snow in 1936 , which Snow included in his book *Red Star Over China* . According to Mao , he and Luo Yixiu were the subject of an arranged marriage organised by their respective fathers , Mao Yichang and Luo Helou . Luo was eighteen and Mao just fourteen years old at the time of their betrothal . Although Mao took part in the wedding ceremony , he later stated that he was unhappy with the marriage , never consummating it and refusing to live with his wife . Socially disgraced , she lived with Mao 's parents for two years until she died of dysentery , while he moved out of the village to continue his studies elsewhere , eventually becoming a founding member of the Communist Party of China . Various biographers have suggested that Mao 's experience of this marriage affected his later views , leading him to become a critic of arranged marriage and a vocal feminist . He would marry three more times throughout his life , to Yang Kaihui , He Zizhen and Jiang Qing , the last of whom was better known as Madame Mao .

= = Early life = =

Born on October 20 , 1889 , Luo Yixiu was the eldest daughter of Luo Helou (??? ; 1871 ? 1943) , a shenshi (??) ? or rural intellectual who earned his living as a farmer ? and his wife (1869 ? 1912) , whose surname was Mao and who was a distant great @-@ aunt of Mao Zedong . Although historian Lee Feigon stated that the Luo family was locally important , Mao biographers Alexander V. Pantsov and Steven I. Levine claimed that they had fallen into poverty . Luo Helou and his wife had five sons and five daughters , but seven of these children died , leaving them only three daughters . The couple 's lack of adult sons diminished their social status , for in Chinese society at the time , only sons could continue the family lineage .

= = The marriage = =

= = = Preparation = = =

Mao Zedong had been born and raised at his father 's farm in Shaoshanchong , a small rural village named for the nearby Shaoshan mountain . His disciplinarian father , Mao Yichang , had decided to deal with Zedong 's rebellious attitude in a manner typical of the time , by forcing him into an arranged marriage that would compel him to take family matters seriously . Yichang also desired a helper for his own wife , Wen Qimei , whose health had deteriorated through years of heavy agricultural labour . He selected Luo Yixiu in either late 1907 or 1908 . Her kinship to the Maos may have helped in this selection , as Luo Yixiu 's mother 's four brothers , surnamed Mao , lived only two li (1 km) from Mao Yichang 's home in Shaoshanchong . Following traditional procedures , a matchmaker would have been sent to the Luo family house , and the Luo family would have been socially expected to accept the marriage proposal immediately . Luo Helou was happy to see his eldest daughter married . The two families exchanged gifts and signed the marriage contract , after which the marriage was considered inviolable .

Zedong first met Yixiu on the day that the contract was signed . Years later , his granddaughter Kong Dongmei stated that Mao was unhappy with his father 's choice , and that he instead was in love with his cousin , Wang Shigu . However , marriage to Wang had been ruled out by a local diviner because their horoscopes were incompatible . Although displeased by the arrangement , Mao agreed to marry Luo . At the time he was fourteen , and later erroneously informed Edgar Snow

that Luo was aged twenty , a claim independently accepted by Mao biographers Ross Terrill and Philip Short , but later challenged by biographers Jung Chang and Jon Halliday , and Alexander V. Pantsov and Steven I. Levine , who established that she was eighteen .

= = = The wedding = = =

The wedding took place in 1908 . According to a number of Mao 's biographers , the ceremony would have likely followed traditional rural Hunanese custom . Thus , it probably would have begun with a feast in the groom 's home on the day before the ceremony , to which friends and relatives were invited . The next day , the bride would have been dressed in red , with a red veil over her face , and carried by red palanquin to the groom 's family home . There , her veil would have been removed , and she would have been expected to express unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the groom by publicly insulting him . According to tradition , a display of fireworks would probably have taken place , before both bride and groom would have kowtowed to each guest , to the groom 's ancestral altar , to the spirits , and to one another , concluding the ceremony .

If traditional practices were adhered to , feasting would have continued for two days , while guests would have given gifts , mainly of money , to the newlyweds . The wedding ceremony would have culminated with the guests entering the bridal chamber , where they would have made various sexual references and innuendos , led by a figure with his face painted black . In Chinese rural tradition , the bride was expected to show the bloodstains on the bed sheets from her wedding night to prove that her hymen had been broken during sexual intercourse , and that she had therefore been a virgin .

= = = Married life = = =

According to what he told Snow , Mao refused to live with his wife and claimed that they had never consummated their marriage . Soon after the wedding , he ran away from home to live with an unemployed student in Shaoshan . There he spent much of his time reading , particularly historical works like Sima Qian 's Records of the Grand Historian and Ban Gu 's History of the Former Han Dynasty , and political tracts like Feng Guifen 's Personal Protests from the Study of Jiao Bin .

Now considered part of the Mao family , Luo lived with Mao Yichang and Wen Qimei at their home , but was publicly humiliated by her husband 's disappearance ; some locals considered her to be Yichang 's concubine . Luo Yixiu died of dysentery on February 11 , 1910 , the day after Chinese New Year . Mao Zedong returned home ; his father forgave him for his disobedience , and in the autumn of 1910 agreed to finance his son 's studies at the Dongshan Higher Primary School , and so Mao left Shaoshanchong . When in 1936 Mao told Snow " I do not consider her my wife " , he made no mention of her death . Luo Yixiu 's grave is located on the mountain facing Mao Zedong 's former residence in Shaoshanchong , a few steps away from the tomb of his parents .

= = = Aftermath = = =

When Mao Zedong returned to Shaoshan in 1925 to organize a local peasant movement , he went to visit Luo Yixiu 's relatives , including her father Luo Helou and his nephew Luo Shiquan (??) . Luo Shiquan would join the Communist Party in the winter of that year and would remain a peasant activist until the 1949 revolution . Because Luo Yixiu had died without offspring , when the Mao lineage updated its genealogy book in 1941 , Mao Anlong (???) , who was Mao Zedong 's third son with his second wife Yang Kaihui , was listed as Luo 's descendant . In 1950 , Mao sent his eldest son Mao Anying to Shaoshan and instructed him to visit Luo Shiquan . Mao also kept in contact with two men who had married Luo Yixiu 's sisters , and met one of these men when he returned to Shaoshan in 1959 for the first time since the 1920s .

= = Influence on Mao = =

In *Mao : A Reinterpretation* , American historian Lee Feigon argued that Mao 's experience with arranged marriage inspired him to become " a vehement advocate of women 's rights " in the late 1910s , as he began to write articles for the left @-@ wing press criticizing the traditional Chinese family system and arguing that love , rather than societal or family pressures , should be the primary determinant in marriage . This idea had previously been expressed by journalist and sinologist Clare Hollingworth . In their biography *Mao : The Unknown Story* , Jung Chang and Jon Halliday agreed , stating that it was this experience with Luo that turned Mao into a " fierce opponent " of arranged marriage .

Mao would marry three more women over the course of his life : Yang Kaihui in December 1920 , He Zizhen in May 1928 , and Jiang Qing in November 1939 .