

4 The Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, 1966–76

8 The aims, origins and course of the Cultural Revolution

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the aims and origins of the Cultural Revolution
- how the Cultural Revolution developed between 1966 and 1969.



Fig. 1 Red Guards at a rally held in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, November 1966

Almost a million people could fit into Tiananmen Square, and on this day [18 August] it was packed as I had never seen it before. Everywhere there was chanting, marching, and near-hysterical acclamations of 'Chairman Mao', 'Chairman Mao'. And at the centre of the rostrum stood Chairman Mao, in an olive-green PLA uniform. As he waved to the crowds, they began to cry and scream for him even harder. They think he's a god, I thought. 'We will die for Chairman Mao,' they shouted again and again.

1

From Sirin Phathanothai, *The Dragon's Pearl*, 2006

In 1966, Mao launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, an extraordinary and violent upheaval that threatened the very foundations of the regime he had done so much to establish. Just after 5 am on the morning of 18 August, a time carefully selected to coincide with the sunrise, Mao walked out into Tiananmen Square in Beijing to a rapturous

reception from 1 million Red Guards. He wore a green PLA uniform to emphasise his warlike mood and his closeness to the army. Lin Biao, the PLA leader, addressed the crowd, describing Mao as the 'Great Leader, Great Teacher, Great Helmsman and Great Commander'. This was the first of eight such rallies in Beijing, following which the Red Guards, made up of university and high-school students, conducted a violent campaign against 'all those people in authority who are taking the capitalist road'. Parts of China descended into chaos until the movement was finally brought under control by the PLA in 1969. Although the violent phase of the Cultural Revolution ended then, its repercussions were still being felt in the 1970s and beyond.

The aims and origins of the Cultural Revolution

To struggle against and overthrow those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticise and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic authorities and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes, and to transform education, literature and art, and all other parts of the superstructure not in correspondence with the socialist economic base.

2

'Sixteen Points on the Cultural Revolution' by the Central Committee, August 1966

It was Mao who launched the Cultural Revolution and it was Mao and his allies who defined its aims and targets. However, as events unfolded the original aims of the movement were broadened and new targets were added for the Red Guards to attack. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to reduce the complexities of the Cultural Revolution to a single classification. For the purposes of analysis, however, it is helpful to consider the aims and origins of the Cultural Revolution under three main headings:

- a struggle to remould Chinese culture
- a power struggle within the CPC
- a rectification campaign.

A struggle to remould Chinese culture

The Cultural Revolution was an attack on all modes of thought and behaviour that did not conform to Mao's vision of a socialist society. It was to be a 'great revolution that touches people to their very souls'. By changing Chinese culture, i.e. all modes of thought and expression, and by making Mao Zedong Thought the guiding principles of the Chinese people, a truly communist society could at last be built in China. The aim was to create nothing less than a 'new socialist people'.

The first battles in the Cultural Revolution took place over a play. *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* was written by Wu Han, an intellectual, historian and deputy mayor of Beijing. The play was about an official from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) who was dismissed after criticising the emperor for wasting resources on extravagance while ordinary people starved. The parallels with the Peng Dehuai episode in recent Chinese history were not lost on Mao and his allies and, in November 1965, an article was published in a Shanghai newspaper attacking the play and its author. The article was written by Yao Wenyuan, one of the Shanghai 'radicals' with which Mao's wife had allied herself. In launching this attack on Wu Han the Shanghai radicals, with Mao's blessing, were also attacking the Party

Exploring the detail

Red Guards

The Red Guards were loose groupings of college and secondary school students who embraced the cult of Mao and the aims of the Cultural Revolution. They were formed originally to struggle against teachers in their own institutions but quickly took on a much wider role as the 'vanguard' of the revolution. Red Guards could be as young as 12 or as old as 30, but most were in their teens. They were useful allies for Mao because they were outside the official Party structures.

leadership. Wu Han's boss in Beijing was the mayor, Peng Zhen, who was also the Politburo member responsible for culture. Peng was therefore held to be responsible for allowing such 'anti-socialist' plays to be performed and, as Peng was a key ally of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, the Party leadership was also being attacked indirectly. The response of the Party leadership was to treat the issue as an academic rather than a political debate, and to try to keep control over events by setting up the Cultural Revolution Group to investigate the issues raised by the affair. With Peng Zhen as head of this organisation, it was clear that the Party leadership was attempting to defuse the crisis.

Key profiles

Yao Wenyuan

A radical literary critic and intellectual, Yao Wenyuan (1925–2005) began his career in Shanghai and attracted attention with his outspoken attacks on the local daily newspaper. He allied himself with radical politicians in the city. He had been prominent in the campaign against Hu Feng in the mid-1950s and had joined a group known as Proletarian Writers for Purity.

Peng Zhen

Peng Zhen (1902–97) joined the CPC in 1923 in Shanxi province. He was imprisoned by the Nationalists in 1929 and after his release he helped to organise the communist resistance against the Japanese in north China. He became mayor of Beijing in 1951 and held the post until he was purged at the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

Cross-reference

See page 69 for more on Hu Feng.

Cross-reference

For more on Jiang Qing, see pages 92 and 124–5.

In February 1966, the Shanghai radicals raised the stakes by issuing a statement claiming that China was 'under the dictatorship of a sinister anti-Party and anti-socialist line which is diametrically opposed to Chairman Mao's thought. This sinister line is a combination of bourgeois ideas on literature and art.' Lin Biao, the head of the PLA and a key ally of Mao, also laid down the battle lines when he stated that 'If the proletariat does not occupy the positions in literature and art, the bourgeoisie certainly will. This struggle is inevitable.' Therefore, the struggle over culture was part of the wider class struggle and, as such, could not be considered as merely an academic debate. To emphasise his support for Mao's line on culture, Lin Biao appointed Jiang Qing to coordinate the PLA's cultural policies.

The assembly room, though cavernous, was packed. Slogans hung everywhere and Mao's *Little Red Book* bobbed in front of people's faces. When I entered, Jiang Qing was already on stage, leaping up and down as she shouted slogans in her unpleasant, high-pitched voice. 'Learn from the Red Guards' was the principal [slogan] on this occasion. 'Learn from Auntie Jiang Qing' came back the chorus. We read Mao's quotations out loud. We sang songs. We waved the *Little Red Book*.

Then she spoke. She told in minute detail how Chairman Mao had had to fight off the wicked persecution of Liu Shaoqi's revisionist *coup d'état* attempt. The audience roared its support.

