



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **AS History 1041**

## **Unit 2: HIS20**

### **The Impact of Chairman Mao: China, 1946–1976**

# **Mark Scheme**

*2010 examination – January series*

Mark schemes are prepared by the Principal Examiner and considered, together with the relevant questions, by a panel of subject teachers. This mark scheme includes any amendments made at the standardisation meeting attended by all examiners and is the scheme which was used by them in this examination. The standardisation meeting ensures that the mark scheme covers the candidates' responses to questions and that every examiner understands and applies it in the same correct way. As preparation for the standardisation meeting each examiner analyses a number of candidates' scripts: alternative answers not already covered by the mark scheme are discussed at the meeting and legislated for. If, after this meeting, examiners encounter unusual answers which have not been discussed at the meeting they are required to refer these to the Principal Examiner.

It must be stressed that a mark scheme is a working document, in many cases further developed and expanded on the basis of candidates' reactions to a particular paper. Assumptions about future mark schemes on the basis of one year's document should be avoided; whilst the guiding principles of assessment remain constant, details will change, depending on the content of a particular examination paper.

Further copies of this Mark Scheme are available to download from the AQA Website: [www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2010 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

#### COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

---

## Generic Introduction for AS

The AS History specification is based on the assessment objectives laid down in QCA's GCE History subject criteria and published in the AQA specification booklet. These cover the skills, knowledge and understanding which are expected of A Level candidates. Most questions address more than one objective since historical skills, which include knowledge and understanding, are usually deployed together. Consequently, the marking scheme which follows is a 'levels of response' scheme and assesses candidates' historical skills in the context of their knowledge and understanding of History.

The levels of response are a graduated recognition of how candidates have demonstrated their abilities in the Assessment Objectives. Candidates who predominantly address AO1(a) by writing narrative or description will perform at Level 1 or Level 2 depending on its relevance. Candidates who provide more explanation – (AO1(b), supported by the relevant selection of material, AO1(a)) – will perform at high Level 2 or low-mid Level 3 depending on how explicit they are in their response to the question. Candidates who provide explanation with evaluation, judgement and an awareness of historical interpretations will be addressing all 3 AOs (AO1(a); AO1(b); AO2(a) and (b) and will have access to the higher mark ranges. AO2(a) which requires the evaluation of source material is assessed in Unit 2.

Differentiation between Levels 3, 4 and 5 is judged according to the extent to which candidates meet this range of assessment objectives. At Level 3 the answers will show more characteristics of the AO1 objectives, although there should be elements of AO2. At Level 4, AO2 criteria, particularly an understanding of how the past has been interpreted, will be more in evidence and this will be even more dominant at Level 5. The demands on written communication, particularly the organisation of ideas and the use of specialist vocabulary also increase through the various levels so that a candidate performing at the highest AS level is already well prepared for the demands of A2.

## **CRITERIA FOR MARKING GCE HISTORY:**

### **AS EXAMINATION PAPERS**

#### **General Guidance for Examiners (to accompany Level Descriptors)**

---

##### **Deciding on a level and the award of marks within a level**

It is of vital importance that examiners familiarise themselves with the generic mark scheme and apply it consistently, as directed by the Principal Examiner, in order to facilitate comparability across options.

The indicative mark scheme for each paper is designed to illustrate some of the material that candidates might refer to (knowledge) and some of the approaches and ideas they might develop (skills). It is not, however, prescriptive and should only be used to exemplify the generic mark scheme.

When applying the generic mark scheme, examiners will constantly need to exercise judgement to decide which level fits an answer best. Few essays will display all the characteristics of a level, so deciding the most appropriate will always be the first task.

Each level has a range of marks and for an essay which has a strong correlation with the level descriptors the middle mark should be given. However, when an answer has some of the characteristics of the level above or below, or seems stronger or weaker on comparison with many other candidates' responses to the same question, the mark will need to be adjusted up or down.

When deciding on the mark within a level, the following criteria should be considered *in relation to the level descriptors*. Candidates should never be doubly penalised. If a candidate with poor communication skills has been placed in Level 2, he or she should not be moved to the bottom of the level on the basis of the poor quality of written communication. On the other hand, a candidate with similarly poor skills, whose work otherwise matched the criteria for Level 4 should be adjusted downwards within the level.

