

THE PRESENT AND THE PAST ..

Modern China

A History

Second Edition

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The Cultural Revolution

By the mid 1960s, the Chinese Revolution seemed to have settled down to the job of ruling China. Its main goals were essentially nationalist: a prosperous modern economy, and a government capable of maintaining national unity and upholding China's place in the world. While there continued to exist substantial economic inequalities, the distribution of wealth was probably a bit more equal than in most Western countries, and significantly more equal than in pre-revolutionary China. One could say that the Chinese were trying to carry out an improved version of the Russian Revolution – improved by the fact that China had not gone as far as the Soviet Union had gone under Stalin in regard either to extremes of internal terrorism or to Stalin's tremendously wasteful methods of forced-draft economic development. Almost all CCP leaders were happy with this picture. Mao Zedong was not; he felt that some fundamental goals of the revolution were being abandoned.

Education was functioning as the basis of a caste system, which to Mao seemed unpleasantly reminiscent of the system by which the Confucian scholars had dominated traditional China. He could observe that the Soviet Union was, quite literally, ruled by the graduates of advanced technical schools. This group not only managed the factories, it held an overwhelming majority of the positions on the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. Despite the distrust for intellectuals that the CCP had shown so brutally in the Anti-Rightist movement of 1957–58, China seemed to be headed in the same direction. Educated people not only got the best jobs and the highest pay, they had high prestige. They felt (and many of the non-educated agreed with them) that an educated person was fundamentally superior to an uneducated one, entitled to look down on the masses, give them orders, and avoid, *as a matter of right*, having to do any form of manual labour. China's poverty and the lack of qualified teachers restricted access to education. Even primary schooling was far from universal; graduation from secondary school,

especially from one of the best schools in the major cities, marked a person destined for a position well above the average in Chinese society.

While there were great variations in income between different villages, and between different jobs in the urban sector, the overall averages showed a clear pattern: the cities were much richer than the countryside. Most capital investment was going into urban industries. The urban workers, using a considerable amount of expensive machinery, had a much higher average level of productivity per hour than the rural workers, who lived mainly by farming but did not have enough land, machinery, or fertilizer. The natural consequence was for the city people, with their greater economic power, not only to arrange for themselves an average income level about twice as high as that in the countryside but also to dominate Chinese society in other ways.

Finally, the bureaucrats of the Communist Party and the government, who dominated Chinese society more thoroughly than the Confucian scholars or the Guomindang had ever managed to do, made Mao uneasy. They formed a ruling caste, which felt entitled to make all real decisions and demand instant obedience from the people.

All three of the marks of privilege – education, urban residence, and Party or bureaucratic status – were to a considerable extent hereditary. This was not just a result of the informal social realities that exist in most societies – that the children of educated parents did better in school, that communities with prosperous and well-educated adult populations had above-average schools, and that influential parents could sometimes arrange special preference for their children. Such informal mechanisms were buttressed by very strong formal ones. The children of city people usually lived in the cities where they had grown up; the residence permit system made it very difficult for the child of a peasant to get permission to move into a city. The systematic, formal preference given to the children of revolutionary cadres in the educational system went far beyond anything their parents might have hoped to arrange on an individual basis.

Family background played, in one way or another, a tremendous role in the educational careers of Chinese students. All students had an official class label, based on the status of their parents. The level of academic competence one had to show in order to win admission to a selective school depended on one's class label.

- The children of revolutionary cadres were given a strong preference in admission to good schools, and also the average educational level of their parents was somewhat higher than the average for the population as a whole. They therefore formed a large proportion of the student body at the better secondary schools and colleges.
- The children of ordinary workers and poor peasants had to meet somewhat higher academic standards to win admission, and since their parents were generally uneducated, few of them were able to do so. Partial figures

are available for thirty upper middle (senior high) schools in Guangzhou; the children of ordinary workers and peasants made up, on the average, less than one-sixth of the students of these schools.

- The children of the middle class had to meet still higher standards, but thanks to the educational background of their parents, many were able to do so; they made up about half of the student body of the Guangzhou schools mentioned above.
- The children of the 'bad classes' (landlords, counter-revolutionaries, rich peasants, capitalists, and 'rightists' who had spoken out against the Communist system during the Hundred Flowers episode of 1957) had to meet the highest standard of all to win admission, but a significant number were able to do so.

The differential admissions policy led directly to differentials in the average academic competence of the students in each category. Middle-class students tended to be academically above the average in any given school, and students from the 'bad classes' very far above the average, simply because if they were not above average they would not have been allowed in the school. Students of below-average competence were generally the children of revolutionary cadres or of ordinary workers and peasants. This led to serious conflicts over the criteria to be used in choosing students for the next higher level of education, since a selection process emphasizing academic competence would clearly favour the middle class and the 'bad classes'.

The peasants of China were better off than before the revolution. They had a higher average standard of living, and more security against unexpected disasters. The élite was more solicitous of peasant interests than had been true in the old society. However, while a good many individual peasants had managed to work their way up into the élite, the peasantry as a whole was still, quite clearly, a lower class with a subordinate position in society. This was not what the revolution had been intended to accomplish.

China was having far more difficulty escaping from its past than Mao had expected. Marxist theory predicted that after the initial establishment of a socialist society, there would be a continued upward movement towards forms of society having less and less in common with pre-revolutionary patterns. Chinese tradition, however, said that the high point of each dynasty had always come shortly after it was founded; dynasties tended to decline from that point onward. Inequalities of wealth were smallest at the beginning of a dynasty, and increased later on. Mao looked at the younger generation, the people who would someday inherit power in China, and he was not reassured. Conditioned to accept substantial inequality in society, conditioned to obey authority without question, lacking experience of revolutionary turmoil or personal knowledge of what China had been like before 1949, how could they have any real understanding of the revolution? How

could they be expected to preserve its ideals once the older generation was gone?

Aside from being distressed by the direction the revolution had taken, Mao felt increasingly outraged by the difficulty he sometimes had in making his beliefs felt. In some respects he seemed as powerful as ever. His picture was displayed everywhere, and the general public continued to regard him as the incarnation of the revolution. The army came increasingly under his influence after his enemy Peng Dehuai was replaced as Minister of Defence by his ally Lin Biao in 1959. Mao took advantage of this by initiating a campaign to 'learn from the People's Liberation Army', which increased the army's influence in the Party and the civil government. Much of the Party bureaucracy, however, did not share his fundamental attitudes and in any case did not like the way some of his mass campaigns had disrupted orderly government. On many issues, especially those involving economics, the bureaucrats had shunted him out of the main line of policy formation after the failures of the Great Leap Forward.

Mao's effort both to re-establish his personal power and to shift the overall course China was following led to the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution': several years of chaotic mass struggle starting in 1966, and then a lingering aftermath lasting until Mao's death in 1976.

Most observers, both Chinese and Western, feel today that Mao had simply lost touch with reality; that in his old age he had become willing to throw away everything he had built, in his blind pursuit of Utopian dreams and personal power. Certainly Mao's optimism about the social transformation he was trying to bring about has turned out to be unjustified. Still, if he had cared to respond to the charges he knew were being made, that he was being unrealistic, he might have said: Marxist doctrine taught that in a socialist society, there would be a natural tendency for social inequalities to shrink, for greed to give way before the habit of unselfish cooperation, for the gaps separating mental from manual labour, peasants from industrial workers, cities from countryside, to fade away. More than a decade of socialism in China, and more than four decades in the Soviet Union, had provided little evidence that any such natural tendency was going to emerge. What would it be most 'realistic' for him to do? To abandon his most cherished goals without a struggle? To sit back and continue to hope that all would somehow work out for the best, despite the evidence he could see all around him? Or to fight to *make* the promises of Marxism come true, as ruthlessly as he had once fought, against odds that looked even more impossible, in the hills of South China?

Whether or not one thinks Mao's decision was so irrational as to reflect a loss of contact with reality, there can be little dispute that the results of the decision were disastrous. He failed to reach his goal, to get China off the path he called the 'capitalist road'. The country was more firmly set on that path by the 1980s than it had been in 1965. Furthermore, the cost of the unsuc-

cessful attempt to change course was ghastly, no matter how one measures it – lives lost, students not educated, economic growth set back for years. The Chinese leadership later referred to the period from 1966 to 1976 as the ‘Ten-Year Catastrophe’.