3

A meeting in the Great Hall of the People. From Sirin Phathanothai, *The Dragon's Pearl*, 2006

As the Cultural Revolution gathered momentum, the cultural policies of Jiang Qing became clear. What Mao, Jiang Qing and their allies were attempting to do was to impose strict limits on culture to ensure that it served the revolution and that 'anti-socialist, poisonous weeds' were eradicated from the arts. In Jiang's view, art was not something to be valued for its own sake nor did it exist in a vacuum. All art reflects the society from which it springs and serves a political purpose. Therefore, a feudal society produces a feudal culture, a bourgeois society produces a bourgeois culture, etc. In a socialist society, feudal and bourgeois art forms have no place. Indeed, to allow them to be published or performed would undermine people's belief in Socialism and threaten the very foundations of the new China. It was therefore necessary, according to Jiang Qing, to completely eradicate all feudal, bourgeois and foreign influences in Chinese culture and replace them with a truly 'proletarian culture'. Mao denounced the 'Four Olds': old culture, ideas, customs and habits. Jiang Qing turned Mao's slogan into a programme for the eradication of traditional Chinese culture. Traditional opera was suppressed and replaced by 'revolutionary operas' in which the heroes and heroines represented workers, peasants and soldiers. Literature, art, films and theatre were subjected to a strict censorship – only those works that promoted revolutionary themes were allowed. Western music was banned as being bourgeois and decadent. Wearers of Western-style clothing were liable to be attacked. Anything that was seen as representative of the past – temples, works of art, ornamental gardens – was liable to be destroyed.

The recruitment of youthful Red Guards was a key part of Mao's strategy for the Cultural Revolution. Young people would, in Mao's eyes, be untainted by the thoughts, habits and customs of old China. They could be mobilised in a campaign to eradicate the Four Olds from Chinese culture.

A power struggle within the CPC

Since the 7,000-cadre conference in 1962, Mao had been largely at odds with the Party leadership of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. In 1966, Mao was 73 years old. He felt that he was being denied influence over policy because of his age and he was increasingly concerned about the question of who should succeed him when he was gone. After the fall of Peng Dehuai it was Liu Shaoqi who had been promoted to the number two position in the communist hierarchy and who was therefore considered to be Mao's chosen successor. By 1965 it was Mao's view that Liu Shaoqi and his allies could not be trusted with defending and extending the revolution and Mao had decided that they should be purged. Attacking Liu and Deng directly, however, was not a wise course of action. Both had shown themselves to be loyal to Mao and the Party in the past, they had



Fig. 2 The Four Olds

Activity

Thinking point

- 1 Explain why Mao believed that it was important to wage a political struggle to change Chinese culture.
- 2 Why were the Four Olds and Western influences selected as targets in the Cultural Revolution?

the support of most of the Party Politburo and they enjoyed considerable prestige among the Party rank and file. Mao, therefore, acted in a devious way to undermine them and attack them at their weakest points, using the lessons he had learned many years before in guerrilla warfare.

The attack on Wu Han's play which signalled the beginning of the Cultural Revolution was, in reality, an attack on the Party leadership. Although Mao was not the author of Yao Wenyuan's article, he was undoubtedly the inspiration behind it and had sanctioned the attack. In attacking Wu Han, the article was also attacking Peng Zhen, an ally of Wu Han and the Politburo member responsible for culture. By association, the attack on Peng was also an attack on Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. By doing nothing to stop this play from being performed, Liu and Deng had shown that they were either incompetent or they were allies of Wu Han and Peng Zhen. Either way, they were showing themselves, in the eyes of Mao and his allies, to be untrustworthy 'capitalist-roaders'.

In March 1966, while Liu was away on a foreign tour, Mao – with the support of Lin Biao, Kang Sheng and Chen Boda – made his first move against the Party leadership. Peng Zhen was removed from office by the Politburo after Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai had abandoned him to his fate, calculating that to continue supporting him would threaten their own careers. Following this, in May 1966, Mao took control of the Cultural Revolution Group, which was reformed with his allies occupying the key positions. At this point Mao had seized the initiative and his objectives were beginning to become clearer, yet Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping still clung to the belief that they could both retain control over events and satisfy the Chairman's demands. Their optimism was severely tested, however, when the movement spread to the universities. In May, a large-character wall poster criticising the university administration was put up in Beijing University by a philosophy professor. This seemingly spontaneous act was, in fact, orchestrated by Mao's ally Kang Sheng, whose wife had close links with the professor. Mao endorsed the poster and ordered that

its message should be broadcast on the radio, thereby spreading the movement to other campuses. By the early summer of 1966 university campuses were experiencing growing turmoil as students, armed with Mao's *Little Red Book* and wearing Red Guard armbands, began to attack their teachers and university administrators. Liu and Deng tried to contain and control this movement by sending work teams on to the campuses, whose job it was to direct the students' criticisms at specific individuals and away from the Party in

Cross-reference
Further details about Kang Sheng and Chen Boda can be found on page 92.

Exploring the detail
Large-character wall posters
Known in Chinese as *dazibao*, this form of communication had been used in China for centuries. These wall-mounted posters were hand written and used large-sized Chinese writing. They had traditionally been used as a means of protest or propaganda, or simply popular communication. In the Cultural Revolution the use of these posters by the Red Guards to denounce their victims became widespread.



Fig. 3 Soldiers of the PLA recite from the Little Red Book. This photograph was taken in 1970, after the official end of the Cultural Revolution

general. For Mao, this was further confirmation that Liu and Deng were attempting to frustrate his wishes.

In July 1966, Mao swam in the strong currents of the Yangzi River, a symbolic act designed to show that he still had the physical strength to fight the revolutionary battles that lay ahead. With extensive newspaper and newsreel coverage, the swim in the Yangzi had enormous propaganda value for Mao. He returned to Beijing, a city he had not visited since November 1965.

By staying away from the capital he had been able to distance himself from both the actions of the Party leadership and the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. Now he was ready to place himself squarely at the centre of events. At this point his criticism of Liu became open and direct. At a Central Committee meeting in August – the first for four years – Liu was forced to make a self-criticism for his errors in sending work teams into universities. His words were not, however, sufficient to save him. Mao accused him of exercising a dictatorship in Beijing and resisting the Cultural Revolution. The Central Committee approved changes in the CPC's hierarchy which left Liu Shaoqi demoted from second to eighth place, while Lin Biao was promoted to second place and established as Mao's chosen successor.

