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MAO TSE-TUNG: THE PEOPLE'S EMPEROR

1893	Born
1912	Formation of the Republic of China
1921	Joined Communist Party
1934–35	The Long March
1937–45	The Japanese War
1949	Formation of People's Republic of China
1966–69	The Cultural Revolution
1976	Died

Mao Tse-tung, the man who was to become China's great proletarian revolutionary, was born into a well-to-do peasant family in Hunan province, in central China, in 1893. As a boy he received a traditional Confucian education in the local primary school. At sixteen he went to a neighboring town to attend a "radical" new, Western-style school, teaching such things as foreign history and geography. He went on to secondary school in the provincial capital of Chang-sha.

But his education was overwhelmed by the rush of political events. Sun Yat-sen was preaching cultural and political revolution. In 1911 the revolution actually broke out against the Manchu dynasty. Mao joined the army. His military service was brief and unimpressive. In the spring of 1912 the Republic of China was proclaimed and he was mustered out of the army.

After trying several kinds of schools Mao finally graduated from the First Provincial Normal School of Chang-sha in 1918. He then enrolled at Peking University. The six months he spent there were to turn his life around. He was exposed to the radical new doctrines of Marxism-Leninism. In 1921 he was one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party.

The fledgling Communist Party joined with Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) against the imperial government in Peking. With the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek became head

of the Kuomintang and broke with the Communists. The Chinese civil war had begun. Mao was one of the organizers of the Chinese Red Army and emerged as its leader in the Long March—a harrowing retreat from Chiang Kai-shek's forces. But the war against Japan brought Communists and Nationalists together against their common enemy. In the course of the war Mao Tse-tung became the leader of the spreading Communist movement throughout China.

With the end of the war the old rivalry between the Communists and the Kuomintang resurfaced, but with far different results this time. In the spring of 1949 the People's Liberation Army, as the Red Army was now called, forced Chiang out of the country, eventually to rule Nationalist China on the island of Taiwan. Mao was the master of mainland China. For a while he followed the lead of Stalin's Soviet Union. But he was increasingly disillusioned both with the Soviet leadership of world communism and with the Soviet model of socialist development that had been promoted in China.

In 1955 he vigorously stepped forward with a program of his own for China. He advocated the abandonment of the emphasis on heavy industry and capital production and the classical Soviet preference for central planning in agriculture. He announced instead a nationwide program of cooperative agricultural communes. Further, he encouraged Chinese intellectuals and technical and managerial experts to speak out in criticism of the party's failures and the defects of the system. "Let a hundred flowers bloom," he declared in early 1956. But the intellectuals and specialists not only criticized the failures of the system, they criticized the system itself—and its leadership under Chairman Mao. At this point things changed abruptly. Writers who had been too outspoken found themselves cleaning toilets or scrubbing floors; indiscreet managers of plants and businesses were reassigned as laborers on distant farm communes. From the disappointing intellectuals, administrators, and specialists Mao turned to the unlettered masses, the peasants. If China was to be changed, let them change it. These new policies, begun in the fall of 1957, were to be called the Great Leap Forward. Not only agriculture but all forms of economic activity were organized at the grass roots in small communal units, relying on local initiative. Equally important, there was a decentralizing of political power into the hands of communal party secretaries.

The Great Leap Forward turned out to be a dismal failure: the economy was disrupted and there were severe food shortages. Mao's policies were reversed. He retired as chairman of the Chinese People's Republic and settled into a period of reflection and inactivity. But he retained the chairmanship of the Communist Party and he retained his popularity with the People's Liberation Army.

Differences grew between Mao and his chief rival in the party, Liu Shao-ch'i, who had replaced him as chairman of the People's Republic. In 1966 Mao once more seized control of the party and of the nation in the most radical experiment in the history of Communist China, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

CHAIRMAN MAO

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was, in part, a substantive program that grew naturally out of much that Mao had thought and advocated—in particular his suspicion of intellectuals and his almost mystical bond with the Chinese peasants. But it was also powerfully motivated by Mao's bitterness toward Liu and his faction in the Central Committee of the party, his conviction that the party was moving in the wrong direction, and his consequent intention of regaining undisputed control over it. As early as 1962–63 he and Liu had clashed over party objectives. Then in the late summer of 1966 Mao, through his great personal prestige, convinced the Central Committee to adopt his bold new scheme.

Mao proclaimed a new stage in China's socialist revolution that would reclaim the leadership in education, literature, and the arts from the "bourgeois" corruption of experts and authorities and restore it to the true proletariat, the Chinese masses. It is essential, Mao argued, to trust the masses and not to fear disorder or disruption. They can educate themselves. Schools must be reformed according to the aims of Chairman Mao; in order to serve the needs of the proletariat, education must be combined with productive labor to teach students not only their academic subjects but farming, military affairs, and industrial work. If this program is followed the people will achieve greater, faster, better, and more economical results in all fields of work. In all this the guide is to be Mao Tse-tung's thought.

Mao himself traveled widely through China to assess the progress of the Cultural Revolution, and from the fall of 1967 to the summer of 1969 he issued a series of "directives" that appeared in the

major Chinese newspapers. They analyzed the results of the revolution and suggested some courses of action. The following are the most pertinent of those "directives."

April 19, 1968

The great proletarian cultural revolution is in essence a great political revolution made under the conditions of socialism by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes; it is a continuation of the prolonged struggle between the Chinese Communist Party and the masses of revolutionary people under the Party's leadership on the one hand and the Kuomintang reactionaries on the other, a continuation of the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

August 2, 1968

It is still necessary to have universities; here I refer mainly to colleges of science and engineering. However, it is essential to shorten the length of schooling, revolutionize education, put proletarian politics in command and take the road of the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant in training technicians from among the workers. Students should be selected from among workers and peasants with practical experience, and they should return to production after a few years' study.