Criteria for deciding marks within a level:

- The accuracy of factual information
- The level of detail
- The depth and precision displayed
- The quality of links and arguments
- The quality of written communication (grammar, spelling, punctuation and legibility; an appropriate form and style of writing; clear and coherent organisation of ideas, including the use of specialist vocabulary)
- Appropriate references to historical interpretation and debate
- The conclusion

---

January 2010

**GCE AS History Unit 2: Historical Issues: Periods of Change**

**HIS20: The Impact of Chairman Mao: China 1946–1976**

**Question 1**

- (a) Use **Sources A and B** and your own knowledge.

Explain how far the views in **Source B** differ from those in **Source A** in relation to the Cultural Revolution. (12 marks)

*Target: AO2(a)*

**Levels Mark Scheme**

	Nothing written worthy of credit.	<b>0</b>
<b>L1:</b>	Answers will <b>either</b> briefly paraphrase/describe the content of the two sources <b>or</b> identify simple comparison(s) between the sources. Skills of written communication will be weak.	<b>1-2</b>
<b>L2:</b>	Responses will compare the views expressed in the two sources and identify some differences and/or similarities. There may be some limited own knowledge. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed.	<b>3-6</b>
<b>L3:</b>	Responses will compare the views expressed in the two sources, identifying differences <b>and</b> similarities and using own knowledge to explain and evaluate these. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed.	<b>7-9</b>
<b>L4</b>	Responses will make a developed comparison between the views expressed in the two sources and will apply own knowledge to evaluate and to demonstrate a good contextual understanding. Answers will, for the most part, show good skills of written communication.	<b>10-12</b>

**Indicative content**

**Note: This content is not prescriptive and candidates are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.**

Candidates will need to identify differences between the sources. For example:

- **Source A** refers to Mao's 'long term' aim of erasing the past from the minds of his (Mao's) subjects and his wish to 'wipe out culture from Chinese homes'. The emphasis in Source A is very much on the efforts of the Red Guards to eliminate old culture (one of the Four Olds) in China, with references to the destruction of old books, art objects and historical monuments
- **Source B**, on the other hand, suggests a wider range of targets for the Red Guards. There are references to restrictions on styles of dress ('blue jeans', 'rocket shoes' etc)

- **Source B** refers to the promotion of the personality cult surrounding Mao. There is no mention of this in **Source A**. The emphasis in **Source B** is very much on the targets of the Red Guards, rather than (as in **Source A**) on Mao's aims.

Candidates will need to use their own knowledge to explain these differences. They might, for example, refer to:

- the Cultural Revolution was a complex phenomenon which was launched by Mao to achieve a range of separate, but closely linked, aims. Mao's primary objective was to attack those in the CPC leadership who were, in his view, following the 'capitalist road', but he was also attempting to remove all traces of old Chinese culture and establish a 'proletarian culture' in its place
- the Red Guards were following Mao's lead but were increasingly random in their selection of targets
- the reference to 'blue jeans' and 'rocket shoes' can be placed in the context of the Cultural Revolution being an attack on western influences in China.

To address 'how far' candidates should also indicate some similarity between sources, for example:

- both sources refer to the efforts to remove old books. In **Source A** it is stated that 'frightened citizens burned their old books' whilst **Source B** says that bookstores were not allowed to sell 'classical books'
- both sources focus on the destructive activities of the Red Guards.

In making a judgment about the degree of difference, candidates may conclude that there are both differences and similarities between the sources in terms of the targets of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. The two sources differ in the way they focus on particular targets but there are some underlying similarities in the way that the Red Guards are portrayed.

- (b) Use **Sources A, B and C** and your own knowledge.

How successful was the Cultural Revolution, in the years 1966 to 1976, in achieving Mao's aim of changing Chinese culture? (24 marks)

*Target: AO1(b), AO2(a), AO2(b)*

### Levels Mark Scheme

Nothing written worthy of credit.

