

MODERN HISTORY

Analyse the role played by one of the following personalities in the 19th and early 20th century China in a speech format.

During the early 20th century, China was confronted by its youth criticising Chinese culture and looking towards Western countries as their new future. Chen Duxiu played an essential role in the modernisation of China during the 20th century. His enthusiasm conveyed through the magazine, “New Youth”, his formation of the Communist Party of China, and his role as a lecturer demonstrate his crucial part in China’s revolution.

It was the experience of examination that convinced Chen the irrelevance of traditional education and governmental systems in the twentieth century. Chen was educated at Qiushi (or truth-seeking) Academy, where he was exposed to Western ideas –contributing in his realisation, that China needed a reform towards modernisation and Marxism. And that’s what Chen strived to do. Initially, Chen had participated in revolts such as the ‘Xinhai Revolution’ and acted as dean of ‘The School of Arts And Sciences Of Beijing University’ promoting Marxism and individualism. The peak of Chen’s influence however, was in 1915 through the establishment of the “New Youth” magazine.

‘Xinqingnian’ or, “New Youth” was one of the most influential magazines in China’s twentieth century. This magazine encouraged youth to rejuvenate the nation; Chen’s arguments stating that China must westernise under the influence of Mr Sai and De. (Science and democracy), and called for the destruction of tradition. His magazine published translations of Western literature and contained articles about imperatives like education and culture. The following quote is from Chen an issue of ‘New Youth’, “When compared to the accomplishments of the white race, the differences in thought between our peoples of this same age can be measured in millennia...” demonstrates Chen’s passion to overcome Confucian attempts to venerate age and instead celebrate youth. He believed that young people should rebel against the authority of the high elders, reject the ‘wisdom of the past’ and embrace independence, freedom and humanism. Chen’s massive role is also evident in the influence he had made on the huge numbers of young people abruptly joining the camp of the critics against Chinese tradition.

Following the establishment of the “New Youth” magazine, Chen Duxiu played a leading role in the ‘May Fourth Movement’ between 1919 and 1921. In the evening of 1919 Chen was caught distributing propaganda literature, leading to his arrest by authorities for using his “new thought” to instigate student demonstrations. This movement marked a new stage against feudalism and encouraged Chen, with, Li Dazhou, to create the Chinese Communist Party, or the CCP, in 1921. This is another significant example of Chen’s crucial role in 20th century China, Chen acting as secretary general of the party for the first five years. Chen was undoubtedly, a significant figure that inspired the Chinese to maintain their course towards basic human rights and was absolutely fundamental in the foundations of the CCP. Chen’s position led the CCP to initiate strikes such as the railroad workers’ strike on February the seventh, 1923, and the May Thirtieth Movement of 1925. He also worked towards women rights in the third and second congress of the CCP (1922 and 1923), and protested for the rights of labourers during his reign as secretary-general. Eventually however, Chen made certain ideological errors as the chief representative in the Communist Party of China during the Northern Expedition in 1927. This led to the removal of his post in 1927, although, without Chen’s role, the people of China would not possess the rights they hold today.

So, there you have it. Chen Duxiu, a courageous protester, venturing in the dangerous and never before seen parts of China. An independent thinker, THINKING for the rest of China. His publication of ‘New Youth’ and his influence on the Chinese Communist Party declared his role as one of the leading intellectuals, striving towards better rights, for the next generation of China.