Deng Xiaoping had been spared from humiliation in August as Mao and his allies concentrated all their fire on Liu. At a Party conference in October, however, both Liu and Deng were subjected to more criticism and forced to make self-criticisms. Although they both officially retained their posts within the Party and the PRC, their careers were effectively over. Liu died in prison in 1969. Deng survived, largely because he enjoyed the support of Zhou Enlai, and was rehabilitated in 1973.

The purge of the Party leadership did not end with the fall of Liu and Deng. Other victims in the autumn of 1966 included Wang Renzhong (the Party chief of Hubei province), Tao Zhu, Marshal He Long and Zhu De. All these men, in the eyes of Mao, were tainted with 'old thinking' and were purged as a warning to other Party officials at all levels that they needed to show more enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution.



Fig. 4 Mao [front] swims in the Yangzi River in July 1966 at Wuhan. This event, just before he launched the Cultural Revolution, was designed to show that Mao still had the energy and determination to fight

Activity
Revision exercise
Make a large copy of Figure 5. Add further notes to the outer arms to give examples of how the Communists used propaganda in an attempt to control the masses.

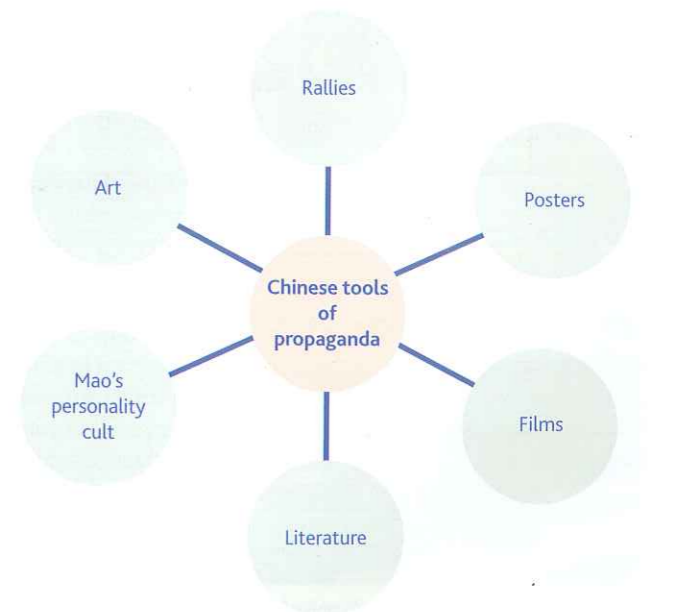


Fig. 5 Chinese tools of propaganda

Key profiles

Tao Zhu

Tao Zhu (1908–69) was the CPC leader in south China. After being promoted to the Politburo in August 1966, he was purged just four months later.

He Long

Born in Henan, He Long (1896–1969) received no formal education and spent part of his youth as an outlaw after killing a local tax collector. He served in the nationalist army in the early 1920s but joined the CPC in 1927 and rose to become a communist military commander in the early 1930s. He was an ally of Mao and a veteran of the Long March. In 1955, he was one of ten people appointed as marshals of the PLA.

Zhu De

Zhu De (1886–1976) had participated in the 1911 revolution and later joined the CPC in Europe. A close ally of Mao from the late 1920s, he was Mao's chief military adviser in the Jiangxi years. During the Civil War he was overall Commander-in-Chief of the PLA.

A rectification campaign

Trust the masses, rely on them and respect their initiative. Cast out fear and don't be afraid of disturbances.

4 Chairman Mao, 1966. From *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*

The important feature of this excellent situation is the full mobilisation of the masses. Never before in any mass movement have the masses been mobilised so broadly and deeply as in this one.

5 Chairman Mao, 1967. From *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*

As had happened on a number of previous occasions, in the mid-1960s Mao was concerned about the way the Communist Party was developing as the Party in power. He became convinced that the Party at all levels had become over-bureaucratic, corrupt and ineffective as a revolutionary force. He criticised officials at universities for behaving like 'scholar-tyrants'. Party cadres, he believed, had become accustomed to a privileged lifestyle which set them apart from the mass of the population. The reintroduction of incentives after the failure of the Great Leap Forward had led to the re-emergence of inequalities among peasants and workers. Above all, Mao was opposed to the compromises made by the Party leadership of Liu and Deng to rebuild the economy after the Great Leap Forward. He came to the conclusion that these trends were evidence of the infiltration of the Party by capitalists and the bourgeoisie. A class warrior all of his life, Mao had become convinced by the early 1960s that the class struggle in China now had to be fought within the Communist Party. Nothing short of an assault on the Party itself would suffice to save the Chinese revolution from counter-revolutionary elements.

Since 1962 Mao had been cultivating allies in his struggle with the Party leadership. Lin Biao had been entrusted with the task of ensuring that the PLA would support Mao in the struggles that lay ahead. In the same way, Jiang Qing had been given the task of mobilising radical intellectuals

from Shanghai in an assault on the CPC's cultural policies. In 1966, Mao added a third element to his coalition of revolutionary forces with which he would confront the Party leadership. Mass mobilisation had been a key feature in the Chinese revolution many times in the past; the mobilisation of China's youth was one of the main elements in the Cultural Revolution. Young people who had been born after the Communists took power in 1949 had never had the opportunity to participate in revolutionary struggle. Mao believed that once young people had gained direct personal experience of revolutionary struggle, which included engaging in acts of violence and killings in his name, they would become firmly committed to the revolutionary cause. In this way the Party could be purged and purified of 'capitalist-roaders' and 'counter-revolutionary elements' and the revolution itself would gain renewed impetus with the infusion of new blood. This was Mao's theory of 'continuing revolution' being put into practice once again.

Mao believed that the Communist Party – his Party – needed to be reformed and rectified through criticism from the people it served. This was a technique he had used on several occasions previously, but this time the rectification campaign went far beyond 'normal' practice'. Whereas in the past mass participation in rectification campaigns had been kept firmly under the control of the Party, during the Cultural Revolution Mao's aim was to bypass the Party bureaucracy and unleash 'a great disorder across the land leading to great order'. Mao's disenchantment with the Party leadership had increased when they had sought to retain control of the Socialist Education Movement and of the early stirrings of student unrest in 1966. He was determined that the Cultural Revolution was not going to be 'hijacked' by the 'bourgeois dictatorship' which was, in his eyes, in control of the Party. In his wall poster of August 1966, he finally revealed his true intentions. 'Bombard the Headquarters' was Mao's rallying cry to the revolutionary students to attack the Party leadership and cadres at all levels. It was a declaration of war on the Party by a leader who now considered himself to be an outsider. In the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, Red Guard violence was directed at the students' own teachers and Party cadres within educational institutions. From August 1966, Party cadres at national, provincial and local level became targets.