**0**

- L1:** Answers may be based on sources or on own knowledge alone, or they may comprise an undeveloped mixture of the two. They may contain some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question or they may address only a part of the question. Alternatively, there may be some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. There will be little, if any, awareness of differing historical interpretations. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **1-6**
- L2:** Answers may be based on sources or on own knowledge alone, or they may contain a mixture of the two. They may be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the focus of the question. Alternatively, they may contain some explicit comment with relevant but limited support. They will display limited understanding of differing historical interpretations. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **7-11**
- L3:** Answers will show a developed understanding of the demands of the question using evidence from **both** the sources **and** own knowledge. They will provide some assessment backed by relevant and appropriately selected evidence, but they will lack depth and/or balance. There will be some understanding of varying historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **12-16**
- L4:** Answers will show explicit understanding of the demands of the question. They will develop a balanced argument backed by a good range of appropriately selected evidence from the sources and own knowledge, and a good understanding of historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, show organisation and good skills of written communication. **17-21**
- L5:** Answers will be well-focused and closely argued. The arguments will be supported by precisely selected evidence from the sources and own knowledge, incorporating well-developed understanding of historical interpretations and debate. Answers will, for the most part, be carefully organised and fluently written, using appropriate vocabulary. **22-24**

### Indicative content

**Note: This content is not prescriptive and candidates are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.**

---

Candidates should be able to make a judgment by balancing points which suggest success against others which do not. All three sources provide references to success and candidates should use the sources as evidence in their answer.

Relevant material from the sources would include:

- Source A makes the claim that Mao 'succeeded in wiping out Chinese culture' and that he also fulfilled 'his long-term aim of erasing China's past'
- Source B also refers to the campaign to eradicate western influences on styles of dress. This source also refers to the efforts to remove classical literature from sale
- Source C contains the most evidence in regard to changes to Chinese culture. The author, writing from the perspective of 1971, claims that the 'drive against the Four Olds has had a sweeping effect'; a 'new generation has appeared' and a 'new China is in existence' are also claims made by the American journalist who wrote this source.

From own knowledge, candidates need to show that they are aware of the range of aims that Mao had in launching the Cultural Revolution, and that the Cultural Revolution affected different groups in different ways. Factors suggesting success might include:

- there was widespread destruction of cultural artefacts and historical monuments and the new officially approved culture was limited to that which served political purposes. Nevertheless, some traditional Chinese ceremonies and festivals, such as the Festival of the Dead and celebrations of the Chinese New Year, did survive
- young people, especially those involved in the Red Guards, were most affected by the Cultural Revolution. The attack on Confucianism meant that it became a counter-revolutionary crime for the young to show the traditional Chinese respect for the aged or for parents. The attacks on school teachers and university professors also undermined traditional attitudes towards authority
- the closing of schools and universities for two years had an adverse effect on the education of China's youth. Millions of young people were sent to the countryside to live and work among the peasants in order to learn from them. One result of this was to open the eyes of city-born young people to the harsh realities of life in the countryside; to this extent Mao succeeded in his aim of breaking down the barriers between city dwellers and the peasants.

Factors suggesting that the Cultural Revolution was not a complete success might include:

- Mao did not succeed in entrenching the revolutionary enthusiasm of the students. Confronted with the realities of rural poverty, backwardness and the lack of proper education and health care in the countryside, many city born students became cynical and disillusioned
- the Cultural Revolution did not succeed in bringing greater equality to Chinese society. Showcase communes such as that at Dazhai were held up as examples of what could be achieved through hard work, self-reliance and collective labour but Dazhai was not typical. Most peasants remained poor compared with city dwellers
- in remote rural communities life for the peasants continued much as it had done before the Cultural Revolution
- Some traditional Chinese ceremonies, such as the Festival of the Dead, continued even after the Cultural Revolution.

Good answers are likely to conclude that there were many visible signs, in the early 1970s, that traditional Chinese culture had been eradicated but that the Cultural Revolution had merely succeeded in suppressing outward shows of respect for the past.