At the time the Cultural Revolution was going on, some people were puzzled that it seemed to be so much the personal creation of Mao Zedong. His name was repeated endlessly in the documents of the Cultural Revolution; it will be repeated endlessly in the account of the Cultural Revolution in this book. Great historic movements do not normally spring from the head of an individual, they arise from the logic of a situation. It seemed incredible that the social, economic, and political structure of the largest nation on earth was being drastically revised because one man willed it.

Today, after the failure of the movement, the pattern of events makes more sense. While Mao was able to find a certain natural base of support for the Cultural Revolution in Chinese society, this natural base was weak enough so that nothing remotely resembling the Cultural Revolution would have been likely to occur if Mao had not decided to make it occur. That is why it ended in failure.

1966: ‘To rebel is justified!’

The conflict between Mao and his opponents came to a head in 1966. The Deputy Mayor of Beijing, Wu Han, was an academic who had not been a member of the Communist movement during the Civil War, but who had been recruited along with many other intellectuals during the 1950s. In 1961, Wu Han wrote a play called *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, about a wise and virtuous official of the Ming Dynasty, devoted to the welfare of the people, who was dismissed from office by an egotistical emperor (see Ch. 1). It may well have been written innocently, but it looked suspiciously like a disguised criticism of Mao for the way he had purged Peng Dehuai in 1959. When Mao became disturbed by the parallel, he found that he could not even arrange for publication of an attack on the play in the major Party organs in Beijing. He had to go to Shanghai, where his own influence was greater and Wu Han’s was less, to get his view into print.

Wanting to cut down the power and privileges of the ruling élite of China, Mao obviously had to find allies outside that élite. His supporters in the army would eventually play a major role, but it was students who led during the opening stages of the movement.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution began as a campaign to root out ‘bourgeois’ influences in art and literature. By the spring of 1966 it had been broadened to deal with bourgeois influences among the intellectuals in general. Party authorities in Beijing sent out teams of cadres to conduct the

movement in various schools, factories, and other organizations. Nothing suggested that this was going to become a matter of great importance; the movement seemed directed mainly against intellectuals from middle-class backgrounds, the type of people who had been attacked in the Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957. The Party bureaucracy, not Mao Zedong, controlled the teams of cadres supervising the movement.

Then, in May 1966, a woman named Nie Yuanzi (Nieh Yuan-tzu) put up a wall poster at Beijing University. She argued that the Cultural Revolution should be a vigorous mass movement, and she denounced the administration of Beijing University for restricting it and keeping it from developing properly. Mao had her poster reprinted in the *People's Daily*. In the summer of 1966 students in Beijing began, with Mao's support, to organize themselves as 'Red Guards'. They took an increasing role in the effort to root out bourgeois influences from the faculties and administrations of their universities. Wall posters attacking various professors and administrators proliferated fantastically. Before long there were far more posters than space available on the walls; rooms and courtyards had ropes strung across them like clothes-lines, from which posters could be hung. People walked along the narrow alleys between the rows of posters, reading them or putting up posters of their own.

Mao had the work teams pulled out of educational institutions in late July. With their restraining influence removed, the Red Guard movement was able to spread to institutions throughout China. The Red Guards attacked the 'Four Olds': old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. They also attacked anything that they felt represented the influence either of the Soviet Union or of the Western capitalist countries. They smashed images in Buddhist temples. They raided the homes of professors and other intellectuals, confiscating or destroying Western-style clothing, books and paintings representing the Four Olds, and anything else that offended them. The owners of such materials were abused both verbally and physically. Within weeks, the first incidents in which Red Guards beat people to death began to occur. The police and the military were under orders not to interfere.

The students involved, in the first months, were mostly from backgrounds considered 'pure'. Many, in fact, were the children of important Communists. They were stepping outside the bounds of behaviour normally permitted by the Communist system, and they were putting a severe strain on the system when they attacked academic administrators many of whom belonged to the Communist Party, but they regarded themselves basically as defenders of the system. They had a variety of motives for joining the Red Guards. Most were convinced that anything Chairman Mao urged them to do must be correct. Many genuinely resented the authoritarian behaviour that characterized many teachers and administrators. Many had a longstanding dislike of 'bourgeois' intellectuals, a dislike that had grown out of the competition that pitted cadres' children against students of greater academic



talent who came from bourgeois backgrounds. Almost all the Red Guards were desperately eager to meet whatever criteria were currently being used to measure correct political attitude, since if their political attitude were not considered correct, their chances of further education and thus a better life would become miniscule.

On 5 August 1966, the direction of the movement began to change. Mao Zedong himself issued a statement titled 'Bombard the Headquarters', in which he charged that there were people in the CCP at all levels up to the very top who were following reactionary, essentially bourgeois policies. He did not name those he was attacking, but it soon became clear that they included both Liu Shaoqi (Chief of State of the PRC) and Deng Xiaoping (General Secretary of the CCP). On 15 September, Lin Biao told a mass rally in Beijing, attended by Red Guards from all over the country, that the main target for their movement should be the individuals in power who were following the capitalist road. Soon, more and more senior officials were being attacked and humiliated. Many of them, including Liu Shaoqi, eventually died as a result of the mistreatment they suffered.

At schools where the movements had at first been dominated by the children of revolutionary veterans, competing groups appeared, containing more students from middle-class backgrounds, who had long resented the special preference given to the children of cadres. They attacked the Communist Party bureaucracy, and indeed most of the authority structure that had ruled China. Before the end of 1966, many of the original Red Guards, children of the Party bureaucracy, were rallying to the defence of that bureaucracy and struggling against the newer Red Guard units.

In September 1966, student Red Guards from colleges and even some from secondary schools were invited to go travelling through China to share information and experiences, and to learn more about revolution. They were given the right to travel free on the railroads, but tens of thousands marched on foot across the countryside, visiting Chairman Mao's birthplace, the CCP strongholds of the 1930s in Jiangxi, and other famous revolutionary sites. They hoped both to find inspiration there and to toughen themselves by enduring physical hardships along the way. About 11 million went to Beijing to attend mass rallies where they could actually glimpse Chairman Mao in person. The general right of Red Guards to travel everywhere was rescinded in December, but they continued to move about to a significant extent. They were ordered to return home in February 1967.

Organizations analogous to the Red Guards began to be formed among industrial workers. By the end of 1966, workers' organizations in Shanghai were already showing the same pattern of factional division that had appeared among the student Red Guards in many cities: there were radical

organizations attacking the Party apparatus, and more conservative ones defending it.

The 'mass organizations' – student Red Guards and workers' groups – were not simply operating on their own. Shortly after Mao had pulled the Party organization's work teams out of the universities in the summer, he had begun sending in work teams of his own. However, the situation in which competing authorities issued conflicting orders to conflicting organizations of workers and students amounted to a breakdown of central control. In the confusion, many students and workers broke free of almost all organized restrictions; one or another group attacked almost every sector of the authority system that had formerly governed China. Professors probably suffered the most, but factory managers, government officials, and Party leaders also found their authority vanishing and themselves being held up to public scorn as followers of the 'capitalist road'. Many were subjected to savage physical abuse; some died.

Mao had once said, 'In the last analysis, all the truths of Marxism can be summed up in one sentence: "To rebel is justified."' He did not feel that there was anything sacred about the Communist Party. He had been a rebel against the warlord regimes of his youth; he had spent the best years of his life rebelling against the Guomindang; he saw nothing wrong with rebelling, and inciting the students to rebel, against the Communist Party structure once he had decided that the Party was leading China in the wrong direction. Loyal opposition would not do. The authoritarian traditions of Chinese society had combined with the authoritarianism of Communism to produce a structure so intimidating that there was no possibility Mao could persuade great masses of people to act as a loyal opposition, to put pressure on that structure while continuing to respect it. They would follow him against the structure only if he could persuade them to reject its authority totally, and set out to overthrow it.

Most Communists, once in power, become in a sense rather conservative. A few actually develop a respect for formal law, under the slogan of 'socialist legality'; they argue that the laws of a Communist state have been designed to protect the interests of the state and the people, and therefore everyone, including the Communist Party, must obey those laws. Most place Party policy above the law, and are willing to flout the law when the interests of the Party require it, but they have a great respect for the structure of Party authority. In traditional Chinese culture there is a horror of disorder, a fear that it will lead to complete anarchy if not quickly checked. Most Communist leaders shared this attitude, but Mao seems to have been immune to it. In the Cultural Revolution he showed utter contempt not only for formal law but for the authority of the Party, and for the normal rules governing politics within the Party. The only rule he respected in the game of politics was that the true revolutionaries must win.