Mao's call to 'Bombard the Headquarters' found a ready and enthusiastic response among China's youth. The Maoist cult of personality, which had been gathering momentum in the early 1960s, had placed an emphasis on loyalty to Mao rather than the Communist Party. Students who resented the lack of career opportunities for those who did not have Party connections, and youths who had been relocated to the countryside after the failure of the Great Leap Forward, were a receptive audience for Mao's message. With this new guerrilla army doing Mao's bidding, the CPC was shaken to its foundations.

Activity

Group activity

Produce a large wall chart identifying the key players in the Cultural Revolution and the roles they performed during these events. The key players should include Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, Jiang Qing, Kang Sheng and Yao Wenyuan. Include on the chart key groups such as the Cultural Revolution Group and the Red Guards.

Cross-reference

See page 90 for more on the Socialist Education Movement.

Exploring the detail

Rectification campaigns

Rectification campaigns had become a regular feature of Mao's leadership of the Communist Party since the Yan'an Rectification campaign of 1942. They were a device for rooting out corrupt or inefficient Party officials and enforcing Mao's ideological line. The Socialist Education Movement of 1964 had in part been a rectification campaign.



Fig. 6 Red Guards march through the streets of Beijing during the Cultural Revolution. They are holding the Little Red Book and shouting out quotations from it. Note the young age of some of the participants in the foreground

Activity

Revision exercise

- 1 Divide a large sheet of paper into three sections.
- 2 Write the following headings in the three sections: Struggle to remould Chinese culture; Power struggle within the CPC; Rectification campaign.
- 3 Under each heading, summarise the main aims and targets of the Cultural Revolution.

Exploring the detail

Status in China

To be 'red by birth' in the People's Republic of China, a person had to come from a worker's, peasant's or soldier's family or be the child of a Party official. Those who did not have these connections had limited career opportunities. The Cultural Revolution gave young people from more bourgeois backgrounds the chance to prove that they were 'red by action'.

Exploring the detail

Rallies

The first enormous rally of Red Guards was held in Tiananmen Square on 18 August 1966. One million Red Guards from all over China converged on Beijing to participate in the rally at which Mao appeared. This was the first of eight such rallies held between 18 August and 26 November, involving a total of 13 million Red Guards.

Cross-reference

See page 99 for details on the Four Olds.

The extent of this outpouring of violence, and the rage of the young Red Guards against their elders, suggest the real depths of frustration that now lay at the heart of Chinese society. The youth needed little urging from Mao to rise up against their parents, teachers, Party cadres and the elderly, and to perform countless acts of calculated sadism. For years the young had been called on to lead lives of revolutionary sacrifice, sexual restraint, and absolute obedience to the State, all under the conditions of perpetual supervision. They were repressed, angry and aware of their powerlessness. They eagerly seized on the order to throw off all restraint, and the natural targets were those who seemed responsible for their cramped lives. To them Mao stood above this fray, all-wise and all-knowing.

6

From P. Short, *Mao: A Life*, 1999

The development of the Cultural Revolution

The starting point

The various strands in Mao's struggle to assert his dominance over the CPC had been gathering momentum since the end of 1965. On 8 August 1966, however, the Communist Party's Central Committee adopted the Cultural Revolution as official Party policy and issued a document, 'Sixteen Points on the Cultural Revolution'. This can usefully be taken as the official starting point of the 'great revolution that touches people to their very souls'. Members at this meeting also elected a new Politburo in which Lin Biao was elevated to become Vice-Chairman of the Party (and therefore Mao's chosen successor) while Liu Shaoqi was demoted. From this point onwards, events began to unfold quickly.

Mao held a series of enormous rallies in Beijing involving millions of Red Guards. In a society in which movement around the country was strictly controlled, transporting millions of Red Guards from the provinces to Beijing could only be achieved with the logistical support of the PLA. Lin Biao, the head of the PLA, was therefore a key figure in facilitating the Cultural Revolution as well as acting as Mao's chief ally and cheerleader.

By the end of August 1966, chaos and violence had spread across China. Schools and universities were closed. Red Guards were free to humiliate, beat and kill. Their targets were intellectuals, university and school teachers, members of non-communist parties and those from the 'five black categories'. The Red Guards, many of whom dressed in green PLA uniforms, also began a campaign to eradicate the Four Olds and all traces of Western influence in China. They declared war on 'Hong Kong-style haircuts, Hong Kong-style clothing, cowboy trousers, winkle pickers and high-heeled shoes'. 'Correction stations' were set up at street corners where heads of offenders were shaved. Historic sites such as temples, old city gates, statues and historical artefacts were damaged. Religious buildings in particular were singled out for attack. Red Guard units also invaded and ransacked the private homes of those suspected of being 'bourgeois'. Antiques, foreign currency, jewellery, musical instruments, paintings and books were confiscated or destroyed. Large piles of books by authors considered to be bourgeois or feudal were set on fire in city streets. Authors now considered to be bourgeois included many of the intellectuals who had participated in the May 4th Movement in 1919, a movement from which Mao and other Communists of his generation had drawn inspiration.

In the days after Mao reviewed the first group of Red Guards in Beijing, and gave them his blessing, the Red Guards in Shanghai took over the streets. The newspaper announced that the mission of the Red Guards was to rid the country of the 'Four Olds'. There was no clear definition of 'old'; it was left to the Red Guards to decide. First of all they changed street names. The main thoroughfare of Shanghai along the waterfront, the Bund, was renamed Revolution Boulevard. They smashed flower and curio shops because, they said, only the rich had the money to spend on such frivolities. The other shops were examined and goods they considered offensive or unsuitable for a socialist society they destroyed or confiscated. Because they did not think a socialist man should sit on a sofa, all sofas became taboo.