August 23, 1968

Our country has 700 million people and the working class is the leading class. Its leading role in the great cultural revolution and in all fields of work should be brought into full play. The working class also should continuously enhance its political consciousness in the course of the struggle.

August 30, 1968

In carrying out the proletarian revolution in education, it is essential to have working-class leadership; it is essential for the masses of workers to take part and, in co-operation with Liberation Army fighters, bring about a revolutionary "three-in-one" combination, together with the activists among the students, teachers and workers in the schools who are determined to carry the proletarian revolution in education through to the end. The workers' propaganda teams should stay permanently in the schools and take part in fulfilling all the tasks of struggle-criticism-transformation in the schools, and they will always lead the schools. In the countryside, the schools should be managed by the poor and lower-middle peasants—the most reliable ally of the working class.

The struggle-criticism-transformation in a factory, on the whole, goes through the following stages: establishing a revolutionary committee based on the "three-in-one" combination, mass criticism and repudiation, purifying the class ranks, rectifying the Party organization, simplifying organizational structure, changing irrational rules and regulations and sending people who work in offices to grass-roots levels.

October 11, 1968

Sending the masses of cadres to do manual work gives them an excellent opportunity to study once again; this should be done by all cadres except those who are too old, weak, ill or disabled. Cadres at work should also go group by group to do manual work.

December 27, 1968

It is very necessary for educated young people to go to the countryside to be re-educated by the poor and lower-middle peasants. Cadres and other people in the cities should be persuaded to send their sons and daughters who have finished junior or senior middle school, college or university to the countryside. Let us mobilize. Comrades throughout the countryside should welcome them.

July 4, 1969

Every Party branch must reconsolidate itself in the midst of the masses. This must be done with the participation of the masses and not merely a few Party members; it is necessary to have the masses outside the Party attend the meetings and give comments.

In the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, some tasks have not yet been fulfilled and they should now be carried on, for instance, the tasks of struggle-criticism-transformation.

A Contemporary Analysis

STUART SCHRAM

The resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on August 8, 1966, giving authorization for the Cultural Revolution, was implemented immediately. The first agency was the People's Liberation Army. Since 1959 it had been headed by Lin Piao, a dedicated supporter of Chairman Mao. Under his leadership the army had become "a great school of Mao Tse-

tung's thought." The official army newspaper carried the thoughts of the chairman on page one of every issue, and the *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, the famous "Little Red Book," was first published by the army in 1964. Each edition contained a foreword by Lin that began "Comrade Mao Tse-tung is the greatest Marxist-Leninist of our era." Clearly a part of the intent of the Cultural Revolution was to put forward a position favored by both Mao and the army, that China must be separated from Russia and Russian-style communism, and the parallel position that China was the natural leader of the Third World.

With the army benignly in the background, Mao pushed forward as the leading element in his Cultural Revolution a quasi-military group known as the Red Guards or, as he called them, the "little devils." They were young people, totally dedicated to Chairman Mao, guided by his thoughts in the "Little Red Book" and utterly contemptuous of both their cultural betters and the Communist Party leaders. They smashed temples and burned books and called party leaders to task before people's courts. Thousands of people were deprived of their livelihoods; thousands more were killed in the streets amid mindless riots.

In the confusion of the Cultural Revolution, and with the resulting paralysis of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao had little trouble dismissing Liu Shao-ch'i, his hated rival, from office and reasserting his own firm control of the party and the nation.

The excerpt presented below deals with the onset and early course of the Cultural Revolution. It is from a biography of Mao written by Stuart Schram. Schram is not only a distinguished international authority on Communist China; he was in China at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and his knowledge of it is first hand. Because the Cultural Revolution was still going on at the time the book was written, his conclusions about it are very cautious. But his analysis of the forces that set it moving and, in particular, his analysis of Mao's motives are extremely interesting and germane to our understanding of Mao Tse-tung.

If Mao no doubt sincerely identifies himself with the anti-imperialist struggles of other peoples, his primary concern remains, as it has always been, the fate of China. At the same time, it must be added that in his eyes China's internal evolution has now taken on decisive international importance. For to the extent that he sees China as the only genuinely socialist great power—the Soviet Union having definitively taken the road of revisionism and the restoration of capitalism—the ideological purity and firmness of will of the Chinese revolutionaries is henceforth the principal guarantee of ultimate victory on a world scale.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that China, in Mao's phrase, should not "change color"—i.e., alter her political character. In order to guard against this danger, the hard lessons of past struggles must be brought home to the young people who have grown to maturity since the victory of 1949.

This preoccupation with training succeeding generations of revolutionaries, in order that China may continue to play her role as the vanguard of the world revolution, lies at the heart of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" that has swept across China during the past year. . . .

The problem of "revolutionizing" young people, in order to make of them revolutionaries forever, both at home and abroad, was the central theme of the Ninth Chinese Communist Youth League Congress in June 1964. It figures extensively in the last and most remarkable of the nine Chinese replies to the Soviet blast of July 14, 1963, entitled "On Khrushchev's Phony Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World," issued on the first anniversary of the Soviet article. In this text Mao is credited with the view that a very long period of time is necessary to decide the issue of the struggle between capitalism and socialism. "Several decades won't do it; success requires anywhere from one to several centuries." During this period, the proletarian dictatorship must be maintained and strengthened. . . .

The most important factor in these developments was the growing rôle of the army. Early in 1964, a campaign was launched to "learn from the People's Liberation Army." The army was held up as a model of political loyalty and political consciousness, and "political departments" similar to those in the army were set up in the organizations responsible for administering economic enterprises. . . . Mao regards the army as the natural repository of the ethos of struggle and sacrifice which is for him the hallmark of every true revolutionary movement. The army also tends naturally toward the combination of discipline and initiative which is Mao Tse-tung's constant preoccupation. It is thus not surprising that the heroes recommended as models to Chinese youth in the last few years have been soldiers.