With hindsight it is possible to discern approximately what Mao was



Plate 8.2 In late 1966 and early 1967, senior CCP and government members were publicly humiliated. Here, a government official is paraded through a Beijing street before Red Guards, wearing a cone-shaped hat as a sign of shame for involvement in an anti-revolutionary group.

after, but he did not explain his goals clearly at the time. Indeed, despite the way the Cultural Revolution lifted him almost to the status of a god, he was hardly presenting his ideas in public at all. The official edition of his *Selected Works* only covered the period up to 1949. *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, a collection of short excerpts from his writings which in a pocket edition known as the 'Little Red Book' became almost a bible for the Red Guards, contained very little written after 1959; most of it dated from before 1949. The man who during the 1930s and 1940s had been writing long and informative analyses of major problems was by the 1960s allowing his views to be represented, for the most part, either by things he had written many years before or by the frenzied and often absurd statements of his followers.

His actions make it unmistakable that he was vitally interested in a wide

range of policy questions. He cannot have believed that the Chinese people already understood his beliefs well enough so that he had no need to write about them further; there were too many conflicting interpretations of his ideas in circulation. Despite the effects of age and illness, he retained enough vigour and alertness to fight and win major political power struggles; surely he was still capable of the much easier task of writing out his views, or at least of allowing some assistant to edit into publishable form the texts of the speeches he was giving. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that, for a whole range of reasons, he had made a conscious and deliberate decision not to explain his thinking in print. Probably he wanted to let his followers experiment, and find their own way without the inhibition of too much guidance from him. Probably he was to some extent being Machiavellian, and was hoping to win the support of some people who would have opposed him if they had understood his real goals. Probably, feeling his way by trial and error through very difficult questions, and knowing his enemies would seize upon any error, he was reluctant to commit himself too publicly to answers which were still tentative. In earlier years he had been more confident; the tide of history had been running his way. He had been prepared to explain his views and the logic behind them; to be reasonable, even generous, with opponents whom he had defeated by proving that his own policies were superior. In the late 1960s, driven to increasingly desperate expedients in his efforts to regain control of a revolution that had slipped from his grasp, he discarded both civility and candour.

The Maoists presented the Cultural Revolution not as a conflict between two conceptions of the revolution, one more egalitarian than the other, but as a conflict between revolutionaries and enemies of the revolution. This was necessary in a propagandistic sense; they needed to present an almost apocalyptic vision if they wished to persuade loyal Communists to attack the Party apparatus, and educated young people whose own self-interest lay in the existing system, to attack that system. But Mao was spreading fear that the revolution was endangered, and unleashing a mass struggle to defend the purity of the revolution, without having either a coherent organization he could trust to guide it, or a clear and concrete definition of the enemy against which the struggle was to be conducted.

A number of passages in this book attempt to describe, as clearly and rationally as possible, what Mao was promoting and what he opposed. It is important to remember, when reading these passages, that they have had to be based to a considerable extent on reconstruction of Mao's goals from his actions. Neither Mao nor his followers were publishing any such clear, rational explanations of their goals during the Cultural Revolution. Statements by the radicals in this period often referred to the enemy as 'ghosts and monsters', 'freaks', or 'demons'. The intent of these phrases was to indicate that anyone so vile as to oppose the true revolutionary doctrines of Chairman Mao could hardly be considered human. With hindsight, however, such

language looks like a symptom of the fact that some of Mao's followers, not having been told exactly who or what they were struggling against, were having to conjure pictures of the enemy out of their imaginations. The result was chaos.

The radicals tried to connect their enemies as much as possible to the old enemies of the revolution, the landlords and capitalists. There were certain elements of reality in this. Policies that offered advancement to young people with academic talent had given an advantage to the children of educated parents, many of whom were the children of the pre-revolutionary élites. The manager of a state-owned factory in China could be sufficiently similar to the manager of a factory in a capitalist country, in the nature of the problems he faced, the nature of his relations with his workers, and his conception of his role, that it was by no means nonsense to refer to the Chinese manager as following the 'capitalist road', although the way this phrase brushes aside the question of ownership is perhaps odd. The radicals, however, carried their fears of landlord, rich peasant, and bourgeois influence to remarkable extremes. Two radicals who had seized power in one production brigade in the countryside decided it was necessary to carry out a complete extermination of the 'bad classes' – landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists. They called a meeting of leaders of neighbouring brigades (one brigade usually meant one village), and the slaughter was carried out in ten brigades. The victims included children who had not even been born at the time their parents committed the actions that had caused their families to be labelled 'bad classes'.

To the Maoists, the essential characteristics defining the capitalist road was selfishness. All policies that either rewarded or encouraged individual selfishness were deemed capitalist. This definition, which does not seem very Marxist, combined what were in fact two very different types of people under the general heading of 'capitalist roaders'.

1. The typical Communist bureaucrat believed in an authoritarian meritocracy. People should compete with one another, in school and elsewhere, and the winners should be rewarded with top positions in a steeply hierarchical structure of privilege and power.
2. Many intellectuals and some economic planners, on the other hand, believed that individual freedom should be substantially expanded. Writers should be allowed to write as they pleased; farmers should be permitted to grow whatever crops they thought most profitable; more people should be free to search for jobs that suited them, rather than being assigned jobs by the state. Many of the common people, while not involved in theoretical debates, wished that they as individuals could have more freedom to choose how they would make a living.

Lumping the proponents of centralized bureaucracy and of individual freedom together under a single label was not conducive to clear discussion of the

issues. There were only a few policy positions, such as a desire to stress academic competence in the educational system, on which the two types of 'capitalist roaders' were really in accord.

The three supreme elements of Maoist revolutionary purity became: personal selflessness, belief in 'the masses', and belief in Chairman Mao.

Everyone was supposed to be preoccupied with service to society, and care nothing for their own welfare. 'Craving for a comfortable life and continuing the revolution are as incompatible as fire and water.' In fact, selflessness was supposed to be carried to a point where people would sacrifice their own interests out of loyalty to the revolution without even thinking very much about whether their sacrifice would bring any concrete benefit to the revolution. The press gave considerable publicity to a story about a man who was carrying a message about Cultural Revolution policy to a remote village, and found his path blocked by a flooded river. He hurled himself into the waters, and (rather implausibly) died just as he delivered the message on the far side. There was nothing genuinely urgent about the message. One might think that he could have served Chairman Mao better by waiting for the waters to subside, delivering the message, and then making himself available for another assignment. This logic, however, was ignored; his readiness to die for the revolution made him a hero.

Everyone was supposed to believe that the common people had both the right and the ability to run society; the right to avoid being dominated by a few bureaucrats, and the ability to carry out any task of great importance without having to depend on highly trained experts.

On the other hand, everyone was supposed to have faith in the infallible guidance of Chairman Mao. Intensive study of the 'Little Red Book' became the official source of inspiration for almost any activity; it taught people how to grow more wheat, make better light bulbs, and heal the sick. Great crowds chanted it in unison.

The years of chaos: 1967-1968

In January and February of 1967, Mao began to encourage an actual seizure of government by radicals organized in a three-way alliance: (1) 'mass organizations' (Red Guards among the students, and equivalent groups among the industrial workers); (2) the military; (3) officials of the government organs being seized who were willing to change sides and join in the overthrow of their own organizations. Such seizures began to occur in city governments, province governments, and ministries of the national government. Once in power, unfortunately, the new power-holders fought savagely among themselves. Different groups had different private interests to promote, and different conceptions of revolutionary purity.

