Compare and contrast Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping as the leaders of the People’s Republic of China.

The PRC was established on 1 Oct, 1949 as a communist country. Mao Zedong became the Chairman of the Central People’s Government Council and officially announced the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. He was the first leader of the PRC. After the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping resumed all his duties and his influence continued to grow in the following 20 years. He gradually became an important leader of the PRC. Both of these two leaders had carried out different movements to modernize China. As a remarkable leader of the PRC, they had similarities and differences in different aspects.

The approaches towards modernization of Deng and Mao were same based on socialism, but they were quite different. From the establishment of the PRC, Mao started a series of mass movements including large-scale land reforms and Great Leap Forward, which aimed for recovering the economy and modernizing China. During the land reforms, the Agrarian Reform Law was passed in 1950 to introduce a new system under which peasants had the ownership of land. Rural population was classified into five classes: landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, and poor peasants and hires hands. After criticizing the landlords, the land could be shared out equally among peasants. After land reforms, people had high incentives to produce more. The increasing production provided raw materials for industrial development.

Then, in 1958, Mao introduced the Great Leap Forward. New, high targets were set up for industry and agriculture. The CPC was hoping that China could catch up or even overtake Britain in steel and other production within 15 years. So, there was the backyard steel campaign. Collectivization was also introduced. Under collectivization, people had to gave up their land and join cooperatives. People’s Communes were set up then. However, the Great leap forward was a failure. Since the targets were too high, there were many false reports of outputs. People’s working incentives declined and food shortage became serious. China experienced “three hard years” and Mao was criticized.

For Deng, he introduced the policies of “reform and openness” in 1979. He announced that the work of CPC would change from class struggle and proletarian revolutions to economic development and socialist modernization. Then, in 1982, Deng proposed his idea of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”, pointing out China was in the “primary stage of socialism”. He said that China needs about 100 years to accomplish socialist
modernization. He carried out reforms in agriculture and industry, introducing the Responsibility System to rural areas which was totally different from collectivization introduced by Mao. Peasants were given private plots and they had full responsibility over their land. They could even sell their products in the open market after giving a fixed amount of what they produced to the government. Deng also reformed state enterprises in the cities in order to increase the productivity of the society. Individual enterprises were allowed to have full control over their operation and their profits and losses. New incentives like piecework, overtime, bonus payment and profit sharing were also introduced.

Besides, Deng opened up china to the outside world. The government set up Special Economic Zones and Economic Open Zones, as well as coastal and inland cities for foreign investment in order to speed up economic development. This marked the beginning of private economy and foreign investment in China. The “socialist market economy” was an integration of planned and market economies which were also first founded in China. Stock markets began to operate in Shenzhen and Shanghai. Production increased and people’s livelihood was improving. When China's industry was developing rapidly, more and more peasants took up non-agricultural jobs and moved to cities. It led to urbanization. Comparing all the above approaches, it seems that Deng was more successful in turning China to a modernized state.

**In addition, Mao and Deng had their own political experience and beliefs. Mao mainly focused on communism and he emphasized class struggle.** Landlords were being criticized in the Land Reforms because of this idea. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao empowered the Red Guards to have a “right to rebel”. They could criticize the “reactionary authorities” as well as the “black elements” in the society, or even torture them into death. The four olds or anything that related to “capitalist” or “bourgeois” would also be criticized. This was really a tragedy. Actually, he called up the Cultural Revolution mainly for removing opposition within the CPC and gaining back the power he had lost after the failure of the Great Leap Forward. He wanted to protect his political position and even build up a personality cult. He first spread his thoughts in the army by giving every soldier a copy of his book, “Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong”. He then spread the fanatic personality cult to the whole nation through the launch of the Cultural Revolution. He enjoyed superior position and built a God-like figure among the nation successfully. However, the Cultural Revolution created great damage to the society. It paralyzed Party and government institutions, hindered economic development and damaged culture and education.
For Deng, he had a hard political life. However, he had never given up. Though he was opposed and pulled down by three times, he overcame the hardship and resumed all his duties in 1977. After he became the leader of China, he denied class struggle, focused on economic reconstruction. He introduced the policy of “reform and openness” and he believed that the PRC was in the “primary stage of socialism”. To sum up, we can see that Mao had greater influence than Deng politically but what he had done had hindered China’s development into a modernized state.