The campaign launched in 1964 did not appear to involve the modification of the Chinese political system by the transfer of political authority to the army. It was, however, a portent of such developments in the future. How much so has only recently been revealed, as the Red Guards' bible, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* . . . , has become available outside China. For the first edition of this book, we now learn, was published in May, 1964, on the eve of the Chinese Communist Youth League Congress, and thereafter it was distributed widely as a reward for the meritorious study of Chairman Mao's works. And this volume, which was thus to play a key role in the ideological

training of cadres of the party and other organizations, was published by the Political Department of the Army.

It is clear today that the Army was also involved in two other trends which emerged during 1964, and which are central to the current "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution": the attack on tradition, and the increasingly extravagant cult of Mao Tse-tung and his thought. . . . Developments since 1964, and especially in the course of 1966, have none the less lifted the Mao cult to a completely new level as regards its intensity and all-pervasiveness, and have also brought striking changes in the nature of that cult. To understand the significance and function of these tendencies, it is necessary to put them in the context of the current political situation as a whole.

Before reviewing the extraordinary events in China since the spring of 1966, it will be well to pause and ask ourselves who launched this movement, and why. There is no doubt that it corresponds to Mao's temperament and political style, and that he fully supports it and gives his approval to all major decisions. . . .

If the current Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is to a considerable extent stage-managed for Mao by someone else, a large part of the responsibility obviously rests on Lin Piao. . . .

Although it is clear that the army is not entirely united behind Lin Piao, he does speak, of course, for the group now in control of the military establishment. Thus, it is surely no accident that Lin's ascension into public view should have begun immediately after the issuance of the current edition of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, the preface of which is dated August 1, 1965—August 1st, the anniversary of the Nanchang Uprising, being Army Day in China.

Another key figure in the events of 1966, who also emerged from semiretirement to play a leading role in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, is none other than Mao's wife, today known not under her stage name of Lan-p'ing, but as Comrade Chiang Ch'ing. Since her marriage to Mao in Yen-an she had played no open political role whatever, though according to some reports she persistently endeavored to intervene in cultural affairs. . . .

Chiang Ch'ing's rise to eminence found its culmination in her appointment as adviser on cultural work to the People's Liberation Army, which was announced on November 28, 1966, at a meeting celebrating the mass induction into the army of the Peking opera troupe and several other musical and theatrical organizations. In her speech on that occasion—which was greeted by a "thunderous ovation"—Chiang Ch'ing revealed that her "fairly systematic contact with certain sections of literature and art" had begun "a few years" previously. We may assume that one of the first episodes in her intervention in this field was precisely the reform of the Peking opera beginning in 1964. As

regards the substance of cultural policy, she affirmed flatly that the "critical assimilation" of the Chinese heritage was "impossible," thus completely reversing the position of her husband, who in the past had come out repeatedly in favor of the selective assimilation of all that was precious in China's past. She also displayed her discriminating knowledge of Western culture by lumping together "rock-and-roll, jazz, strip-tease, impressionism, symbolism, abstractionism, fauvism, modernism" as things "intended to poison and paralyze the minds of the people."

Assuming that leadership in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution belongs largely to the trio Mao Tse-tung—Lin Piao—Chiang Ch'ing, why did they decide to launch this movement? Fairly obviously, it was in order to deal with opposition within the Chinese Communist Party toward the radical policies they favor.

If I am correct in assuming that for the past five years Mao has been waiting until the time was ripe to impose a new leap forward, economic policy must have been a major issue. This time Mao was resolved to eliminate opposition *before* launching a new leap, and his suspicion undoubtedly fell on all those who had shown a lack of enthusiasm for his policies in 1958–59, of whom Liu Shao-ch'i was evidently one. These skeptics perhaps also ventured to think that "Mao Tse-tung's thought" placed too heavy an accent on the omnipotence of the human will, as compared to the rational elements in Marxism, and was better adapted to inspiring guerrilla fighters than to building a modern economy.

Undoubtedly the war in Vietnam and the possibility of an American attack against China herself were also subjects of discussion. Some observers of the Chinese scene have made of this the central point and have suggested that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as a whole should be viewed primarily as an attempt to prepare for a war with the United States, which Mao regards as henceforth inevitable. I cannot subscribe to this view. The events of the past year appear to me to be above all an attempt to reshape China and the Chinese people. But it is very likely that the anxiety inspired in Peking by events in Southeast Asia helped Mao and Lin Piao to impose their radical and uncompromising line on the Central Committee.

Whatever the issues in the debate, it is clear from the events since the spring of 1966 that Mao's position by no means won universal acceptance throughout the party apparatus. For if it had, Mao would hardly have embarked on the extraordinary and perilous adventure of creating an entirely new organization, the "Red Guards," which is beyond the control of the party officials except Mao and his henchmen. This enterprise is, of course, entirely without precedent in the

forty-nine-year history of Communist regimes, which have always taken as their most fundamental axiom the predominance of the party over all other forms of political and social organization. It is also in contradiction to Mao's own principle, laid down in 1938: "The party commands the gun; the gun must never be allowed to command the party." For the Red Guards, although they harness the enthusiasm of adolescents delighted to occupy the center of the stage, were created and guided by the army, and continue to take the army as their model and inspiration. . . .

At first glance it appears exceedingly singular that Mao should encourage young people to revolt in a country which has been under communist rule for seventeen years, especially as this revolt is directed against "persons within the party who have been in authority, and have taken the capitalist road." To be sure, these persons are said to be only a handful, but in fact the resistance of the party apparatus is obviously much greater than these optimistic official statements would imply, and Mao's aim is not merely to eliminate a few individuals. He is bent on nothing less than smashing the entire party organization as it now exists, and building it up again from the bottom—no doubt incorporating into it in the process a great many revolutionary cadres and militants drawn from the Red Guards and others who have come to the fore in the course of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In order to attain this end, he has not shrunk back from the possible consequences of a period of disorganization. As the Red Guards of the Middle School attached to Tsinghua University wrote in their first poster, the aim is to "turn the old world upside down, smash it to pieces, pulverize it, and create chaos—the greater the confusion the better!"

