

**Document 14.11: A peasant's reflection on Mao Zedong, from an interview conducted in the early 1980s**

*Fifty-four-year-old Zhang Yuxi lived in a village in Shandong Province at the time of this interview. In the interview, he described the effects of the frequently changing policies under Mao, spoke of how “things were going wrong” under the co-op system, and of how hard he cried when in 1964 he was forced to cut down an orchard of peach trees he had grown from scratch because it was a “capitalist activity.” “Life got harder and harder after that,” he continued. “It was so hard to get by in those days that...I can't find the words.” Nevertheless, he had the following to say about Mao Zedong:*

Life has been better the last couple of years. I'm still hoping to get the money together for a trip to Beijing to have a look round. Before I die, I want to see what Chairman Mao really looked like. I know about the mistakes in his last years. But they weren't his mistakes. Sitting there in his dragon palace, he couldn't possibly have known what was happening to us peasants. It was the people under him who were bad. They kept him in the dark and did all sorts of terrible things in his name. Chairman Mao had wealth and greatness written all over his face. He had the look of a real emperor, but he was better than an emperor. No emperor ever saved the poor. Chairman Mao was the savior of the poor from the moment he was born. If he hadn't been, would we be missing him now?

Source: Zhang Xinxin and Sang Ye. W. J. F. Jenner and Delia Davin, eds. *Chinese Lives: An Oral History of Contemporary China*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1987. 117.