7

From Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*, 1986

During August and September 1966, the violence of the Red Guards continued unchecked. Many of the victims of the violence in the early stages were selected at random, but by autumn 1966 the attacks became more systematic and directed specifically at Party officials. Mao and his allies in the Cultural Revolution Group were angry that the CPC leadership had been resisting the Cultural Revolution while appearing to support it. Some officials offered up their subordinates as victims to the Red Guards in an effort to save themselves. Others encouraged the formation of Red Guard units that were more under the control of the Party bureaucracy. These so-called 'conservative mass organisations' recruited from workers and students whose parents were Party cadres. In an ironic twist, Red Guard units composed of students from bourgeois, non-Party backgrounds were the most radical and the most inclined to attack Party officials. At this early stage in the Cultural Revolution, therefore, splits and rivalries were beginning to become apparent in the Red Guards.



Fig. 7 A poster displayed in Beijing describes how to deal with so-called 'enemies of the people', January 1967. The victim is being held in the 'jetplane' position, with head thrust forward and arms forced back

Widening and deepening the Cultural Revolution, October 1966 to January 1967

Key events

In October 1966, at a Central Committee Work Conference, Mao, Lin Biao and the CRG stepped up their campaign against Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, accusing them of being behind the CPC's resistance to the Cultural Revolution. Wall posters were issued denouncing Liu and Deng by name and the two leaders were forced to make a self-criticism at the conference. It was clear that Mao and the CRG were determined to intensify their assault on the CPC establishment. This marked a new stage in the radicalisation of the Cultural Revolution. For example, 20 members of the Central Committee of the Beijing district Communist

Activity

Source analysis

Study Source 7. What can we learn from this source and the background information about the targets of Red Guard violence in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution?

Activity

Thinking point

Explain why the Red Guards were becoming divided by factional rivalries in late 1966.

Exploring the detail

The 'January Storm'

The 'January Storm' in Shanghai actually began on 30 December 1966 with serious street battles between rival factions outside the Party offices in the city. When the rebels seized control of the city, many local government leaders were purged and Wang Hongwen became the effective leader in the city. A Shanghai people's commune was established to run the city.



Fig. 8 A propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution. Red Guards are shown denouncing an 'anti-revolutionary' book by the author Wu Han

Cross-reference

Struggle meetings are covered in more detail on page 38.

See page 98 for more on Yao Wenyan.

Party were forced to appear before struggle meetings, at which they had to wear dunce's caps and were subjected to verbal and physical abuse.

In November 1966, militant factory and office workers began to form their own Red Guard units. In Shanghai a Workers' Revolutionary General Headquarters (WRGH) was set up, with the blessing of the CRG, to coordinate radical groups in the city. Supporters of this body were known as the 'revolutionary rebels'. The Shanghai CPC leadership tried to obstruct this new development, which was outside its control, but Mao declared that workers had the right to establish their own mass organisations and the Shanghai Party bosses were forced to make a public self-criticism. Nevertheless, the Party leadership in Shanghai supported the establishment of the Shanghai Red Detachment, a conservative mass organisation whose members, known as 'proletarian revolutionaries', opposed the efforts of the revolutionary rebels to overthrow the existing power structures. This factional rivalry quickly degenerated into violence.

At the end of December 1966 there were street battles between rival Red Guard factions in Shanghai. This was the beginning of the episode known as the 'January Storm'. Strikes paralysed the port of Shanghai and the railway network in and around the city. On 3 January 1967 the revolutionary rebels seized control of the main newspapers in Shanghai. These events brought about the collapse of the authority of the Party leadership in Shanghai. At this point, Mao intervened. He sent two loyal allies, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyan, to Shanghai with orders to bring down the Shanghai Party Committee and establish a new political authority in its place. In the January Revolution of 5 January 1967, the WRGH announced the overthrow of the Shanghai Party Committee and declared that the city would henceforth be run by the revolutionary rebels. With the support of the PLA, the WRGH took control of all factories, docks, newspapers and businesses in Shanghai. During the rest of January 1967, rebel groups seized power in seven other provinces including Beijing.

Key profiles

Zhang Chunqiao

Zhang Chunqiao (1917–2005) was one of the Shanghai radicals associated with Jiang Qing. With a background in propaganda, he rose to prominence during the Cultural Revolution and became deputy head of the CRG.

Wang Hongwen

Originally a textile worker from Shanghai, Wang Hongwen (1933–92) rose to prominence during the Cultural Revolution after leading the rebels in their seizure of power in January 1967. He became a close ally of Jiang Qing and the other Shanghai radicals.

In January 1967, having been arrested and interrogated, Nien Cheng was moved to a different prison in another part of Shanghai. This is her description of how the city bore the scars of several months of revolutionary upheaval.

There was evidence of destruction everywhere; scorched buildings with blackened windows, uprooted trees and shrubs and abandoned vehicles. Debris whirled in the wind. Grey bent figures were digging hopefully among heaped rubbish. Traffic lights were not operating. Slogans covered the walls of every building we passed. They were even plastered on the sides of buses and trucks. Instead of policemen, armed soldiers patrolled the streets. We passed several truckloads of helmeted revolutionaries armed with iron rods and shouting slogans, probably on their way to carry out revolutionary actions against some rival factions.

8

From Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai, 1986*

Mao and his allies had no plan to guide Zhang and Yao in establishing a new political authority. Having gained control of Shanghai with PLA support, Zhang established a Shanghai people's commune. This was a body whose officials would be chosen in free elections and would be subject to democratic accountability. In other words, there would be no Communist Party monopoly over elections to the commune. Following Mao's principle of 'trust the masses', Zhang believed he had Mao's support in establishing this new body. However, in a change of tack that was one of his trademarks, Mao declared that 'There must be a Party somehow. There must be a nucleus, no matter what we call it.' He refused to back the Shanghai people's commune and instructed rebel groups in other cities not to follow Shanghai's example.

In one of the key turning points of the Cultural Revolution, on 23 January 1967 the Shanghai people's commune was abandoned and replaced by the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee. This was an organisation made up of three elements – a 'three-in-one combination' in the words of Mao – consisting of 'revolutionary rebels', Communist Party officials and PLA representatives. This became a prototype for the establishment of revolutionary committees in other cities and provinces. With the Communist Party in disarray, however, it fell to the PLA to organise and support the new revolutionary committees.