What does Mao want to bring out of this chaos? His ambition is apparently to create a party organization of a new type, with built-in safeguards against "bureaucracy." In particular, the "Cultural Revolution Groups" which emerged during the spring and summer of 1966 are to be made permanent. . . . A careful reading of the innumerable "philosophical" articles by workers and peasants published in the Chinese press revealed that what their authors had learned from the study of Mao's thought was to be resourceful, to look at all sides of a problem, to test their ideas by experiment, and to work hard for the sake of the common good.

This rational kernel in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, while it has not entirely disappeared from view, has been largely swallowed up in a mass movement which has attained levels—or at least forms—of irrationality previously unknown even in Stalin's Russia. In essence, this trend, which emerged in the middle of August, combines a cult of Mao's person of an entirely new type with the

transformation of the "Thought of Mao Tse-tung" from an ideology into a kind of Marxist Koran endowed with magical virtues. . . .

This development is intimately linked with the growth and transformation of the Mao cult, which has attained in the past few months a level which leaves that of Stalin completely in the shade. This is true, first of all, in simple quantitative terms. Mao's photo and Mao's name are far more ubiquitously and insistently present in the Chinese press than were Stalin's in the Soviet press fifteen years ago. But qualitatively the difference is even more striking.

Until very recently, although Mao and his thought were the object of the highest respect, his physical presence as such did not play any great role in his leadership style. With the exception of the banquet and parade on the occasion of the Chinese national day, he seldom appeared in public. Though he was not obliged, like Stalin, to avoid crowds for the sake of security, he preferred to make known his views either through written statements or through speeches before closed groups for the party or state apparatus, and leave the mass meetings to others. A certain element of mystery and withdrawal was apparently thought desirable to enhance his prestige. . . . But it was the rally of August 18 in T'ien An Men Square, the first of several such gatherings, that marked the veritable starting point for the singular developments we are now witnessing in China.

It was on this occasion that the Red Guards made their first official appearance, though they had been seen on the streets of Peking for several days previously. In the course of the afternoon's proceedings, a girl student placed a Red Guard armband on Mao's arm, thus symbolizing the personal union between the "great teacher, great leader, great supreme commander, and great helmsman" (as Mao is henceforth called) and the young activists who are his instrument in carrying out the "cultural revolution." The Red Guards waved in the air their red-bound volumes of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, thus producing a characteristic effect which has been repeated and amplified on each subsequent occasion. . . .

It is not easy to pass judgment on a phenomenon of this magnitude. Clearly more is involved than an artificially created mass hysteria. Although there is undoubtedly deep and widespread dissent both within the party and outside it, Mao probably still enjoys a degree of popular adhesion substantially greater than that in the Soviet Union under Stalin, who ruled by sheer police terror. At the same time, there is reason to wonder whether Mao's popularity has not already been gravely undermined by the massive use of violence in recent months. During the wave of terror unleashed by the Red Guards in August and September 1966, the number of people savagely beaten was probably several tens of thousands, of whom sev-

eral thousand were actually beaten to death. And back of the Red Guards stands, as everyone knows, Lin Piao with his army. This situation is hardly calculated to encourage the public expression of dissent, but neither is it likely to strengthen the citizen's feeling of identification with his government. . . .

Understandably the most enthusiastic support comes from youth. The great majority of the Red Guards were born after 1949, and all of them have been taught during the whole of their conscious lives to regard Chairman Mao as the savior of China and a kind and solicitous father figure. Moreover, they have not been steeped like their elders in the culture of the past, and this, joined to youthful exuberance, makes them the natural and enthusiastic instruments of the smashing of statues, burning of books, and defacing of pictures which occurred in Peking and other cities in August and September of 1966. Quantitatively, this vandalism probably has been less than in France at the time of the revolution, or in England at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. But given the profound respect for the heritage of the past which undoubtedly still exists among many older Chinese, the psychological shock may be even greater. The numerous suicides among the elite of China's writers and artists may well be the result not merely of the harassment to which they have been subjected by the Red Guards, but of despair at the wanton destruction of elements in China's literary and artistic heritage which only primitive-minded fanatics can regard as reactionary.

A More Distant Perspective

ROSS TERRILL

By 1967 Mao himself was tired of the Cultural Revolution and the increasing arrogance and excesses of the Red Guards. Moreover, it had served his purposes. It had reminded China and the Communist Party of Mao's deepest revolutionary theories—that people are more important than things, that purge and renewal are necessary for a continuing revolution, that revolution is best left to the proletarian/peasant masses, and that China rather than Russia is the inevitable leader of world communism—that “yellow and brown are the colors of the future.” Moreover, he had used the Cultural Revolution to overcome those who opposed him in the Chinese Communist Party and Politburo. But most of all, the Cul-

tural Revolution had reasserted Mao's position as the embodiment of the Chinese Communist revolution. Mao's “cult of personality” was so firmly in place that he was, in fact, “the people's emperor” right up to the time of his death in 1976.

The true dimensions of the Cultural Revolution and its significance have become considerably clearer since Schram wrote of it in 1966. This is revealed in the excerpt that follows, from Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography*. This book, published in 1980, is the best full-scale contemporary biography of Chairman Mao. Ross Terrill is a distinguished authority and a prolific writer on contemporary China, and positions his account of Mao firmly in the setting of recent Chinese history.

