

Cultural Revolution

(1966-1976)



The failure of the Mao's policies weakened his position as leader. In 1966, unhappy with the direction of the country and pace of the communism, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution.

The primary goal of the Cultural Revolution was to establish a society where peasants and workers were equal. Mao also used the Cultural Revolution to punish political rivals and strengthen his authority. As such, Mao attempted to bring Chinese education, art and literature in line with communist ideology.



During the Cultural Revolution, millions of educated youths were sent to rural areas to work in the countryside and learn from the peasantry. Mao believed that this would ultimately create a new society where there was no gap between urban and rural, laborers and intellectuals.



Mao mobilized "Red Guards," idealist young people and students committed to his leadership and views of Communism, to spread the revolution. Schools throughout the country closed down as students devoted all their time to Red Guard activities. Millions of these young students were encouraged to attack "counterrevolutionaries" and criticize those in the party who appeared to have deviated from Maoist thought. Teachers were insulted, tortured, and even killed by their students for being "capitalist intellectuals."



In order to create a new communist society, Mao urged the destruction of the old, "poisonous" elements of society. Mao believed traditional Chinese culture and western influences were responsible for China's economic backwardness. People burned religious and traditional objects in the street. Many artifacts were seized from private homes and museums and often destroyed on the spot. China's historical sites, artifacts and archives suffered devastating damage as they were thought to be at the root of "old ways of thinking".



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As the Cultural Revolution spread throughout Chinese society, Mao realized the “Red Guard” had escaped his control. Revolutionary enthusiasm was misused and attacks were directed towards innocent people. The revolution turned into factional battles and threatened to create civil war in China. The army was used to restore order and the Cultural Revolution slowly came to an end with Mao’s death in 1976.