The intervention of the PLA, February 1967

With the PLA taking an increasingly active role in the Cultural Revolution, the army became subject to the same stresses and strains that were dividing Chinese society. Lin Biao, the political head of the PLA, was a key driving force behind the Cultural Revolution. Many of his top military commanders, however, were determined to ensure that the PLA should be insulated from the revolutionary upheavals that were destabilising Chinese society. As the PLA had the ultimate responsibility

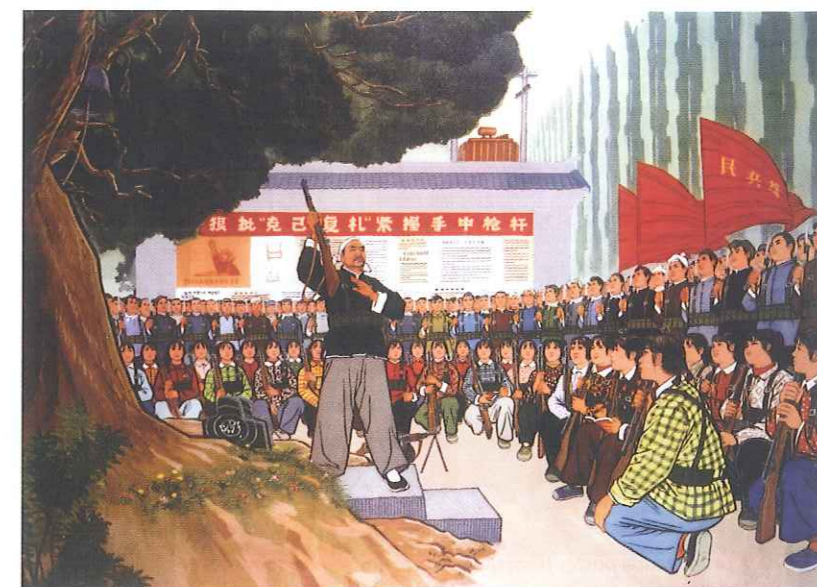


Fig. 9 Propaganda work during the Cultural Revolution, showing young Chinese being given instruction on the use of weapons

Activity

Source analysis

Study Source 8. What can we learn from this source about the effects of Red Guard activity on the city of Shanghai?

Activity

Revision exercise

The events of January and February 1967 marked a key moment in the Cultural Revolution.

- 1 Create a simple timeline showing the events of January and February 1967.
- 2 Mark each event with a symbol to show whether the Cultural Revolution at this point was becoming more or less radical (possibly forward facing/backward facing arrows).
- 3 Summarise the steps Mao took at each stage to ensure he remained in control of events.

毛主席的革命文艺路线胜利万岁！

要使文艺很好地成为整个革命机器的一个组成部分，作为团结人民、教育人民、打击敌人、消灭敌人的有力的武器，帮助人民同心同德地和敌人作斗争。



Fig. 10 A propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution showing the struggle against 'revisionism'. Here, Red Guards, workers, peasants and soldiers are seen brandishing the Little Red Book and attacking a 'revisionist'

for defending the nation against external attack and for maintaining internal security, military commanders believed that the discipline and unity of the army should be maintained at all costs. This meant that PLA officers should not be subjected to struggle meetings involving criticism and humiliation, unlike their civilian political counterparts. The CRG, on the other hand, believed that no sector of Chinese society should be immune from the rectification campaign that was at the heart of the Cultural Revolution. Mao was careful not to reveal his views on this issue. He approved a directive that prohibited attacks on the PLA but did not condemn radical military cadets when they staged struggle meetings against their commanders. In the absence of clear political leadership, a number of senior military commanders decided to act on their own initiative against radical groups. In the February Crackdown, regional military commanders in Sichuan and Wuhan used armed force to suppress radical groups and arrest their leaders.

A political backlash

At the same time, the February Adverse Current developed. This was a backlash against the excesses of the Cultural Revolution by leading members of the Politburo. When, in February 1967, Mao criticised Jiang Qing and Chen Boda for taking decisions on the Cultural Revolution without consulting him, members of the Politburo who had harboured doubts about the whole concept of the Cultural Revolution began to voice their criticisms openly. They pointed out that the Red Guards had been overstepping the boundaries for the Cultural Revolution laid down in the Sixteen Points. This led to a Politburo directive, supported by Mao, which imposed limits on the use of force by the Red Guards, ordered Red Guards to stop travelling around the country and return to their native towns and cities, and directed Red Guards to withdraw from Party and government departments responsible for defence, economic planning, foreign affairs, public security, finance, banking and propaganda. The PLA was ordered to restore order.

The radicalisation of the Cultural Revolution, February to August 1967

The February Adverse Current might have been the point at which the Cultural Revolution was reined in by China's political leadership. In fact, the opposite happened. Mao saw the criticism of the Cultural Revolution from members of the Politburo as a challenge to his authority and a confirmation of his original decision to launch the attack on the Party establishment. After February 1967, the Politburo virtually ceased to function and its powers were henceforth exercised by the Cultural Revolution Group. The criticism of veteran Party cadres became bolder and more sustained. PLA officers who had attempted to crack down on radical Red Guards were denounced as ultra-rightists and court-martialled. The PLA was ordered to refrain from using armed force against Red Guards. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, despite now being isolated and having no political influence, were also caught in the backlash against the February Adverse Current. Both were placed under house arrest.

Key events

- Factional rivalry escalated and in many places led to pitched battles between rival groups. For example, in Wuhan in July 1967, 600 people were killed in clashes between a 'conservative' workers' group called the Million Heroes and the more radical Workers' Revolutionary General Headquarters. Mao, Jiang Qing and Lin Biao sided with the radicals. The regional military commander, who had imprisoned radical leaders during the February Crackdown, was purged. Mao and Jiang Qing now began to advocate arming the radical groups in preparation for a struggle against 'capitalist-roaders in the PLA' who were supporting the more conservative mass organisations.
- There were arms seizures from transports taking Chinese weapons to North Vietnam. Regional military commanders came under renewed attack from the Red Guards.
- Radical groups in Beijing seized control of the foreign ministry and there were attacks on the British, Indian, Burmese and Indonesian legations in the capital.

The crackdown on the Red Guards, August 1967

Once again China seemed on the verge of degenerating into chaos and once again Mao underwent a major change of heart. Realising that the PLA risked being fatally undermined as a disciplined and effective fighting force, he drew back from his radical policies. On 11 August 1967 he issued a statement in which he said that the policy of 'dragging out capitalist-roaders in the army' was 'unstrategic'. This was the signal for a crackdown on radical groups and their leaders. The earlier chaos and radical excesses were conveniently blamed on the May 16 Group, a tiny radical group few people had heard about until it was named as a scapegoat. In late August, the four most radical members of the Cultural Revolution Group were purged and in September Mao approved an order that forbade Red Guards from seizing weapons. The PLA was also authorised to open fire on radical groups in self-defence.