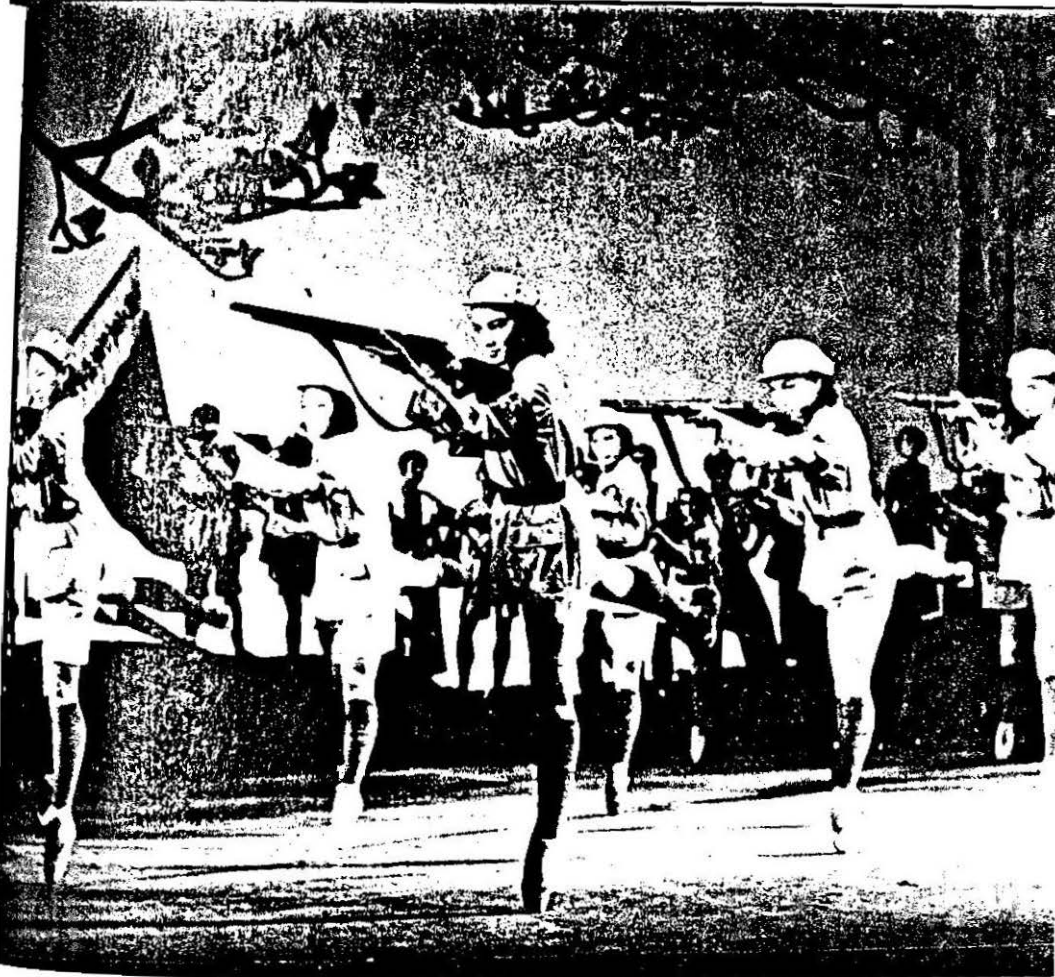


Plate 8.3 During the Cultural Revolution, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, dominated theatre, ballet and the cinema in China. All the works produced under her supervision were characterized by very heavy-handed propaganda themes. This scene is taken from *The Red Detachment of Women*.

In Beijing, the central leadership under Mao was also divided into three parts. (1) Most radical was the committee called the Cultural Revolution Group, of which Mao's wife Jiang Qing was a conspicuous member. The Cultural Revolution Group supported many of the most radical Red Guard factions. (2) Somewhat less radical was the military high command under Lin Biao. (3) Most moderate were the surviving sections of the civil government, under Premier Zhou Enlai. Mao stood above these three groups, balancing them against one another.

There was no simple relationship between the three leadership groups in Beijing and the different groups struggling for power in various parts of China. Many Red Guards accepted policy guidance from the Cultural Revolution Group, but some supported Lin Biao and some backed relatively mod-

erate officials. The same divisions existed within the military, and among civil officials. If a provincial town were split by a fight between radical and conservative factions, there might well be some soldiers, some civil officials, and some Red Guards supporting each side. Participation of the army in actual street fighting was restrained by a policy (enforced to some extent, though not universally obeyed) which forbade the army to use armed force against Red Guards. However, if a military unit wished to weaken a certain Red Guard organization, it would often do so by issuing weapons to some competing Red Guard organization.

Chinese Communism had for years accepted three assumptions: (1) In any situation there exists a correct political line; (2) it is absolutely vital that everyone be made to conform to this political line; (3) therefore, anyone who defies the correct line must be forced into submission by whatever means are necessary. In the early 1950s, the CCP had been willing to be gradualistic in its approach to the goal of ideological conformity; it had been so confident of the eventual acceptance of its political line that it could remain fairly calm when confronted with momentary nonconformity. By the beginning of 1967, however, the future had become very uncertain. When two groups with different versions of the truth confronted one another, each dedicated to ruthless enforcement of what it regarded as correct revolutionary doctrine, then even minor differences in actual beliefs could provoke incredible explosions of violence, especially among the Red Guards. The situation would have been bad enough if the competing factions had been armed with knives and clubs, but soon they were using military weapons.

Changsha, for instance, the capital of Hunan province, was split for several months early in 1967 in a civil war between a 'conservative' Red Guard faction wanting the Cultural Revolution to be directed mainly against bourgeois intellectuals, and a more radical 'Rebel' faction wanting the movement to be directed more against Communist Party bureaucrats. Both sides conducted the fight with great brutality, sometimes torturing or beating to death prisoners taken from the opposing group. The 'Rebel' faction won decisive victory, but by the summer it in turn had split into moderate and radical subgroups. Each group was very heavily armed. A young man named Liang Heng, who was in Changsha at the time, later recalled:

The guns distributed to the Rebels' small official militia by the ... Army scarcely satisfied them. They added what they had seized from the Conservatives, stole from the local militias, stopped trains for weapons shipments, broke into arsenals, and attacked military bases. Then they started shooting at each other in order to decide arguments about who was going to be in charge. The 'moderate' Workers' Alliance was the huge faction cooperating with the army; their opponents were the Xiang River Wind and Thunder group, which wanted to seize power from the military.

The doctrinal differences between the two types of 'Rebels' were not nearly so large as those that had separated 'Rebels' from 'Conservatives' in the spring of 1967. In hindsight, their quarrel seems to have been primarily a struggle for simple political power. At the time, however, each group was sure that it was involved in a fundamental struggle of good against evil. Most members were convinced that their cause was worth dying for, and many were as careless with their own lives as they were with the lives of their enemies or of innocent bystanders. Liang Heng was near the office of the newspaper *Human Daily* when a battle between the two factions of 'Rebels' broke out there in the summer of 1967; his account illustrates the extraordinary fanaticism of these young people.

Suddenly, fifty or sixty men carrying machine guns ran past the gate of the *Hunan Daily* toward me. A short man in black carried the flag with the words 'Young People's Bodyguard Squad' on it, the name of one of the groups in the Xiang River Wind and Thunder faction. I instinctively flattened myself against the wall and a number of people leaped for their bicycles in fear; when the men were almost abreast of me they opened fire, aiming off down the road into the distance, shaking with the vibrations of their guns.

The enemy was out of sight, but it responded with force. The bullets whizzed through the air and, as if everything were in slow motion, the flagman fell in front of me and rolled over and over like a lead ball. The flag never touched the ground. Someone caught it and raised it, hardly breaking stride. Then he crumpled and rolled and someone else seized it and carried it forward. They never hesitated to take their places in the front line, always running erect and proud, then falling and rolling. The pool of blood widened to within a few feet of my bare toes. I thought I would vomit.

There were soldiers present, but they adhered to the official policy that the Army was to remain neutral in fights between Red Guard factions. Even when the Young People's Bodyguard Squad brought out cannons, the soldiers did not interfere, but neither (despite angry demands) would they give instructions in the use of the cannons. Lacking such instruction, the young rebels proved capable of loading and firing their weapons but not of aiming them; Liang Heng watched their shells strike nearby buildings almost at random.

Violence on a greater or lesser scale broke out in every province of China, but its nature and extent varied. From only one province (Guangxi), for example, are there convincing accounts of ceremonial cannibalism, in which significant numbers of leftists demonstrated the depth of their hatred for the rightists by frying and eating the hearts and other organs of their slain victims.