In the 1940s and 1950s it would not have been apt to speak of “Maoism” or “Maoists.” While collegial authority endured in the CCP, every Party member was to a large degree a Maoist. Maoism was pretty much the Chinese Communist Way.

Now things were different. Mao's following had shrunk from almost the whole, in the 1950s, to merely one part, in the 1960s. In a split Party he was reduced to latching on to one wedge.

But he did have a substantial wedge. Its color was khaki. Mao launched a drive for all of China to “Learn from the PLA [People's Liberation Army].”

What exactly would China learn from the PLA? First signs were odd. “Comrade Jiang Qing talked with me yesterday,” Lin Biao told a group in Shanghai. “She is very sharp politically on questions of literature and art.”

For years Jiang Qing's health had been spotty and her mood brittle. Mostly she had stayed home and looked after the two daughters. Mao had spent much time away from her. “A man with few words,” was how she found him even when they were together.

But her topic—culture—was Mao's chosen weapon for the first round of the fight he was preparing for. “Green Waters”¹ plunged into art and literature circles with a heavy baggage of resentment at her long exclusion from them.

Soon soldiers were doing songs and dances at her behest. Her terrible crusade to put China's artistic life into a straitjacket had begun. . . .

Mao left Peking for Shanghai in the autumn of 1965. Jiang Qing was with him. . . .

The spell away from Peking was one more of his retreats, prior to a

¹The English translation of Jiang Qing's name.—Ed.

strong return with batteries recharged. He came to Shanghai to recruit some bright young intellectuals as political tools.

One day the Shanghai daily *Literary Currents* carried a heavy piece of drama criticism. That at least is what the strollers on the Shanghai Bund, opening their papers after work on November 10, thought it was.

The article was the first shot in the most amazing gunfire that any Marxist government has ever inflicted upon itself.

The Cultural Revolution had begun. Only in China could an epic of political theater begin with a dry slice of real theater.

The author of the drama column was Yao Wenyuan, a 44-year-old Shanghai essayist with a moon face and sly eyes. As drama criticism his review was stale stuff. For the play that he damned was none other than *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, the 1961 work by the vice-mayor of Peking.

Wu Han's play was a cunning allegory that protested Mao's own dismissal of Peng from the defense ministry. Mao had seen the barb behind it four years before. Now he felt he could hit back. . . .

Only Mao would have made a big issue of Wu Han's play—because Mao was its target. In remarking to some Albanian visitors that the Cultural Revolution began with the *Literary Currents* article, Mao admitted that his own role in Chinese politics was its first bone of contention.

Yet Mao did have some broad and even noble motives for his "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." Villagers so wretched that they ate bark, he told Malraux, made better fighters than glib chauffeurs from Shanghai. He was worried about the softness of the 300 million young people born since 1949. They must be put through a struggle of their own.

Mao was also reasserting his belief that people count more than things. "Should we attach more importance to men, to things, or to both?" he asked in a directive on labor reform. It was a question that Chinese tradition had long concerned itself with and Mao gave an answer that was very Confucian. "If we do our work on men well," he concluded, "we shall have things as well." Mao was trying to reestablish, amid the shifting sands of the Chinese Revolution, a priority for social relations over economic output.

The man believed deeply in purge and renewal. "If you have to fart, fart!" he once cried out at a Party meeting. "You will feel much better for it." As in the past, it was nature that lent him the patterns of thought he felt comfortable with.

"Don't peasants weed several times a year? The weeds removed can be used as fertilizer." The sentiment was macabre in its implications. Yet Mao was rousing himself not without hope.

He was in search of immortality for Mao Zedong—but also for the Chinese Revolution.

Mao started with a shot at *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* for reasons beyond mere wounded vanity. Like any Chinese leader, he had a healthy regard for the role of literature in cementing, or undermining, the legitimacy of a political dynasty.

Being a semi-intellectual himself, he did not quite trust the species, yet he was fascinated by it too. He had come to believe—and told an audience of economic planners so in mid-1964—that in Russia the new privileged elite had sprung first from literary and artistic circles.

"Why are there so many literary and artistic associations in Peking?" he inquired in irritation. "They have nothing to do." At the festivals, "army performances are always the best, local troupes rank second, and those from Peking are the worst."

His obsession with Russia, his chauvinism, his craving for immortality, all tumbled out before the same group of economic planners. "You have this association, that organization—it's all just a transplant from the Soviet Union . . . all ruled by foreigners and dead men. . . ."

If Mao was furious with Peking cultural officials, he also had bigger fish to fry. Shooting at the vice-mayor, he hoped to splatter some blood of accusation on the mayor.

Peng Zhen was a man of taste and stature. In some eyes he was a possible successor to Mao. His urbane, routinized ways turned Peking into a city that Mao found as soulless and self-important as some Deep Southerners find Washington.

Mao angrily refused to read *People's Daily* during these years. He preferred the army paper *Liberation Army Daily*. . . .

Two outlooks were about to collide.

Using a crablike technique to bring pressure to bear on Peng Zhen and the Peking establishment, Mao appointed a group that included the mayor himself to guide what he had already labeled a Cultural Revolution. Nothing could come of that, except a fight.

The mayor tried to limit the Yao article to the realm of academic debate. Mao was bent on far-reaching political change. The first wave of the Cultural Revolution was against those officials who had come to regard the edifice of PRC rule as an end in itself. A fight was just what Mao had in mind.

He watched it brew during the spring of 1966 from the vantage point of Shanghai. . . .

Mao had made a new analysis of international relations which put Russia and America theoretically on a par as class enemies of China. It was a confused analysis—gaily mixing up national and class factors, arbitrarily reclassifying Russia as capitalist—yet it carried the seed of a coherent new foreign policy line for China.

Mao's problem in calling a plague on both superpowers was that most of the Politburo disagreed with him.