The creation of new political structures, August 1967 to July 1968

This was another key turning point in the Cultural Revolution. After the events of August and September 1967, the main focus of the Cultural Revolution shifted from the destruction of the old order towards the creation of a new system. Mao ordered the rival Red Guards and workers' factions to unite and form 'grand alliances'. He called for rapid progress in setting up new revolutionary committees. In Beijing and Shanghai, this was achieved quickly.



Fig. 11 Chinese leaders Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong and Lin Biao review troops in Tiananmen Square, October 1967. Note that, in contrast to photographs from the early 1960s, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping are no longer part of this official group, having been purged during the Cultural Revolution

Did you know?

The Vietnam War

During the 1960s, South Vietnam (supported by the USA) was fighting a communist group known as the Vietcong, which was supported by the communist government in North Vietnam. China supported North Vietnam and the Vietcong by supplying weapons.

Exploring the detail

The May 16 Group

The May 16 Group was a small ultra-left group with about 40 members. It had been making attacks on Zhou Enlai as the 'backstage boss' of the February Adverse Current. Mao supported Zhou against these attacks and the agitation stopped. By August the May 16 Group no longer existed but Mao branded it as a 'counter-revolutionary clique' and exaggerated its importance. This gave him an excuse to crack down on radical groups.

Activity

Thinking point

Explain why Mao decided to restrain the Red Guards in August 1967.

Elsewhere in China, however, factional rivalries and conflicts continued and delayed the formation of revolutionary committees. Between August 1967 and July 1968, revolutionary committees were established in 18 provinces. In the remaining provinces, which were more remote or more deeply divided, it took longer to create the new political structures.

The purging of the Red Guards, August 1967 to July 1968

Key events

- By the end of 1967 a far-reaching purge of the Red Guards was under way. Under the pretext of clamping down on the excesses of the May 16 Group, 10 million people fell under suspicion, 3 million of whom were detained for questioning. At just one of the PRC's main ministries, the foreign ministry, 2,000 officials were purged.
- In the spring of 1968, the net was widened into a campaign 'for the cleansing of class ranks', which led to the arrest of a further 1.8 million people. Tens of thousands of these victims were either beaten to death or committed suicide. Most of the rest were sent to labour camps. New public security regulations made it a counter-revolutionary crime to criticise Chairman Mao, Lin Biao or other radical leaders.
- In the summer of 1968, Mao took steps to restore order in Shaanxi and Guangxi provinces where civil war had been raging. The PLA was ordered to separate the warring factions and Military Control Commissions were established to put down resistance to military rule. In Guangxi this provoked a wave of indiscriminate slaughter, including some instances of cannibalism when so-called 'traitors' were killed and their livers eaten by their assailants.

The University itself had become a battle zone. Verbal fights had given way to pitched battles. The campus was divided into two warring states, the conservative faction and the rebel faction. Both had loudspeakers with which to blare vehement denunciations at each other twenty-four hours a day. Both pledged undying allegiance to Chairman Mao. Both were his most loyal followers, their opposites were evil incarnate. Each faction had its own armband for identification. Anyone who entered the wrong zone was sure to be pelted with stones and accused of spying. Laboratories were turned into miniature arms factories to produce tear gas and hand grenades.

9

From Sirin Phathanothai, *The Dragon's Pearl*, 2006

Activity

Source Analysis

Study Source 9.

- 1 What can we learn from this source about factional rivalries among the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution?
- 2 What can we learn from this source about the effect of Red Guard activity on university education?

- There was also serious violence and disorder on a number of university campuses, including that of the large and prestigious Qinghua University in Beijing. The violence at Qinghua brought about the final suppression of the Red Guards. Arguing that the leadership of the

Cultural Revolution should be in the hands of workers not students, in July 1968 Mao sent a team of 30,000 workers and PLA troops on to the campus at Qinghua to disarm the student Red Guards. Ten people were killed in the fighting that followed.

- The suppression of the Red Guards was followed by a large-scale, compulsory, rustication programme in which young people from the cities were sent to live and work in the countryside. Between 1968 and 1970, some 5 million young people were sent for work-study programmes among the peasants. At the same time, several million Party cadres and intellectuals were ordered out of the cities to live in May 7th Cadre Schools. For Mao, these programmes fulfilled two objectives: they forced bureaucrats to rediscover their revolutionary zeal through hard manual labour while Red Guards were forced out of the cities and dispersed to areas where they could cause little trouble.

The growing power of the PLA

The PLA played a key role in the Cultural Revolution. Not only was it responsible for restoring order, it was also assuming a much greater political role in Chinese society. Many of the rusticated youths were sent to work on army-run farms in remote border regions. PLA officers oversaw the 'cleansing of class ranks' at the May 7th Cadre Schools, while military work teams were installed in factories, newspaper offices and every government department.

The PLA was also emerging as a dominant force in the new political structures. At provincial level, half of the members of the new revolutionary committees were PLA officers; Red Guards provided one third of the members while veteran Party cadres made up only 20 per cent of these bodies. At local level, PLA dominance was even more pronounced. In some areas, 98 per cent of members of county-level revolutionary committees were drawn from the army. By the end of 1968, the last Red Guard units had been disbanded, their newspapers closed and China was effectively under military rule.

The end of the Cultural Revolution

In September 1968, when the last of the 29 provincial revolutionary committees was finally established, the Cultural Revolution Group proclaimed 'the entire country is red'. In other words, the Cultural Revolution, in the eyes of its main protagonists, had completed its work. Mao then moved to draw the Cultural Revolution to a close.

A full Central Committee meeting was held in October 1968, made up of the survivors and those who had gained from the Cultural Revolution. By the time the Central Committee met, more than two thirds of those who had been members in 1966 had been purged and only 40 members with full voting rights were present. Under the Party constitution this was not enough to make binding decisions. Acting unconstitutionally, Mao added 10 new members to the committee and packed the meeting with 80 of his supporters, drawn from the PLA and the new revolutionary committees. The Central Committee declared that the Cultural Revolution had been necessary and it had won a 'great and decisive victory'. The meeting denounced the February Adverse Current and those who had supported it but did not purge them from their posts. Liu Shaoqi, who had long since ceased to have any power but who still served as a convenient scapegoat, was finally expelled from both the Party and the government.