The killing did not involve only the 'mass organizations'; the army was

directly involved in some areas. In September Chairman Mao called for students to return to their schools, and ordered that military weapons be handed back to the military. The army was given the right to use armed force against the Red Guards in the suppression of factional fighting. Mao began pressing the various factions among his followers to compromise their differences and join in unified organizations. Soon, some of the most radical members of the Cultural Revolution Group were arrested on charges that they had been plotting against Zhou Enlai and the military.

These measures did not cure the problem, however. The level of armed conflict died down for a while, but then flared up again. Street fighting in the spring of 1968 sometimes involved tanks and artillery. As late as July 1968, a dispute among Red Guards in Beijing itself left fifteen students dead.

At the end of that month, Mao finally agreed with the more moderate of his supporters that the chaos had to end. 'Worker-peasant Mao Zedong thought propaganda teams' including a large number of military personnel began moving into educational institutions all over the country, and breaking the independent power of the Red Guards. Revolutionary committees, on which the military was heavily represented, became the principal administrative units everywhere. Millions of Red Guards, from all factions, were soon shipped out to the countryside and put to work on the land. Open violence ended in the streets of most cities, though it continued in a few places.

The extent to which political issues had been reduced to personalities was quite striking, and after Mao's death there would be vigorous denunciations of the 'cults of personality' practised during the Cultural Revolution. Chairman Mao, as an individual, became the incarnation of the revolution to an even greater extent than he had been before 1966. People bowed before his image after getting up and before going to bed. When a PLA soldier saw a school building on fire, his first thought was to save the portraits of Mao that hung in the classrooms. Only after he had done this did he turn his attention to saving human beings trapped in the building; he got the last of them out only seconds before the building collapsed. When the story was published, his priorities were not criticized; he was treated as a hero.

When the CCP issued a new constitution in 1969, Mao's name appeared in it eleven times; it repeated endlessly that 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought' formed the guiding line of the Party. Lin Biao, who as head of the Army had been Mao's greatest supporter in the Cultural Revolution, was designated by name in this constitution as Mao's heir. The most bizarre thing, however, is that the Party constitution phrased the reasons for Lin Biao's elevation purely in terms of his relationship with Mao; this had become more important than Lin's concrete accomplishments. It said: 'Comrade Lin Biao has consistently held high the great red banner of Mao Zedong Thought and has most loyally and resolutely carried out and defended Comrade Mao Zedong's proletarian revolutionary line. Comrade Lin Biao is Comrade Mao Zedong's close comrade-in-arms and successor.'

⁴ The cost of the Cultural Revolution had been monumental. There was a general attack on intellectuals, the 'stinking ninth category'. All institutions of higher learning were closed for several years, due both to the struggles being conducted against their administrations and faculties, and to the fact that the students were busy being Red Guards. A significant number of colleges were reopening by 1970, but others did not do so until 1972, and the academic quality was far below the levels that had prevailed in 1965. For a relatively backward country trying to modernize itself, this was a hideous disaster. The disruption was less severe in primary and secondary education, and in industry, but still significant. The take-over by Red Guards of considerable portions of the railroad network had affected almost all sectors of the economy.

In more general terms, China suffered from a general breakdown of law and order, the effects of which endured long after the Red Guards had been shipped out to the countryside. Crime rates increased drastically, and street gangs appeared in many of China's cities. The enforcement of birth-control policies slackened, and took several years to restore. Corruption within governmental and economic units flourished. Most fundamental, the relationship between political discourse and reality was severely damaged. Most governments tell a certain number of lies, but the level of lying in Chinese public life reached incredible levels during and after the Cultural Revolution.

The process by which China had been breaking out of its international isolation was also set back by several years. As all aspects of revolutionary purity became crucial, foreign influences especially came under attack. The PRC, which despite its conflicts with the Soviet Union and India had won steadily greater international acceptance, and by 1965 had been approaching its longstanding goal of replacing the Guomindang as the representative of 'China' in the United Nations, withdrew into virtual isolation. Ambassadors to foreign countries were called home. After the radicals had taken over the Foreign Ministry, China's remaining foreign contacts came to be conducted in a rather strident fashion. When Chinese in various countries came into conflict with the governments of those countries, Beijing mobs sometimes invaded the embassies of the offending governments.

Probably the worst such incident was the attack on the British Embassy. There existed a substantial Communist organization among the Chinese population of the British colony of Hong Kong. In 1967, the PRC began encouraging the Communists in Hong Kong to seize control of the colony. The British administration in Hong Kong resisted successfully, and with remarkably little use of physical violence. In August 1967, a mob of Red Guards protested British actions in Hong Kong by sacking the British Embassy in Beijing. They gave the chargé d'affaires a severe beating, tore the clothing from female members of his staff, etc. This incident was so clearly harmful to China's interests that in its aftermath Zhou Enlai was able to reduce the radical influence on the conduct of China's foreign relations, and

rein in the Red Guards somewhat. This did not undo the damage already done.

The detonation of China's first hydrogen bomb in June 1967 was complicated by the decision of Maoist radicals among the workers and technical staff at the testing site to 'seize power' from those in authority. At facilities as vital as this, however, serious efforts were made to restrain the chaos. The radicals at the nuclear testing site had invited a group of student Red Guards to come and join them, but these had been arrested before reaching the site. China's ability to detonate a hydrogen bomb as early as 1967, and to orbit an earth satellite in 1970, reflects the respect that continued to be given to the technical experts, many of whom had been trained in the Soviet Union or the West, working on these projects.

Perhaps the most striking thing is the way, while the revolutionary frenzy was permitted to disrupt China's relations with much of the world, the crisis in Vietnam, which posed serious dangers to China during the American escalation of 1965–68, was handled calmly and rationally. The PRC put tens of thousands of military personnel in the northern section of North Vietnam, mostly construction units working to keep the railroads open, but also anti-aircraft gunners and so on. This constituted an unmistakable warning to the United States that China would if necessary fight to defend the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However, none of this was given much publicity. The Chinese personnel were clearly visible to US reconnaissance – indeed in some cases they did not dig in against air attack as much as they might have wished, because to do so would have rendered them less visible – but the attention of the American public was never drawn to this fact, so when the United States government limited its actions against North Vietnam it did not appear to be giving in to Chinese pressure. The careful way the PRC avoided inflammatory rhetoric on this one issue is remarkable in the context of the times.

The organizational structure of the Communist Party was destroyed in most areas. However, while many individual military officers were purged, order and discipline were at least partially preserved in the armed forces. Even the administrative structure of the government got some protection. Zhou Enlai, who as Premier headed the government hierarchy, served as a sort of moderator in the Cultural Revolution, trying to limit the spread of chaos. He did not try to oppose the Cultural Revolution; either he saw significant value in it or he decided he was not strong enough to fight Mao. However, Zhou did what he could both to preserve the government as an organization and to protect many of the individuals who were attacked as followers of the capitalist road. The most extreme radicals naturally hated him, and he later became almost a patron saint to those who wanted to repudiate the Cultural Revolution. Mao, who was well aware that China needed some of the trained people whom Zhou was trying to protect, tolerated Zhou's activities and quashed all attacks on him; indeed, Zhou remained Premier until his death in 1976.

Even on less vital matters the frenzy could be moderated in practice. When the Cultural Revolution began to attack the 'Four Olds', the treasures of China's traditional art came under suspicion as 'relics of feudalism'. Any museum or private home where they were displayed was in danger of attacks by Red Guards. However, the destruction of art was not by any means all-encompassing; large quantities were trucked off to safe warehouses. Today some of this material is once again on display in Chinese museums, and other pieces have recently been sold to Westerners, at premium prices, to raise money to help pay for China's modernization.

The initial results

As comparative order was restored in 1969 and 1970, and 'Revolutionary Committees', many of whose members came from the PLA, were established to replace the administrative structures that had collapsed in the preceding years, some of the concrete goals of the Cultural Revolution became more clearly visible. The May Seventh Cadre Schools, the 'barefoot doctors', and a massive reorientation of the educational system exemplify these.

Many administrators and intellectuals were sent to May Seventh Cadre Schools, which combined prolonged and sometimes very unpleasant manual labour with intensive indoctrination. Late in 1969 a rotation scheme was proposed under which, at any given time, one-third of the personnel of leading organizations would be released from their administrative duties to engage in manual labour in farming or industry.