Both Mao and Deng had carried out social reforms. The land reforms introduced by Mao redistributed the land evenly among peasants. After it, about 700 million hectares of land were redistributed among 300 million peasants. Most peasants now had their own land, and they need not pay rent for it. In addition, since land had been taken away from landlords and rich peasants to be shared out among poor peasants and hired hands, the gap between the rich and the poor in the countryside was narrowed.

However, Deng’s reform had widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Although peasants generally enjoyed a higher living standard after the introduction of “reform and openness”, three rural problems remained unsolved. Farming method remained primitive. This was a by-product of the responsibility system since peasants might not have the ability to use high-tech machines in agriculture. Many villages, untouched by most modernization measures, remained poor. Large number of people was still living below the poverty line and they had a hard life. In addition, Deng had pointed out that certain people in certain areas should be allowed and encouraged to get rich first. Therefore, since the coastal area started to develop earlier than the inland area, people lived in coastal cities like Shanghai were richer and enjoyed a better livelihood. Also, the existence of enterprises had also made a group of people became richer and wealthier than the others. These created gaps between the rich and the poor. Deng didn’t just carry out reforms in the economy; he had also promoted education reforms. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, schools and universities resumed admission in 1977. Beside, nine-year compulsory education was introduced and plans were carried out to eliminate illiteracy. People’s education level was rising then.

In diplomatic area, the relations between China and the foreign countries, especially Western powers, were greatly different under the rule of Mao and Deng. In 1953, Khrushchev became the leader of the USSR. Mao disliked him and blamed him for revising Marxism-Leninism, and he also openly criticized the Great Leap Forward. The relationship between the PRC and the USSR began to deteriorate. In 1960, the USSR withdrew thousands of experts from and called off projects in China. During the Cultural Revolution,
the situation was even worse. It aroused a strong anti-foreign sentiment among Chinese people. Most of the foreigners and the people with foreign contacts were under close government supervision. The British Embassy in Beijing was attacked and the Riots of 1967 were also caused in Hong Kong. The country became totally shut out of the world.

When Deng was in power, the situation was improving gradually. His policies of “reform and openness” encouraged foreign investment. There is more communication between China and other countries then. Also, in 1984, the PRC joined the Olympic Games for the first time and has since taken part in various international sports events. In 2008, the Olympic Games will be held in Beijing. We can see that with the opening of China towards outside world, the relations between China and other countries improved a lot. The international status of China was rising, too. Therefore, Deng was more successful in maintaining a good diplomatic relationship than Mao.

Mao and Deng had different ideas and policies since they had different personalities. Mao was quite radical. He often encouraged class struggle. He promoted the large scale reforms very rapidly and he liked to set up high targets. Sometimes, his targets were irrational. For example, during the Great Leap Forward, there was propaganda slogan like “Writing 60 scripts in one night”. His radical thinking led to the great destructions done by Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution. In the opposite side, Deng was a prudent leader. He said that China needs about 100 years to accomplish socialist modernization. Also, he was practical. He didn’t set up high targets. He carried out reforms step by step. When he introduced the policy of “reform and openness”, he didn’t open the whole China for foreign investment in one time. He opened China part by part. Also, after developing the coastal area, he also tried to improve the economy in the inland. The different personalities of Mao and Deng led to the different policies when they were ruling China.

To conclude, both Mao and Deng had brought some achievements to China. However, Deng was more successful in modernizing China and developing the economy. He also improved the educational level of Chinese. At the same time, China has a better relationship with other countries under Deng’s rule. The country was prospering and people enjoyed a better livelihood. Mao was an important leader for establishing the PRC, and he greatly influenced China politically. He had built a God-like figure in peoples’ heart and he is highly respected until now. However, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution held by him was a total failure and hindered the development of China in catching up with the West. To compare, Deng Xiaoping was a more capable leader since we can see that China is becoming richer and stronger now. Deng was the one who paved the way for it.