

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution 1966-1976

Prelude to the Cultural Revolution:

- The origins of the Cultural Revolution can be traced back to 1962 when the Great Leap Forward failed to meet its industrial targets and caused a massive famine in the countryside.
- As a result Mao took a less prominent place in politics and CCP members Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi became increasingly popular because they played a major role in ending the famine. Mao feared that his colleagues would remove him from power.
- Mao turned to Lin Biao, the field-marshal of the PLA, as an important ally. Lin Biao compiled a collection of Mao's thoughts and sayings into a book entitled *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* (aka the "Little Red Book"). The 33 chapters outlined a variety of topics, and became the source of all truth for China. It became mandatory for all members of the PLA to have a copy and soon the teachings of the book spread throughout society and eventually 750 million copies were distributed throughout China.
- Mao's wife Jiang Qing became the most dominant figure in the "Shanghai Forum" a group of hardliners from the CCP of whom the most uncompromising figures were known as the "Gang of Four." These four members (including Mao's wife) attacked members of the CCP who wanted to modify Mao's economic plans, and also any writers or artists who were not committed to Mao's Revolution.
- In May of 1966 Mao packed several key committees in the CCP with his hardline supporters. For example the Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) was dominated by the Gang of Four who sought to find counter-revolutionary revisionists (members of the bourgeoisie) and remove them from the CCP.

Start of the Cultural Revolution

- The Cultural Revolution started as a party purge, and soon became a national campaign when a 73-year-old Mao swam across the Yangtze River (symbolic as a national life force) in July 1966 in a stage managed event to show that he was still alive and in control of events.
- In August Mao held a special meeting of the Central Committee where he called on all party members to rededicate themselves to class struggle, and to avoid revisionism.
- The event that brought the Cultural Revolution national and international attention was an August 18, 1966 rally at Tiananmen Square of over 1 million young Chinese waving Little Red Books, screaming, "Mao Zedong is the red sun rising in the East." The event was organized by Lin Biao.

Aims of the Cultural Revolution:

- Removal of all rivals to Mao in order to preserve himself in power for the rest of his life.
- Destroy the damaging record of the Great Leap Forward.

Block: _____

- Purge the CCP of revisionists and counter-revolutionaries
- Continue Mao's version of the communist revolution after his death, avoid revisionism and counter-revolution
- Prevent China from making the same revisionist mistakes as the Soviet Union
- Restore the peasant character and revolutionary spirit of China's Communist revolution.

Instruments:

- Revolutionary students and pupils known as the **Red Guards** terrorized and destroyed any of the four olds after Mao told them that there was no moral restriction on what could be done in the name of revolution.
- People's Liberation Army (PLA) tolerated, allowed and encouraged the Red Guard to continue the Cultural Revolution. The PLA also hunted down and attacked counter-revolutionaries across China (post-1967) when the PLA reduced the influence of the Red Guards.

Methods:

- Mao enlisted the youth of China to criticize and attack the ideas of CCP officials and government members so as to remove the threat to Mao. "Use the monkeys to disrupt the palace."
- There were eight large rallies in Tiananmen Square between August and November 1966.
- Struggle sessions, self-criticism, and the "airplane" position were used to punish revisionists.
- It was believed that the Red Guard helped kill 500,000 CCP officials. By 1967 industry was disrupted, schools and universities were shutdown and a series of civil wars had broken out amongst rival Red Guard groups. Orders were given that the PLA replace the Red Guard and begin to do their work.
- From 1967-1972 the Red Guards were encouraged to "go up to the mountains and down to the villages." They would go into the countryside to live amongst the peasants so they could see what life was like for 80% of the population and to deepen their understanding of the revolution. In these years 12 million young people moved into the countryside.

Targets:

- Attack the "four olds": old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits.
- Five categories of people to be punished: landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, bad elements, rightists.
- Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi were dismissed from their positions in the CCP in October 1966 for being revisionists. They were beaten and sent for re-education and public humiliation.
- Victimisers became the victims (like Stalin's purges)

Block: _____

- Public beatings and killings, cultural vandalism (e.g. treasures of China's past 4922 of Beijing's 6843 places of cultural or historical interest, Confucius' home town of Qufu 6618 acts of vandalism in four week period in November 1966).
- 11 foreign embassies were attacked in defiance of all rules of international diplomacy, including surrounding the Soviet Embassy for 24 hours of insults, and the breaking in and burning of the British Embassy. Also by 1967, Chinese militants caused 30 violent incidents around the world.
- The PLA took over for the Red Guard in 1967 and began by "cleansing the class ranks" of counter-revolutionaries, which was a nice way of saying that all signs of capitalism would be destroyed which led to an orgy of violence and death.

Results:

- Lin Biao the architect of the Cultural Revolution died in a plane crash after plotting to assassinate Mao. Biao was convinced that Mao was going to get rid of him because Biao and the PLA had too much influence and power from the Cultural Revolution.
- The Cultural Revolution slowed down from 1972-1976. Deng Xiaoping was rehabilitated and given his job as party secretary back in 1975.
- Class war amongst and between various classes in society
- Cultural devastation and destruction of Chinese culture and artefacts
- Economic chaos and disruptions
- The "Lost Generation"

Was Mao Responsible for the Cultural Revolution?

- Mao remained in the background throughout the Cultural Revolution, allowing others (like his wife Jiang Qing and Lin Biao) to organize it. By remaining in the background he could claim that he had nothing to do with it, although most believe that Mao could have made the Cultural Revolution stop at any point.