**Question 2**

- (a) Explain why Mao established labour camps in China in the early 1950s. (12 marks)

*Target: AO1(a), AO1(b)*

**Levels Mark Scheme**

Nothing written worthy of credit. **0**

- L1:** Answers will contain either some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question or some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **1-2**
- L2:** Answers will demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the demands of the question. They will **either** be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the question **or** they will provide some explanations backed by evidence that is limited in range and/or depth. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **3-6**
- L3:** Answers will demonstrate good understanding of the demands of the question providing relevant explanations backed by appropriately selected information, although this may not be full or comprehensive. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **7-9**
- L4:** Answers will be well-focused, identifying a range of specific explanations, backed by precise evidence and demonstrating good understanding of the connections and links between events/issues. Answers will, for the most part, be well-written and organised. **10-12**

**Indicative content**

**Note: This content is not prescriptive and candidates are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.**

Known as lao gai, labour camps were a form of prison and were used by the regime to suppress opposition. Often set up in remote areas with harsh climatic conditions, the camps were places where inmates were subjected to hard physical labour in fields or mines. Used as an alternative to execution, the camps were founded on the principle of 'reform through labour', borrowing heavily from the gulags established by Stalin in the USSR. In practice they were a particularly severe form of imprisonment in which many inmates died of overwork and under-nourishment.

Answers should include a range of reasons as to why the labour camps were established.

Candidates might include some of the following factors:

- repression, of which the labour camps were a part, was a key element in the Communist Party's struggle to control the population of China after it came to power in 1949
- the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 heightened the feeling among China's new rulers that the regime was under threat from external enemies and was used to justify an intensification of repression, including the establishment of the labour camps. Those

Chinese who had links with foreign institutions such as businesses, universities and churches became targets for repression, with many being sent to labour camps

- the regime moved to eliminate internal opposition, which included not just political opponents but also members of religious sects and 'bandits' (people engaged in criminal activities)
- the Party also instigated a campaign against officials and managers to root out corruption and waste (The Three-Antis campaign), which resulted in some of the victims being sent to labour camps
- the Party launched the Five-Antis campaign against businessmen to root out bribery, tax evasion, theft and cheating on government contracts. Many of the victims were also sent to labour camps
- candidates may make a link to Mao's ideological belief that an individual demonstrates his/her value to the community through hard labour. Mao also believed that the prison population constituted a valuable labour force which could be deployed to open up remote areas to agriculture and exploitation of mineral wealth.

To reach the higher levels, candidates will need to show the inter-relationship of the reasons given. For example, they might argue that, whilst repression of political opponents took many forms, the use of labour camps was motivated mainly by the ideological belief in 'reform through labour'.

- (b) 'The communist revolution brought complete equality for Chinese women by 1953.'  
Explain why you agree or disagree with this view. (24 marks)

Target: AO1(a), AO1(b), AO2(b)

### Levels Mark Scheme

- Nothing written worthy of credit. **0**
- L1:** Answers may **either** contain some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question **or** they may address only a limited part of the period of the question. Alternatively, there may be some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. There will be little, if any, awareness of differing historical interpretations. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **1-6**
- L2:** Answers will show some understanding of the demands of the question. They will **either** be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the question **or** they may contain some explicit comment with relevant but limited support. They will display limited understanding of differing historical interpretations. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **7-11**
- L3:** Answers will show a developed understanding of the demands of the question. They will provide some assessment, backed by relevant and appropriately selected evidence, but they will lack depth and/or balance. There will be some understanding of varying historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **12-16**
- L4:** Answers will show explicit understanding of the demands of the question. They will develop a balanced argument backed by a good range of appropriately selected evidence and a good understanding of historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, show organisation and good skills of written communication. **17-21**
- L5:** Answers will be well-focused and closely argued. The arguments will be supported by precisely selected evidence leading to a relevant conclusion/judgement, incorporating well-developed understanding of historical interpretations and debate. Answers will, for the most part, be carefully organised and fluently written, using appropriate vocabulary. **22-24**

### Indicative content

**Note: This content is not prescriptive and candidates are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.**

Candidates should be able to make a judgment by balancing points which agree with the view that women had achieved complete equality by 1953, against others which do not. Candidates will need to show awareness of the traditional status of women in Chinese society and may well mention concubinage and footbinding in support of a view that women were far from enjoying equal status with men in pre-revolutionary China. On the other hand, a more balanced approach might show understanding of the advances that had been made in the status of women under Guaomindang rule since the 1920s. Footbinding had all but disappeared by 1949 and there had

been some progress towards better educational opportunities. In areas controlled by warlords, however, traditional abuses such as arranged marriages and concubinage persisted.