The 'barefoot doctors' were peasants who were given a few months of medical training and were then set to providing rudimentary health care at the village level, referring only the more difficult cases to clinics having real doctors. These people really did make a contribution to Chinese health care. Real doctors had several major disadvantages. They were very expensive to train, and a poor country like China could not possibly afford enough of them to provide for all the patients needing care. They tended to congregate in the cities, where the living conditions were best and where most of the people with sufficient influence to demand good medical care were found. Finally, highly trained doctors often developed a liking for cases which challenged their skills, which generally meant cases on which one had to devote a great deal of time and effort to a single patient, and even then possibly fail to effect a cure. For the cost of training one real doctor specializing in heart surgery the government could train a great many 'barefoot doctors', and even a single 'barefoot doctor', by doing relatively routine work on tasks like the eradication of snail fever, might succeed in doing more good for more patients than the heart surgeon.

The whole spirit of the educational system was altered to reduce gaps

between the educated and the uneducated, between mental labour and manual labour. A system that had been geared to giving a fairly good education to a few people was redesigned to give a lower level of education to a great many people. Enrolment in secondary schools expanded dramatically, while enrolments in colleges and universities, when these finally reopened, remained below 1965 levels. The duration of schooling was reduced (at the college level, five-year courses of study were typically cut to three years). Even during those years the number of hours of academic learning was reduced, so the students could devote a considerable portion of their time to manual labour, enough so their labour actually had economic value. Some grew vegetables in school gardens. Others worked in school workshops, which might turn out consumer goods and other simple products, or even have a contract with some nearby factory to produce components for large machinery.

The ability to demonstrate academic competence, through written examinations, was de-emphasized; this had been a major desire of the first Red Guards, in 1966. In the early 1970s, when an attempt was made to revive written examinations as part of the selection process for college admissions, one student handed in a paper that consisted simply of a denunciation of examinations and those who did well in examinations.

To tell the truth, I have no respect for the bookworms who for many years have been taking it easy and have done nothing useful. I dislike them intensely. During the busy summer hoeing time, I just could not abandon my production task and hide myself in a small room to study. That would have been very selfish. If I had done that, I would have been guilty of being unworthy of the revolutionary cause which concerns both the poor and lower-middle peasants and myself, and I would have been condemned by my own revolutionary conscience.

His statement was given national publicity, and he became a hero for having expressed such a correct revolutionary attitude.

College students were no longer recruited straight from the secondary schools, and were no longer selected by primarily academic criteria. Graduates of secondary schools had to complete at least two years of manual labour in agriculture or industry before becoming eligible to be nominated by their co-workers to go to college. Proper political attitudes, and a willingness to respect manual labour and those engaged in it, were supposed to be key criteria in this selection. Beyond this, when the colleges and universities began to reopen in 1970, many of the students selected for admission were not secondary graduates at all. Some had never even graduated from *lower middle* (junior high) school.

The fact that political criteria were more important than academic ones ensured that politically powerful individuals would be able to arrange ad-

mission for their children; or the friends of their children, or just someone who offered them a bribe. This was known as entry through the 'back door'. Personal influence became, in fact, more important than before the Cultural Revolution; those evaluating the political attitudes of college applicants very seldom found fault with anyone favoured by a powerful official.

It was in the early 1970s that China finally began a really massive attack on population growth. The population control programme introduced in the 1960s, which had collapsed in the Cultural Revolution, had been essentially limited to the cities. The campaign that began in 1971 covered the countryside as well, and was astonishingly effective; the national birth rate dropped by about a third within five years.

Aftermath: 1969–1976

In 1969 the formal apparatus of the Communist Party, which had fallen apart during the Cultural Revolution and had been replaced by the Revolutionary Committees, began to be restored. By late summer of 1971 there was, once again, a CCP provincial committee in every province. Military men still had a major role, and Lin Biao, Minister of Defence, was openly acknowledged as Mao Zedong's chosen successor. As public order was restored and the Party apparatus was revived, Mao felt less need for the army and its commander, and he began to cut down on Lin Biao's authority. Lin, perhaps uncertain as to how far this would go, and not willing to give up the supreme power that had seemed within his grasp, apparently began plotting against Mao.

The details are difficult to discern; most of what we know comes from statements made, after Lin Biao was dead, by the people who had sided with Mao. They include some truly preposterous slanders against Lin, ranging up to the claim that Lin had been planning to make China a colony of the Soviet Union, and also that he had been planning to abolish socialism, handing the factories over to the capitalist class and the land to the old landlords, as private property. The propaganda of Chinese power struggles had abandoned all concern for truth or even plausibility. What seems fairly clear is that a power struggle occurred, and by September 1971 Lin had lost. He and some of his followers apparently tried to flee to the Soviet Union by air, but were killed when their plane crashed in Outer Mongolia. The cause of the crash is still uncertain.

The fall of Lin Biao was not revealed at once to the Chinese people. For a while Party leaders said nothing in public. Then there was a long period during which they denounced Lin Biao in the most extravagant terms, but without mentioning his identity; their denunciations simply used the euphemism 'political swindlers like Liu Shaoqi'. By the time they were willing to attack Lin Biao by name in the press, he had been dead for almost two years.

Mao had removed a great many people from important positions on a purely temporary basis during the Cultural Revolution. It had always been assumed that most of those sent to May Seventh Cadre Schools would eventually return to their former work, once they had been subjected to intensive reindoctrination, and once radicals satisfactory to Mao were ensconced in some key positions. The defection of Lin Biao increased Mao's need to broaden his base of support by bringing non-Maoists back into the Party and the government. During the early 1970s, even people who had been charged with the most serious crimes during the Cultural Revolution, and who seemed to have been placed permanently beyond the pale, were in many cases rehabilitated and restored to positions in the Party and government. The most important of them was Deng Xiaoping, rehabilitated in 1973. By 1975, as both Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai became too ill to handle any great amount of business, Deng was given control of the day-to-day operations of the Communist Party's Central Committee. Some of the most extreme leftists, such as those responsible for attacks on foreign diplomats in Beijing in 1967, were repudiated and even put on trial. Not all leaders purged during the Cultural Revolution were rehabilitated, but even so the range of those being asked to work together was very wide.

Extreme Left-wing leaders who had risen to power in the Cultural Revolution felt that the past was returning to haunt them. They had long been worried about the danger posed by old attitudes and traditions, hence the enthusiasm of their attack on the Four Olds starting in 1966. When they saw the enemies they thought they had defeated returning to power their worry about the strength of the past increased still further.

When attacks on Lin Biao finally began to mention him by name, they did so in the context of a 'Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius'. The CCP propaganda apparatus charged that Lin Biao had been a Confucian, that he had used the ideas of Confucius to try to turn back the clock and undo the work of the Communist Revolution. Party propagandists tried to portray Confucius, in turn, as a reactionary who in his own lifetime had been trying to defend an old, declining ruling class – the slave-owners – against the encroachment of feudalism. The CCP praised Shi Huangdi and the Legalists (previously the villains of Chinese historiography) as valiant advocates of reform and progress, who had set out to destroy Confucianism as part of their struggle to destroy the slave-holding system the Confucians defended. The curious thing is that the people who conducted the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius were saying both (a) that Confucianism had already been the ideology of an outmoded and declining class of exploiters even in the third century BC, and (b) that the power of Confucian ideology was still dangerously great in the 1970s.

The ideological journal *Red Flag* said that Shi Huangdi had been correct in burying alive 460 Confucian scholars to stop them from 'recounting the past to the detriment of the present'. Apparently, as the radicals watched

conservative CCP leaders purged in the 1960s returning to power, they were beginning to feel that the oppressive influence of the past was almost immortal. No measures were too drastic to use in the effort to destroy this influence, and no measures could give one any confidence that one would succeed in destroying it.

Left and Right

Policy differences between the leftists and rehabilitated rightists focussed mainly on economics. The leftists emphasized the importance of egalitarian attitudes. They did not like the use of bonuses or salary differentials to reward those who did the most, or the most useful, work. A system of economic incentives would reinforce and reward the old habit of trying to obtain as much as possible for oneself, instead of inculcating the socialist idea of doing what was best for society regardless of personal profit.