It was clear to everyone in Peking that the U.S. was still a threat to China. Mao did not deny it. The novelty of Mao's position was that he asserted *Russia could be no help* to China in this predicament. Liu and many PLA leaders, on the other hand, still believed in the possibility of "joint action" with Moscow in the face of the American threat. . . .

Mao's strategic view was not changed by the outcome of the Vietnam War. He had already decided by the mid-1960s that Russia was a rising menace and the U.S. a falling one. The U.S. failure in the rice paddies of Indochina merely gave a delayed illustration to his thesis. . . .

While in retreat from Peking, Mao reread *Journey to the West*. The hero of the novel is a monkey with a red ass named Sun. He performs wonderful feats.

Sun steals and eats the peaches of immortality in the gardens of paradise. He storms the gates of hell in order to strike his name off the cosmic blacklist. He covers 180,000 leagues in one bound to reach the pillars that mark the boundary of the world, and once there pisses on a pillar to show his independent spirit.

Daring fate, Sun the monkey king has a trick for coping with adversity. He plucks hair from his body—the term for "hair" happens to be the same Chinese character as Mao's name—bites it into fragments and cries "Change!" Each piece then turns into a small monkey and he has at his side an army of supporters.

"We must overcome the king of hell and liberate the little devils," Mao remarked to a Politburo colleague in March 1966. "We need more Suns from the various local areas to go and disrupt the heavenly palace."

He—and Peking—got them before the year was out. . . .

By mid-1966 Mao was ready to spring back in person to the public arena and he did so clutching a packet of surprises worthy of Sun the monkey king.

He let China know he was alive (but not where he was sojourning) by receiving the premier of faithful Albania at an undisclosed location. Then he offered proof of his physical vigor. He went to Wuhan and swam the Yangze before a battery of TV cameras.

People's Daily reported—perhaps in the spirit of the monkey king legend—that Mao covered fifteen kilometers in sixty-five minutes and showed no sign of fatigue afterward.

Mao returned to Peking to summon some real-life "little devils" to his cause, and to write in his own hand a wall poster that asked the whole nation to revolt.

So the Cultural Revolution really began.

"We need," Mao ruminated of China's future, "determined people who are young, have little education, a firm attitude, and the political experience to take over the work."

His own experience was his guide. "When we started to make revolution we were mere 23-year-old boys," he pointed out, "while the rulers of that time . . . were old and experienced. *They had more learning but we had more truth.*"

The Cultural Revolution put this idea to the test. Young people were supposed to be untainted with old ways. Their education had been purely Chinese and without distortions from the non-Chinese world. As pristine products of new China, would they not prove to have "more truth"?

In that sense the Cultural Revolution was a fresh effort to do what the Hundred Flowers had failed to do: crystallize a moral consensus.

In another sense the Cultural Revolution was a departure from anything Mao had tried before. The "political experience" that Mao wished youth to have was to be gained by a *struggle against the Party!*

This gamble, too, stemmed from the shocks of 1956–1957. At that time Mao lost his faith in the established doctrines of Marxism-Leninism. Truth and the authority of the Party were thereafter quite separable in Mao's mind. So much so that by 1966 he believed that truth could be established *over against* the authority of the Party.

For the Great Leap Forward Mao trusted the Party as vehicle. For the Cultural Revolution he did not. He called in the little devils to assault the Party.

Mao set the Red Guards loose by assuring them that "To rebel is justified" is the gist of Marxism. He invited them to "Knock down the old."

At first their targets were cultural. They smashed temples. They ransacked the homes of intellectuals and better-to-do folk for items that seemed "bourgeois" or "revisionist."

Sunglasses were unacceptable on the first score; chess was too Russian to pass the second test. Almost all books other than those of Marxist doctrine were suspect. Burning them made rousing bonfires which were fun to watch.

If the Red Guards seemed at times like religious zealots, Mao had handed them an apt doctrine. His line of thought was reminiscent of the maxim "Love God and do what you like," which some Christians down the ages have believed in.

If the heart is in the right place, it presumes, then good conduct will flow as naturally as water down a slope.

Mao in 1966 gave Marxism a similar twist. He put "rebellion" in the center, where the Protestant sectarian put "love." If youth has the spirit of rebellion, the Mao of 1966 and 1967 believed, then it will do good deeds for China.

It was a mindless theory and it issued in mindless practice.

The Red Guards had their own reasons to find satisfaction in rebellion. They were a lost generation who suddenly had a sense of being

found. They had been to high school, but the expectations aroused there could not be fulfilled. Neither college places nor city jobs existed for them.

A generation that had never had the chance to let its hair down now did so to an extreme. High school kids, who would not have known a capitalist if they saw one, accused veterans who had battled against capitalism for decades of being fingers on capitalism's black hand!

A group of Red Guards broke into Peng Zhen's home in the middle of the night, switched on the light in his bedroom and ordered the mayor to rise and come downtown to be criticized. "Peng Zhen's face turned ashen out of surprise," the young zealots wrote in a breathless report, "and he could not even dress himself properly." . . .

The Red Guards seemed to be devoted to Mao as believers to a prophet. It was in some cases a sincere devotion. But a student of seventeen could not really share Mao's perspective on the Cultural Revolution. For him or her it was exciting to shout insults at "evil ones." It lent self-importance to travel up to Peking by special train to see Chairman Mao and "take part in revolution."

The mechanics probably meant more than the message.

"The Central authorities constantly urged us," one Cantonese youth who eventually swam to Hong Kong recalled, "to take along Mao's *Quotations* and study them whenever there was time. What we did was take along a pack of cards and play whenever there was time."

It seemed that Mao had forgotten the difference between student politics, with all its instability and mixed motives, and the politics of administering a country of 700 million people. . . .

At first the Red Guards wrote posters that merely criticized everything old. But in late 1966, Mao handed graver tasks to the little devils. He asked them to knock power from the hands of half of the Politburo. As if to anoint them for their labors, Mao met eleven million of them at ten sunrise rallies by the Gate of Heavenly Peace.