Factors which show that women had achieved equality might include:

- there were definite advances in the status of women after the Communists came to power in 1949. The New Marriage Law of 1950 outlawed arranged marriages and the purchase of wives through the payment of dowries to a husband or his family. Concubinage was banned and unmarried, divorced or widowed women were given the same rights to own property as men. Divorce was made available to women on the same terms as men
- in areas under communist rule before 1949 women were given the right to vote and Mao stipulated that at least one quarter of those elected to representative bodies had to be women. These policies were extended to the whole of China after 1949
- in cities, women had been making progress towards greater equality even before the communists came to power. Educated women had begun in the 1920s to challenge traditional attitudes and to gain entry to professional occupations. Educational opportunities were extended under the communists.

Factors which show that women had not achieved complete equality might include:

- with growing equality came extra burdens, however, especially in the countryside. Women were expected by the communists to take on manual labour in the fields in order to boost production, but still had their traditional duties of child-rearing and housework to perform
- attitudes were slow to change. Old prejudices against widows and unmarried older women persisted as it was considered unfitting for a woman to be independent.

Good answers are likely to conclude that although attitudes, especially in rural areas, were slow to change, the legal reforms of the early 1950s, together with greater educational opportunities, did create a framework within which women could begin to achieve greater equality. Much still remained to be done, however, by 1953.

**Question 3**

- (a) Explain why Mao launched an 'anti-rightist' campaign in 1957. (12 marks)

*Target: AO1(a), AO1(b)*

**Levels Mark Scheme**

Nothing written worthy of credit.

**0**

- L1:** Answers will contain either some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question or some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **1-2**
- L2:** Answers will demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the demands of the question. They will **either** be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the question **or** they will provide some explanations backed by evidence that is limited in range and/or depth. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **3-6**
- L3:** Answers will demonstrate good understanding of the demands of the question providing relevant explanations backed by appropriately selected information, although this may not be full or comprehensive. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **7-9**
- L4:** Answers will be well-focused, identifying a range of specific explanations, backed by precise evidence and demonstrating good understanding of the connections and links between events/issues. Answers will, for the most part, be well-written and organised. **10-12**

**Indicative content**

**Note: This content is not prescriptive and candidates are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.**

The anti-rightist campaign was launched in the summer of 1957 after Mao's Hundred Flowers campaign, in which he invited intellectuals to criticise the Communist Party, led to a torrent of criticism which threatened to destabilise the Party's rule. It led to the persecution of thousands of intellectuals who had voiced criticisms; many were executed, others were sent to labour camps for 're-education through labour'.

Answers should include a range of reasons as to why Mao launched the campaign.

Candidates may refer to the following long-term factors:

- the Communist Party had long been suspicious of intellectuals and their belief in freedom of thought. Intellectuals' skills were needed by the Party in its efforts to industrialise the economy but they were treated with suspicion and hostility because of their bourgeois origins
- there had been earlier campaigns to persecute intellectuals and the anti-rightist campaign of 1957 was another in a series.

And some of the following short-term factors:

- the Hundred Flowers campaign had been treated with suspicion and wariness at first by intellectuals who had suffered from the earlier persecution, but once the campaign took off in the spring of 1957 it unleashed a flood of criticism which took Mao by surprise and led to growing pressure from within the Party to clamp down. It could thus be viewed as the result of a serious miscalculation on Mao's part
- candidates may argue, or debate, whether the anti-rightist campaign of persecution of the intellectuals had always been part of Mao's plan. Mao himself, in later attempting to justify his decision to launch the Hundred Flowers campaign, claimed that he had deliberately set a trap to flush out the rightist elements in society. This is rejected by many historians, who see the Hundred Flowers campaign as a miscalculation by Mao, but candidates should be credited if they offer this as a possible explanation.