Confucian social theory held that a merchant, a man who makes a living by buying things in one place and then selling them elsewhere at a higher price, is fundamentally a parasite; he has made a profit without actually having produced anything. Mao's leftist followers took a similar view, but pushed it to greater extremes. They even disliked the idea of a productive enterprise concentrating on products that were in great demand, since such goods commanded high prices and could thus allow the enterprise to make a large profit, out of proportion to the amount of work done.

The leftists were crude and inflexible in their management of the economy. They did not even bother to collect the kind of information on which sophisticated national planning might have been based; in 1976 there were only about one-tenth as many statisticians in the State Statistical Bureau as there had been in 1966.

The leftists wanted to build a decentralized, self-sufficient local economy. Every region and indeed every commune was urged to achieve self-sufficiency in grain, ignoring the fact that in some areas far more value could have been obtained from the land by concentrating on tea, vegetables, and so on.

There was a short-list of industrial products for which production was encouraged everywhere. These included iron and steel, chemical fertilizer, coal, cement, agricultural machinery, and agricultural implements. But anyone in a backward commune who tried to go beyond this list, and produce something else for which there existed a demand and therefore a profitable market, risked being accused of 'following the capitalist road'.

The leftists tried in some ways to reduce the gap between the cities and the villages. They greatly expanded the programme, originally begun in the 1950s, of sending educated young people (usually recent secondary school



Plate 8.4 The peasants of Dazhai, in Shanxi Province, won tremendous praise for the way they had converted barren and unusable hillsides into terraced fields.

graduates) out to the countryside. About 17 million were 'sent down' between 1968 and 1978, of whom about 10 million were still in the countryside in 1978. Most of them lacked skills directly relevant to farming; the villages actually had to be paid to accept them. Some of the young people 'sent down' were actually persuaded to look on this as an opportunity to 'serve the people', but for most it was agony. If they managed to grit their teeth and smile it was from fear that if they opposed the programme they might be punished by being kept in the wilderness for life. They were reluctant to marry; a settled family life would reduce their chances of getting permission to return to the city. However, the very reasons they found life in the villages so hateful – the much lower level of material and cultural life, the paucity of educational facilities, and the intellectuals' traditional lack of respect for manual labour and the people who engaged in it – were the reasons Mao and his associates felt it was so vital to break down the barriers between city and countryside, at whatever the cost. Mao felt that people who despised village life so totally were, *ipso facto*, unqualified for the leading positions in society that the young graduates were hoping to fill.

For the most part the leftists realized that they would have to temper their actions at least in the short run, and tolerate some persons, activities, and institutions distasteful to them. This applied especially to their dislike of economic incentives. The Chinese people's mode of thinking could not be changed overnight, and institutional changes could not get too far ahead of

changes in thought patterns. Leftist officials in some areas decided to abolish the peasants' private plots, collectivize pigs and other livestock which had been privately raised, and end the work-point system under which the income a peasant family drew from the production brigade had been dependent on the amount of work done by the family, but such drastic steps towards egalitarianism were not national policy.

The leftists advocated putting 'politics in command'. If someone argued that a coal-mine which operated at a loss should be closed down, they said that this was putting 'profits in command', and that the national need for more coal should take precedence over the selfish desire for profit. They did not consider that if a mine operated at a loss – in other words, if the value of the coal it produced was less than the cost of operating it – this might be a sign that its continued operation was not really in the national interest. 'Politics in command' also meant that people should do their work out of a desire to build socialism, not in order to win higher incomes for themselves. Selfishness was very nearly the ultimate sin. (Note the extreme contrast with traditional Chinese values, in which accumulating wealth for oneself, in order to be able to provide security for one's family, was a virtue.)

Everything would work out well if the mass line were followed. Managerial personnel should make decisions in cooperation with the workers, and not simply try to impose their views by fiat. Production workers should be encouraged to make technical innovations, rather than leaving such things to technical experts, and using uncritically the machines and procedures given to them.

The rightists felt that the most important task of the revolution was to build up a strong and wealthy China, and that this task required stability and hierarchy. China was an underdeveloped country; everywhere one turned there were problems that were not being solved fast enough because of the shortage of technically trained personnel. To strip a qualified engineer of the authority he needed to manage a construction project simply because he did not have the correct political attitude, or to choose for engineering training, on political grounds, someone other than the candidate who showed the greatest technical aptitude, were luxuries China could not afford. Deng Xiaoping, by the 1970s the leading spokesman for the Right, used to say that he did not care whether a cat was black or white as long as it could catch the mice. Most of China's technicians, managers, administrators, and intellectuals – the urban élite – were convinced that the work they did required more skill than the manual labour done by the common people, and was of greater benefit to society. Both pride and self-interest made them cling, despite prolonged Maoist indoctrination, to the idea that they were entitled to a higher status and a better life than that enjoyed by the bulk of the population.

The rightists, even rehabilitated ones, seldom dared express their views clearly in public. The savagery with which the Left suppressed unacceptable ideas, even in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, made open debate

impossible. Indeed the leftists may have executed more people in 1970 and 1971, quietly in various prisons and cellars, than during the publicly visible mass struggles of 1966–68. When major leftist leaders were brought to trial in 1980, it was charged that between 1966 and 1976 their persecution of their opponents had caused the deaths of about 34,000 people. Besides outright executions, this figure apparently included people driven to suicide, and those such as Liu Shaoqi who simply died of abuse and neglect while imprisoned. It cannot have included the casualties of the Red Guards' street fights; including those deaths would have produced a figure many times higher.

The leftists had written principles of free expression into the Constitution, but they were not above surgically severing the vocal cords of a woman who expressed herself in a manner they found too objectionable. Dominating the media of public propaganda, they presented their one-sided argument with all the carelessness of people who know that if they confound logic, falsify the facts, or misrepresent the views of their opponents, nobody will dare to point out the errors.

Argument in terms of allegory, and indirect language which avoided saying outright what the author meant, had proliferated. There had been a long period during the Cultural Revolution when the press had been filled with denunciations of 'the chief person in power following the capitalist road', also known as 'China's Khrushchev'. At least in that period everyone knew that the un-named culprit was actually Liu Shaoqi. In 1973, people similarly understood that denunciations of 'swindlers like Liu Shaoqi' actually referred to Lin Biao. But in 1974, when a campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius became so important that it was clearly intended to be relevant to current political struggles, it was not obvious which living persons were the real objects of this criticism nominally directed against dead ones.

Complex political ideas were summed up in slogans so short that nobody who did not already know would have been able to deduce the real meaning. This practice had many disadvantages. It encouraged fuzzy thinking. It was elitist, since the ordinary person was not able to understand policy statements without the help of some knowledgeable interpreter. It was ideally suited to the convenience of those who wished to misrepresent the content of important policy statements, and it helped Mao's enemies to misrepresent his ideas quite seriously after his death. But Chinese culture had for many centuries respected indirect, allusive language, while clear language would have made more difficult the vital task of misrepresenting the views of one's own enemies.

The difficulties of dialogue and compromise were increased by the way the policies of each faction formed an interrelated whole. A rightist style of industrial management *required* a rightist style educational system to train the managers, and so forth.

Efforts to combine elements of rightist and leftist policies often worked

out badly. In agriculture, the role of free markets in a predominantly socialist system was a source of almost perpetual trouble. The norm for China, since the collectivization of agriculture in 1955-56, had been to allow the peasants to have small private plots on which they could grow what crops they wished, and raise their own livestock. At some periods, especially during the relaxation of controls in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, the peasants had been allowed considerable freedom to sell their produce at local markets, for whatever they could get for it. Where there were acute shortages of many products, such free-market activities could be extremely profitable. The head of one commune discovered in the early 1960s that the peasants were selling privately raised chickens at the local market for five times the price of chickens marketed through government channels. He decided that this was a very dangerous phenomenon; it would lead the peasants to use the desire for profits as the guide to their actions, and to neglect collective production in favour of private production, where they could obtain higher incomes without having to work any harder. He applied pressure to prevent the peasants from using the local market. In the mid 1970s, some peasants on another commune decided to take some of the land on which they had been growing grain, and use it instead to grow melons, which were in great demand and were commanding high prices. This was collective production, not private, but it was following the 'capitalist' principle of 'putting profits in command', and it clearly had the potential to make these peasants much richer than those of their neighbours who were adhering to the ideologically correct course of growing grain. Local authorities responded by destroying the melon crop shortly before it would have been ready for harvest.