The young people wore khaki—what did the seasoned veterans of the PLA think of that?—with a red armband and the white words "Red Guard." Each one clutched a copy of *Quotations*. Waved in the air, the red covers made the square resemble a field ablaze with butterflies.

Mao contributed to the rather forced military atmosphere by wearing his PLA fatigues and cap with the red star. The floppy green garments hid a figure that was by now pear-shaped.

At none of the rallies did Mao make any kind of speech (it was frequently Lin Biao who spoke). He merely stood on top of the gate, Jiang Qing beside him (also in PLA uniform), and raised an arm. Yet hundreds of thousands wept from joy, biting their sleeves and jumping up and down in response to his mere presence.

The Cultural Revolution brought all kinds of formalization of self-

expression. In a weird way, Mao revived old China's ritual in his waning years.

The philosopher who had written books wrote 200-word posters instead.

The leader who used to lecture for hours to persuade his followers of the merits of a new policy now merely appeared before them with an upraised hand and a glassy smile.

The teacher who always wanted his students to think for themselves seemed content to have them chant a phrase of adoration which they no more understood than does a child understand the catechism it repeats.

Artists signed their paintings, during the mad months of late 1966 and 1967, not with their own name—not with any name—but with the sycophantic phrase: "Ten Thousand Years to Chairman Mao."

How could Mao look at himself in the mirror each morning amid such disgusting nonsense? Had he not asked in his 1949 speech on "Methods of Work" for a "stop to flattery and exaggerated praise"? Had he not forbidden even the naming of a street after a Party leader?

Yet now his own statue stared down over every lobby, his phrases were treated like magic charms, and urban China had come to resemble the interior of a Catholic cathedral with Mao as a red Mary.

Why had Mao changed? Because in his old age he did not any longer believe in the collegial authority of the Communist Party, and his own self-image reverted toward that of a traditional Chinese ruler. . . .

Because Lin Biao was pushing the Mao cult, for his own purposes, and a mixture of lack of energy and lack of will prevented Mao from scotching it.

"You should be concerned about the national crisis," he told a throng outside the Central Committee building one day, "and you should carry out the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the end." He needed more turmoil, for inside the building he was in danger of being outvoted. . . .

The Mao-Liu split began to open up at the time of de-Stalinization. Mao's eventual response to the shock from Moscow—a decision to find a Chinese Way to socialism even if it was not still a Marxist way—left Liu behind in dogged orthodoxy and sheer incomprehension at the pranks of the monkey king. . . .

Liu proved obdurate. The split might have been arrested if Liu had the willow's suppleness, as Zhou had, but he did not. Speaking to an Albanian group in late April 1966, when Mao was starting to crack the whip for his new adventure, Liu did not once mention the words "Cultural Revolution" or even "Mao"!

Liu's most drastic step of resistance was typical of his organization-mindedness: he tried to summon a full Central Committee meeting and have Mao's Cultural Revolution reviewed. But 1966 was not a moment for the triumph of the letter of Party law; a Caesar had much of the nation mesmerized. . . .

Mao's responses grew more and more anti-leftist. The opening stage of the Cultural Revolution, 1965–1966, had been directed against those “veteran cadres encountering new problems” (the code word was “capitalist roaders”).

The next stage, from 1967, was directed against young firebrands who proved less good at building than at smashing (the code word was “ultra-leftists”).

The wind shifted. *People's Daily* still managed to urge rebellion. Yet between the lines was a very different admonition to law and order. Well before Liu was formally dismissed from office, in October 1968, Mao's focus of anxiety had switched from Liu's errors to the errors of the “little devils” who had attacked Liu and who wanted “communism now.”

The turning point came in Shanghai. Militant leftists “seized power” as Mao had invited them to. They proclaimed a “Shanghai Commune” along the lines of the utopian Paris Commune of 1871. Mao did not approve.

He summoned to his office in February 1967 the two leaders of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai: Zhang Chunqiao, a former journalist whose career was closely linked with Mao's patronage; and Yao Wenyuan, the moon-faced propagandist who had written the critique of *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*.

Mao could hardly wait to see them. As their plane flew up from Shanghai he kept asking his secretary if it had arrived at Peking airport yet. The supreme leader ended up waiting in the doorway for the two firebrands to enter his quarters.

He poured cold water on them. Anarchism should be avoided, he said. Organizations must have someone in charge of them.

Shanghai leftists had been quoting a statement of Mao's from the May Fourth period. “The world is ours,” ran this cry of youth, “the nation is ours, society is ours.” Don't quote it anymore, Mao said, murmuring that he didn't “altogether recall” using those exact words.

As for a Shanghai Commune, Mao backed out of it with a curiously thin objection. If all China's cities set up communes would China's name not have to be changed from PRC to something else? Would foreign countries grant recognition to a “People's Commune of China”?

Zhang and Yao went back to Shanghai and turned down the ther-

mostat of the Cultural Revolution from hot to lukewarm. The Shanghai Commune lasted just nineteen days.

The reason for Mao's change of heart was his dismay at the factionalism of the leftists. They had excelled at knocking down. But when it came to building, there were hundreds of supervisors and no bricklayers.

Mao took trips around China. He did not like what he saw. Not only were Red Guards fighting among themselves, but Red Guards as a whole were coming into bitter conflict with industrial workers. Rumbles of discontent could be heard in the army. . . .

By late 1967 Mao was in favor of law and order. The “little devils” were ordered back to school. They were still to “make revolution,” but in practice the reopening of the schools rendered that impracticable. “If leftists remain uneducated,” he murmured in Jiangxi, “they will become ultra-leftists.” . . .

Mao scolded the Red Guard leaders for using violence in the factional struggles. . . .

