

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

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

### Activity

#### Revision exercise

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

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

### Summary questions

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

## 9

# The impact of the Cultural Revolution

In this chapter you will learn about:

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

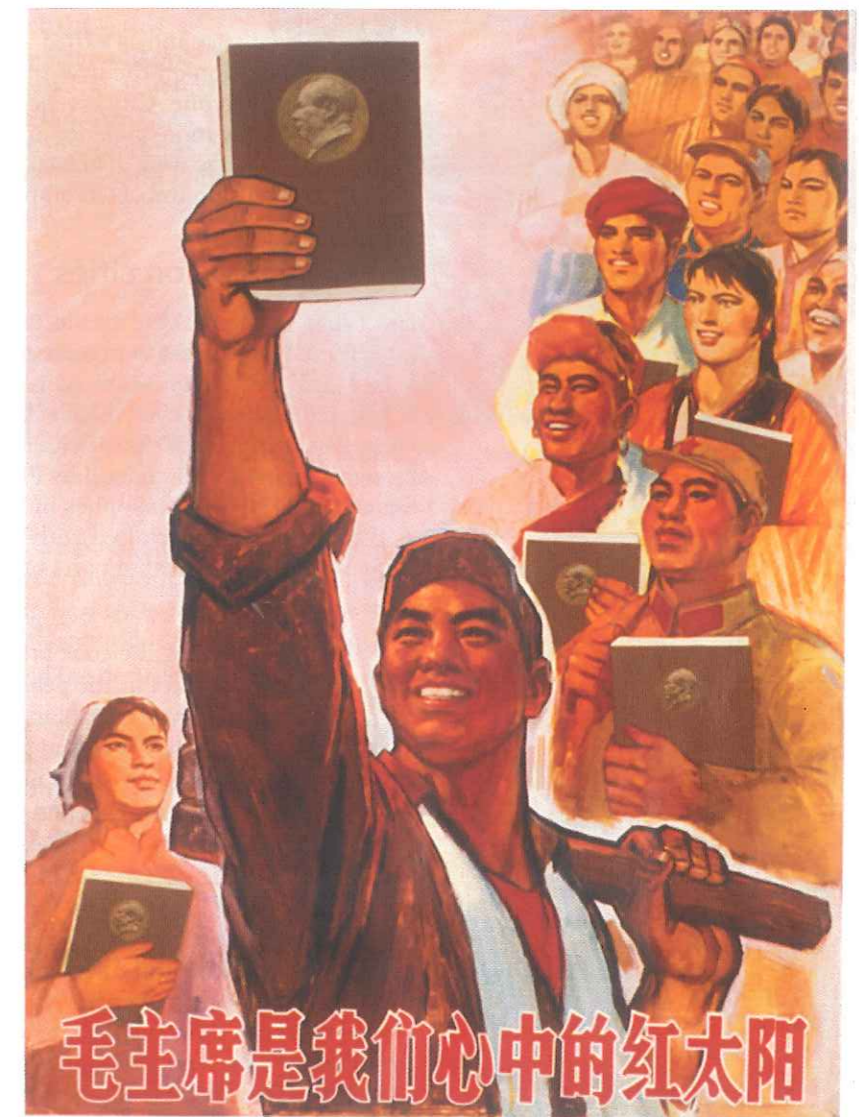


Fig. 1 A propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution, 'Chairman Mao is our heart's red sun.' A Chinese worker holds up the Little Red Book. In the background are people representing many other countries. Posters like this reinforced the personality cult of Chairman Mao

### Exploring the detail

#### Mass killings

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

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

are, however, questionable as they are based on the worst affected provinces. The death toll in other areas was lower. Nevertheless, it is likely that the total number of people killed in the whole of China was at least 500,000. In addition to this, many hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, were unjustly and arbitrarily framed and persecuted for 'counter-revolutionary crimes'.

In a country as vast and as varied as China, however, the impact of the Cultural Revolution on the lives of ordinary Chinese citizens was not the same for everyone. City dwellers were more affected than peasants; some regions saw more violence and more deaths than others; class background and age were also factors which influenced the way that the Cultural Revolution impacted on people's lives.

### The impact on cities

Few urban residents were unaffected by the Cultural Revolution. The movement to eradicate bourgeois and foreign influences from Chinese society and to drive out 'capitalist-roaders' from official positions was conducted in almost every high school, university, factory, office and shop. At times, China's great cities such as Beijing and Shanghai were brought almost to a standstill by Red Guard activities and factional fighting. In 1967, food supplies in Shanghai fell to dangerously low levels as the city became convulsed with street fighting and strikes and was virtually cut off from other parts of China.

The next morning the cook brought us news that there was very little food at the market as the peasants from the surrounding countryside, who used to bring vegetables, fish and shrimps to the markets, had answered Mao's call and joined the ranks of the 'revolutionary masses' to take part in the Cultural Revolution. They had come into the city in large numbers and occupied several hotels in the business section of Shanghai.

1

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

Even those who were not directly involved in Red Guard factions were drawn into the movement in ways that they could not avoid. At workplaces each morning, people stood in formation and bowed three times before Mao's portrait, quietly asking for instructions for the day ahead. This ritual was repeated each evening, after work, when employees reported back to Mao's portrait on what they had done during the day. Not surprisingly, this had an effect on industrial production. Total output fell by 13 per cent during 1967 due to the disruption of work in factories and on the transport system. There was a further fall in 1968, but thereafter recovery was relatively rapid. By 1969, industrial output had recovered to the levels achieved in 1966, and by 1971 the Chinese economy had been able to resume the steady growth that had been achieved in the mid-1960s. The effects of the Cultural Revolution on the economy, therefore, were limited in both extent and duration.