The leftists devoted much more attention to vilifying the followers of the 'capitalist road' than to figuring out how to make the socialist road function effectively. They emphasized spirit over material reality; they chose policies that displayed their own correct revolutionary attitudes, rather than basing their actions on the concrete results of this or that policy. This could go to preposterous extremes. Thus we have the story, supposedly true, of a man who was trying to fight a forest fire, but getting nowhere because he lacked effective tools. He finally gave a loud cry of 'Long Live Chairman Mao', lay down, and tried to put out the flames in his immediate vicinity by rolling on them. This had no significant effect on the fire, and he was quickly burned to death. His sacrifice accomplished nothing, and it rendered him unavailable for constructive action, but it demonstrated tremendous revolutionary dedication and lack of concern for self-interest. He was praised as a great hero.

The emphasis on spirit over results had some of its most important effects in policies dealing with salaries and incomes. The leftists hated the notion of material incentives – the idea that people's incomes should be linked to the amount and quality of the work they did, so as to motivate them to work better. In their view, this legitimized greed; it taught people that

trying to increase their personal incomes was normal, indeed something that the government encouraged.

Inequality of incomes was more acceptable if it were not linked directly to work, because then it would not so obviously encourage greed. It was permissible for a factory to pay Mr Wang half again as much as Mr Chen during a given month on the grounds that Mr Wang had seniority, or that he was classified as a permanent rather than a temporary employee, or that he simply held a position for which a high salary was traditional. It was not permissible to pay Mr Wang more if the reason was that Mr Wang had worked harder. The result of such policies was widespread absenteeism, laziness, or simple indifference on the part of industrial workers.

Many Communists had shown a similar preoccupation with attitudes in the earliest years of the revolution, for some of the same reasons. Most people have a certain view of the way the world works. If they are presented with a single new idea or a new situation, they can usually fit it into their existing mental structure without having to discard old assumptions wholesale. However, if they try to assimilate too many new ideas in a short time, the old world view may collapse through inability to integrate the new material. The problem is that the new material will not automatically organize itself into a reasonably complete and coherent world view, capable of replacing the old. People in such a situation often find themselves unable to answer fundamental questions. In their struggle to organize a new world view they will probably have to oversimplify matters, and they may become rather inflexible. Only gradually will they acquire enough confidence in the new structure of ideas to be able to apply it flexibly and effectively in a variety of situations.

Communism in the 1920s had represented such a departure from the traditional world view that few Party members could really predict the results of a given policy. They had no mental landmarks to tell them which way to go, to tell them that one policy would work while another would not. For lack of a better option, they often chose to do whatever would show a correct revolutionary attitude. Experience gradually filled in the gaps in what had at first been a sketchy and incomplete as well as inflexible Communist world view; it taught them how to work within the new system and how to judge what the actual results of a given policy might be. The making of Party policy had begun to be based on concrete realism by 1935, and was so based to a very large extent by 1949. Mao, however, had cast his followers adrift again in 1966. He demanded that they abandon the patterns of thought and behaviour that had become standard since the Revolution of 1949, and once again they were left frantically trying to learn how to apply a totally new world view to the complexities of the world. The results were the same as they had been a generation before: confusion, bad decisions, and a tendency to mask one's own inner uncertainties by acting self-righteously and attacking one's opponents with exceptional fanaticism and ferocity.

The full extent of the leftists' failure can be seen in the fact that some of

the phenomena they detested most actually became more widespread during the period of their domination. Before 1966, moderate CCP leaders had established mechanisms by which the market, and the forces of selfishness in general, were harnessed to serve CCP goals. The leftists, their sense of revolutionary purity outraged, abolished many of these mechanisms during the Cultural Revolution. Selfishness and the market did not disappear, however. What happened was that selfishness and the market were unharnessed; they no longer operated in such a way as to serve CCP goals.

In the early 1960s the market had played a significant role in the economy. It had for the most part been a rationalizing force, which rewarded those who produced needed goods, and directed goods to those who wanted them. In the early 1970s the market played an even greater role, but it was primarily a market in favours, influence, and bribes. Under the old market system one might have obtained scarce raw materials by paying for them, at so much per ton. In the new market one gave the relevant official a banquet, a hundred cartons of cigarettes, a dozen melons, or permission for his nephew to enter college. If one had *guanxi* (personal ties) with the relevant people, a tremendous range of goods and services were available through the 'back door'. Cadres and officials unselfishly dedicated to duty and the public interest were probably less common in 1972 than in 1965.

International relations

During the Cultural Revolution the Left had been highly xenophobic, but this was more a matter of the Red Guards' determination to demonstrate their revolutionary purity than a reflection of Mao's fundamental goals. Once the frenzy had died down, the Left and the Right agreed on the desirability of resuming the movement, broken off in 1966, towards broader diplomatic and trade ties with non-Communist nations including the United States. The US government, on the other hand, had realized that good relations with China would improve its position both in the Vietnam War and in its world-wide competition against the Soviet Union. Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's National Security Adviser, made his first visit to Beijing secretly in 1971; President Nixon went with great publicity in 1972. The problem of Taiwan still remained a stumbling-block, but the United States was clearly on the road to full diplomatic recognition of the PRC.

The USA had long applied pressure on the international community to keep China in isolation and continue recognizing the Guomindang leaders in Taipei as the government of China, but this pressure was weakening. Canada shifted diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in October 1970; other nations followed in rapid succession.

The shift was most visibly measured in the UN, where for many years a



Plate 8.5 In 1971, Dr Henry Kissinger (National Security adviser to the US President, Richard Nixon) made a secret visit to Beijing, met with Zhou Enlai, and began the re-establishment of friendly relations between China and the United States.

motion had come annually before the General Assembly to replace Taipei with Beijing as the representative of 'China'. The resolution had gradually gained support, and in 1965 had come fairly close to success. The Cultural Revolution interrupted the trend for four years, but in 1970 this motion actually won a majority, 51 to 49, in the General Assembly. The USA managed only to postpone the inevitable by pushing through a procedural resolution stating that this was an 'important question' which would require a two-thirds margin to pass. In 1971, realizing that the PRC might be about to win, the USA belatedly introduced a resolution that both Beijing and Taipei should be represented in the UN, as separate governments. This 'Two China' policy might have had some success if it had been tried when the United States still had the power to say that the PRC could enter the UN only at the cost of coexisting with the Taipei representatives there, but by the time the United States made the offer it had no such power; the PRC had the votes to enter the UN without having to make any concessions. Besides, Chiang Kai-shek's government vigorously denied that it was in the UN as a representative of the area it actually ruled – the island of Taiwan. It still claimed to be

in the UN in its capacity as the sole government of China as a whole, and denounced the American 'Two China' proposal as a 'gross insult'. In October 1971 the General Assembly voted 76 to 35 to expel the representatives from Taipei and seat those from Beijing.

Trade with the capitalist countries grew along with diplomatic contacts, so much so that China had to expand its port facilities quite substantially by the mid 1970s. In July 1971 Britain once again abandoned the discriminatory treatment of China in regard to export restrictions; from this point onward British businessmen could sell to China as freely as to the USSR. The following month, Britain signed a £20m. contract for commercial jet aircraft. In February 1972 the United States followed the British lead in allowing China to purchase as wide a range of non-military goods as the Soviet Union. Before the end of 1972 the Chinese were negotiating to buy jet airliners from France and the USA as well as Britain. For several years the United States continued to refuse to sell equipment having potential military uses, but did not try to prevent its allies from doing so. The French sold some helicopters in 1974, and Britain signed a very large contract for Rolls-Royce jet engines in 1975.

In a step with an even greater potential for subverting the purity of the Revolution, China began sending a few students to Britain to study at the end of 1972. The number of students sent to capitalist countries increased dramatically later in the decade.

The Right was more enthusiastic about very broad contacts, commercial and intellectual as well as diplomatic, than the Left. Mao and the leftists stressed that the Chinese economy should be fundamentally self-sufficient. They accused the rightists of wanting to enslave China to the foreigners physically by depending on imported goods, which would have to be paid for by the export of vital raw materials, and also mentally by depending on imported technology and scientific ideas, and by accepting foreign technologies without change where the leftists wanted to make extensive modifications in imported designs. But the difference was only one of degree; the leftists accepted the need for substantial foreign imports, and the rightists did not want as much as the leftists charged.