Exploring the detail

May 7th Cadre Schools

These were camps set up for the 're-education' of Party cadres through physical labour and political study, and through learning from the peasants. They were usually located in rural areas, far from the homes of those sent to them. Perhaps as many as 3 million people were relocated in such camps.

Activity

Preparing a presentation

'The Cultural Revolution was an act of pure destruction. Its sole purpose was to reassert Mao's position as the Red Emperor.' Divide the class into two groups. One group should prepare a presentation in support of this proposition and the other should prepare a presentation in support of Mao's declared aims during the Cultural Revolution.

This Central Committee meeting was followed by a full Party Congress in April 1969. This meeting ratified the decisions of the Central Committee and officially declared the end of the Cultural Revolution. A new Party constitution adopted by the Congress stressed the 'guiding role' of Mao's thought and the importance of continuing class struggle in the Party's ideology. The Cultural Revolution was over and Mao's position as the Red Emperor had been secured.

Meanwhile, Liu Shaoqi was ending his days as a prisoner in an unheated room at the local Party headquarters in Kaifeng. In November 1969, he developed pneumonia for a second time, but permission to move him to a hospital was refused. He died on 12 November.

Activity

Revision exercise

Copy and complete the table below. In the second column identify the main events at each stage of the Cultural Revolution. In the last column, select one event that was a key turning point in the Cultural Revolution and write a short paragraph to explain its importance.

Phase in the Cultural Revolution	Main events	Critical event
The opening shots: August to October 1966		
Widening and deepening: October 1966 to January 1967		
A critical moment: February 1967		
Radicalisation of the Cultural Revolution: February to August 1967		
The final phase: August 1967 to April 1969		

Summary questions

- 1 Explain why, in the early stages of the power struggle, Mao did not attack Liu and Deng directly.
- 2 Explain why Mao was so concerned about the Communist Party becoming bureaucratic.
- 3 Explain why Mao's call to arms found such an enthusiastic response among Chinese youth.
- 4 Explain why the Cultural Revolution was accompanied by so much violence in the years between 1966 and 1969.

9

The impact of the Cultural Revolution

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the impact of the Cultural Revolution on urban and rural areas of China
- the impact of the Cultural Revolution on education and China's youth
- the effects of the Cultural Revolution on cultural and intellectual life
- how the Communist Party was affected by the Cultural Revolution.

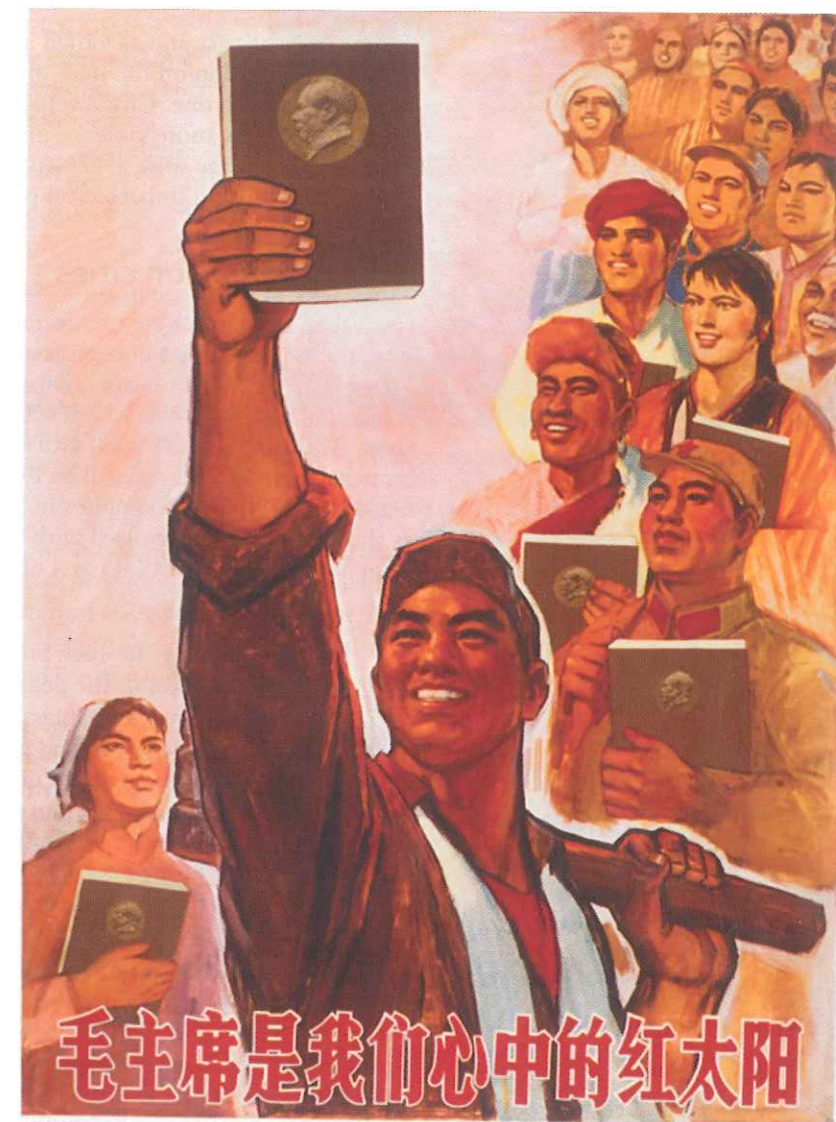


Fig. 1 A propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution, 'Chairman Mao is our heart's red sun.' A Chinese worker holds up the Little Red Book. In the background are people representing many other countries. Posters like this reinforced the personality cult of Chairman Mao

Exploring the detail

Mass killings

Public spaces such as theatres, sports stadiums and town squares became the venues for systematic killings. For example, in a two-day period in the town of Daxing, 300 people were clubbed to death in the town square.

The violent phase of the Cultural Revolution lasted two and a half years. During this time there were many hundreds of thousands of deaths and many Chinese suffered beatings and imprisonment on the flimsiest of evidence, without the opportunity to defend themselves in a court of law. In the province of Guangxi alone, it has been estimated that there were 67,000 deaths in the years 1966–76. Nei Menggu (Inner Mongolia), Xizang (Tibet) and Sichuan also saw many hundreds of thousands of deaths. Extrapolations based on the figures from these provinces indicate a total death toll from the Cultural Revolution of between 700,000 and 850,000. These figures