

Timeline – Cultural Revolution

In an effort to return China to its communist roots, Chairman Mao Tse-Tung turned to the youth of the country to help start the “Cultural Revolution.” Mao called on young people to take down leading intellectuals, party leaders, and their own parents. These teenagers came together to form the Red Guards.

- October 1949:** Mao declared victory in the Communist revolution and established the People’s Republic of China.
- May 1966:** Articles in the state controlled papers introduced the idea of a “Cultural Revolution.”
- Red Guard groups, made up of Chinese youth, emerged throughout China.
- Aug. 1966:** Mao officially launched the “Cultural Revolution” with a speech at the Chinese Communist Party.
- Oct. 1966:** Mao called for the Red Guards to destroy the “Four Olds”: old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas.
- Jan. 1967:** Red Guards achieved the overthrow of provincial party committee officials and replaced them with radicals.
- Feb. 1967:** Top-level Communist Party officials called for an end of the Cultural Revolution, but Mao continued to support it.
- Summer 1967:** Mao replaced pre-Cultural Revolution party officials with radicals who supported the revolution.
- 1968:** On Mao’s orders, the Red Guards were broken up in the “rustification movement,” where individual teenagers were “sent down” to villages throughout China to “learn from the peasants.”
- April 1969:** Mao declared “victory” of the Cultural Revolution and supported Lin Biao as his new successor.

Document A: Mao's "Little Red Book"

Mao's "Little Red Book" is a collection of Mao Tse-Tung's quotations that were used as a source of inspiration and guidance for members of the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution. These are two excerpts from the book.

The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigor and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed in you. The world belongs to you. China's future belongs to you.

Mao, 1957

We must help all our young people to understand that ours is still a very poor country, that we cannot change this situation radically in a short time, and that only through the united efforts of our younger generation and all our people, working with their own hands, can China be made strong and prosperous within a period of several decades. The establishment of our socialist system has opened the road leading to the ideal society of the future, but to translate this ideal into reality needs hard work.

Mao, 1957

Source: Mao Tse-Tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*. 1964

Document C: At the Center of the Storm

Rae Yang was a young girl in the spring of 1966, when she became a part of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. In 1997, she published a memoir retelling the story of her life and her family in China throughout the political turmoil of the 1950s through the 1980s. In this excerpt she writes about her early experience in the Red Guards.

When the Cultural Revolution broke out in late May 1966, I felt like the legendary monkey Sun Wukong, freed from the dungeon that had held him under a huge mountain for five hundred years. It was Chairman Mao who set us free by allowing us to rebel against authorities. As a student, the first authority I wanted to rebel against was Teacher Lin, our homeroom teacher. A big part of her duty was to make sure that we behaved and thought correctly.

Now the time had come for the underdogs to speak up, to seek justice! Immediately I took up a brush pen, dipped it in black ink and wrote a long dazibao. Using some of the rhetorical devices Teacher Lin had taught us, I accused her of lacking proletarian feeling toward her students, of treating them as her enemies, of being high-handed, and of suppressing different opinions. My classmates supported me by signing their names to it. Next, we took the dazibao to Teacher Lin's home nearby and pasted it on the wall of her bedroom for her to read carefully day and night. This, of course, was not personal revenge. It was answering Chairman Mao's call to combat the revisionist educational line.

Within a few days, dazibao written by students, teachers, administrators, workers, and librarians, were popping up everywhere like bamboo shoots after a spring rain. Secrets dark and dirty were exposed. Every day we made shocking discoveries. The sacred halo around the teachers' heads that dated back two thousand five hundred years to the time of Confucius disappeared. Now teachers must learn a few things from their students. Parents would be taught by their kids instead of vice versa, as Chairman Mao pointed out. Government officials would have to wash their ears to listen to the ordinary people....

Source: Rae Young, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir*, 1997.

Vocabulary

dazibao –propaganda posters written to denounce counter-revolutionaries

high-handed– bossy

proletarian –working class

revisionist—in this case, someone opposing Mao's position