To reach the higher levels, candidates will need to show the inter-relationship of the factors given. For example, they might argue that the most important reason why Mao launched the campaign was his miscalculation in opening up the Party to criticism in the Hundred Flowers campaign and his need to reassert his authority.

- (b) 'By 1965, the failure of the Great Leap Forward had destroyed Mao's authority as Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

(24 marks)

Target: AO1(a), AO1(b), AO2(b)

### Levels Mark Scheme

- Nothing written worthy of credit. **0**
- L1:** Answers may **either** contain some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question **or** they may address only a limited part of the period of the question. Alternatively, there may be some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. There will be little, if any, awareness of differing historical interpretations. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **1-6**
- L2:** Answers will show some understanding of the demands of the question. They will **either** be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the question **or** they may contain some explicit comment with relevant but limited support. They will display limited understanding of differing historical interpretations. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **7-11**
- L3:** Answers will show a developed understanding of the demands of the question. They will provide some assessment, backed by relevant and appropriately selected evidence, but they will lack depth and/or balance. There will be some understanding of varying historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **12-16**
- L4:** Answers will show explicit understanding of the demands of the question. They will develop a balanced argument backed by a good range of appropriately selected evidence and a good understanding of historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, show organisation and good skills of written communication. **17-21**
- L5:** Answers will be well-focused and closely argued. The arguments will be supported by precisely selected evidence leading to a relevant conclusion/judgement, incorporating well-developed understanding of historical interpretations and debate. Answers will, for the most part, be carefully organised and fluently written, using appropriate vocabulary. **22-24**

### Indicative content

**Note: This content is not prescriptive and candidates are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.**

Candidates should be able to make a judgment by balancing points which agree that Mao's authority had been destroyed against others which do not.

---

Points which agree that Mao's authority had been destroyed might include:

- the Great Leap Forward was driven by Mao and its failure reflected badly on him. In December 1958 he stepped down as Chairman of the People's Republic of China (Head of State) and retired, as he put it, to the 'second front'
- when Mao launched the GLF not all of the leading members of the Politburo shared his enthusiasm but none was prepared to openly challenge him. In 1959, however, he did face a challenge from Peng Dehuai, the Defence Minister, who attempted to debate with Mao the reasons for the failure of the GLF. Although Peng Dehuai attempted to keep his criticisms out of the public arena, Mao decided to 'expose' Peng as a 'rightist' and purge him from the top leadership
- despite his defeat of Peng Dehuai, Mao behaved in the coming years as if his authority had been undermined. In the aftermath of the failure of the GLF, those Ministers who controlled day to day administration and economic policy – Chen Yun, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping – adopted pragmatic economic policies which were designed to rebuild the economy but which ran counter to the radical policies which Mao had pursued in the GLF. For example, some of the larger communes were broken up and peasants were again allowed to sell some of their produce privately. Mao fought a running battle against these policies and the leaders who had adopted them in the years 1961–65. Mao was fighting a defensive battle against the 'capitalist-roaders' within the leadership and his decision to leave Beijing in 1965 was a sign that he believed he no longer controlled events.

Points which disagree with the view that Mao's authority had been destroyed might include:

- Mao's decision to retire to the 'second front' had been made before he launched the Great Leap Forward and had nothing to do with the failure of that policy. Mao still retained his positions as Chairman of the Communist Party and of the Military Affairs Commission; he was therefore still very much involved in discussions about policy and he still retained his authority over ideological matters, an area which he considered to be his own preserve
- the purge of Peng Dehuai marked a decisive stage in Mao's suppression of open debate within the Party leadership and it was followed by a wider purge of lower-level Party officials. In this sense, Mao's authority was strengthened by the failure of the GLF
- despite Mao's belief that he needed to struggle to reassert his authority, he still commanded enormous authority and respect within the Party and it was Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping who were on the defensive for much of this period.

Good answers are likely to conclude that Mao's authority had not been destroyed. He had continued to purge the Party of any who openly opposed him and had been carefully building alliances with radical intellectuals, the PLA and young people in preparation for a purge of the 'capitalist-roaders' who, he believed, were undermining the revolution.