He tried to switch the Cultural Revolution back to its academic beginnings: “We want cultural struggle, not armed struggle.”

Mao dealt with the Red Guard leaders bluntly as a veteran politician talking to neophytes. “I am the black hand that suppressed the Red Guards,” he said to these young people who had expected that “seizing power” would lead to a new political system. . . .

Was the Cultural Revolution the culmination of Maoism? By no means. It was a charade in a hothouse.

Mao wanted a new society. But in the Cultural Revolution he was driven less by a vision of the future than by a flight from a recent past that he did not like. . . .

Mao also entered on the Cultural Revolution determined to establish more deeply his long-standing socialist values.

- Relations between people are more important than production of things.
- Struggle has a therapeutic benefit that goes beyond attaining the object of the struggle.
- Life is a battleground on which few victories are final and the low and the high change places often.

Here Mao had *some* success. He reminded China of the Maoist faith, even if he did not convert China to it.

The Cultural Revolution did not produce a new type of rule—only some new assistants to the ruler and, for a season, a new social atmosphere. It did, though, put untrammelled power back in Mao's pale and aging hands.

Review and Study Questions

1. In what fundamental ways did Chinese communism under Mao Tse-tung differ from Soviet communism?
2. What prompted Mao to take such radical measures as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution? How successful was it?
3. What role did Mao see for China in the so-called Third World?
4. To what extent was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution a means to greater power for Mao and the perpetuation of his cult of personality?
5. To what extent was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution a genuine effort on the part of Chairman Mao to reenergize and reinvigorate the Chinese Communist revolution?

Suggestions for Further Reading

Mao Tse-tung was a prolific writer, but the entire corpus of his works is not available in English. There are two "official" collections: Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, 5 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1954) and a British edition of the same collection; and *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, 5 vols. (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1977), prepared by the Foreign Languages Press in Peking and authorized by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Both these editions are devoted to public documents, proclamations, position papers, and the like. Neither contains a shred of biographical material. And further, both editions have been heavily edited and revised by the Communist authorities. To an extent the same is the case with *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966). The first of a projected six-volume set of *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949–1976*, vol. I, *September 1949–December 1955*, ed. Michael Y. M. Kau and John K. Leung (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1986) has appeared.

There are two English-language versions of Mao's writings in *Mao Tse-tung's Quotations: The Red Guard's Handbook*, ed. Stewart Fraser (Nashville: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1967) and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, ed. Stuart R. Schram (New York et al.: Praeger, 1967). Somewhat more useful are two carefully edited and selected collections, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, ed. Stuart R. Schram (New York et al.: Praeger, 1963) and *Chairman Mao Talks to the People, Talks and Letters: 1956–1971*, ed. and intro. Stuart Schram, tr. John Chinnery and Tiejun (New York: Pantheon, 1974). Of a similar sort are *Mao Tse-tung on Revolution and War*, ed. M. Rejai

(Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1969), and Philippe Devillers, *Mao*, tr. Tony White (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), in the "What They Really Said" series. There is no autobiography as such. There is, however, a work that has been used as a substitute for an autobiography for Mao's early career: Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, rev. ed. (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1939), in which Snow reports a long series of private conversations with Mao about his childhood and early life. There are two books that present selections from Mao's works in a chronological order and hence are biographical or autobiographical in structure: *Mao Papers: Anthology and Bibliography*, ed. Jerome Ch'en (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), and *Mao*, ed. Jerome Ch'en (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969). The latter of these, part of the series "Great Lives Observed," is the most useful; it not only presents Mao in his own words but has a section called "Mao Viewed by His Contemporaries" and one called "Mao in History." Another book by Jerome Ch'en, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*, has an interesting section consisting of "Thirty-seven Poems by Mao Tse-tung," tr. Michael Bullock and Jerome Ch'en (London et al.: Oxford University Press, 1965). Mao was famous as a poet in China.

There is no end of books analyzing Mao's thought. One of the best of them is Arthur A. Cohen, *The Communism of Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Cohen's book deflates the exaggerated Chinese representation of Mao as a political philosopher and makes the case for his being simply a skillful revolutionary strategist. There is still no better guide to Mao's thought than this one, in spite of such later books as Alain Bouc, *Mao Tse-tung: A Guide to His Thought*, tr. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (New York: St. Martin's, 1977) and Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1973).

In general, with the conspicuous exceptions of Stuart Schram's *Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966), excerpted for this chapter, and Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China*, the older biographies of Mao can be dismissed in favor of those written in the decade following his death. The best of these is Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (New York et al.: Harper & Row, 1980), excerpted for this chapter. Two others can also be recommended: Dick Wilson, *The People's Emperor: Mao, A Biography of Mao Tse-tung* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), stresses the earthy, peasant quality of Mao and his preoccupation with the traditional Chinese cult of the ruler rather than his Marxism or his higher political skills. It is impressionistic and anecdotal and very readable, as is the work by an able Chinese-American journalist, Eric Chou: *Mao Tse-tung: The Man and the Myth* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982). Two books can be recommended that deal

specifically with the Great Cultural Revolution. Roderick Macfarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. I, *Contradictions among the People 1956–1957*; vol. II, *The Great Leap Forward 1958–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, 1983), with a third volume to come, is a definitive, detailed, and altogether convincing analysis of the origins of the Cultural Revolution in the failure of the Great Leap Forward. A less demanding but satisfactory work that also focuses on the Cultural Revolution is Stanley Karnow, *Mao and China: From Revolution to Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1972).

Two books attempt to assess the place of Chairman Mao in modern history: Stuart R. Schram, *Mao Zedong: A Preliminary Reassessment* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), and *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History: A Preliminary Assessment*, organized by the *Chinese Quarterly*, ed. Dick Wilson (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Of the many books on the history of revolutionary China, there are two that can be especially recommended: Chalmer A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), and John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution, 1800–1985* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).