For millions of city-dwelling Chinese citizens, it was their private lives which were most affected by the Cultural Revolution. The pressures to conform in terms of thought, appearance and lifestyle intensified during these years. Any criticism of Mao or his allies, or indeed of the whole Cultural Revolution phenomenon, would lead to humiliation, beatings, imprisonment and worse. It was left to the Red Guards to interpret for

themselves what targets to attack in their campaign against the 'Four Olds', which resulted in arbitrary decisions and indiscriminate attacks. Pedestrians going about their business on the streets could be attacked almost at random for wearing the 'wrong' clothes or hairstyles or even for walking their pet dogs. Private homes were invaded and ransacked by Red Guards. It has been estimated that between a quarter and one third of all homes in Beijing were entered and searched by Red Guard units in the autumn of 1966. Antiques, valuables, musical instruments, paintings, porcelain and even family photographs were regarded as proof of a bourgeois lifestyle and these items were confiscated or destroyed.

Nien Cheng was living in Shanghai at the time of the Cultural Revolution. As a former employee of the (foreign-owned) Shell Oil Company, and as a woman with an identifiably 'bourgeois' lifestyle, she fell under suspicion and attracted the attentions of the Red Guards. This is her account of her experience on the night of 30 August 1966.

Suddenly the doorbell began to ring furiously. At the same time there was a furious pounding of many fists on my front gate, accompanied by the confused sound of many hysterical voices shouting slogans. The cacophony told me that the time of waiting was over and that I must face the threat of the Red Guards and the destruction of my home.

... The Red Guards pushed open the front door and entered the house. There were between thirty and forty senior high school students aged between fifteen and twenty, led by two men and one woman much older.

... The leading Red Guard, a gangling youth with angry eyes, stepped forward and said to me, 'We are the Red Guards. We have come to take revolutionary action against you.'

2

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

The 'revolutionary action' involved searching and ransacking Nien Cheng's house. Valuable antiques, porcelain, glassware, books, cameras, watches, clocks and silverware were destroyed or piled up ready for confiscation. The following morning the Red Guards left, intending to return with a vehicle to transport the valuables away. Factional rivalry between different Red Guard units, and the lack of any coordination or control, meant that people like Nien Cheng were the pawns in a political power struggle. Shortly after the visit by the first Red Guard unit, Nien Cheng's house was visited by a rival unit.

I walked downstairs. Eight men dressed in the coarse blue of peasants or workers stood in the hall. Though they were all middle-aged, they all wore the armbands of the Red Guards. Their leader, a man with a leather whip in his hand, stood in front of me and said, 'We are the Red Guards. We have come to take revolutionary action against you.'

3

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



Fig. 2 Red Guards reading from the Little Red Book, in front of a picture of Mao Zedong. Note how young the Red Guards are in this picture

### Cross-reference

To recap on the Four Olds, see page 99.

### Activity

#### Source analysis

Study Sources 1, 2 and 3.

- Using the sources and information, explain why city dwellers were unable to avoid being affected by the Cultural Revolution.
- What can we learn from Nien Cheng about the impact of the Cultural Revolution on city dwellers?
- How typical do you think Nien Cheng's treatment was?

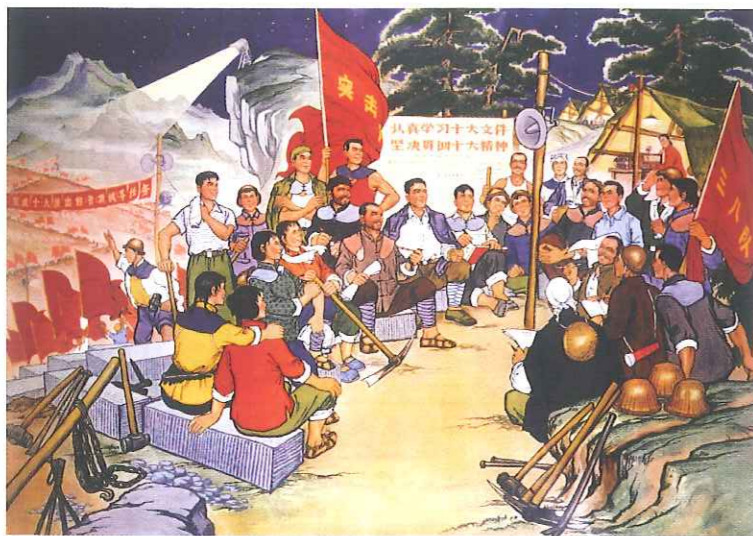
**Cross-reference**

See page 100 for more on large-character wall posters.

**Activity**

**Revision exercise**

Using all the information in this section, draw up a balance sheet of the gains and losses for peasants as a result of the Cultural Revolution.



**Fig. 3** Propaganda work by Red Guards among peasants in the countryside. During the Cultural Revolution, many Red Guards were sent to live and work among the peasants

This group took away the suitcases of valuables left behind by the first Red Guard unit. They also put a large-character wall poster on the outside of the house accusing Nien Cheng of 'conspiring with foreign nations'. When the original Red Guards returned to the house to find all of the valuables gone, Nien Cheng was accused of hiding them, a counter-revolutionary crime. Eventually she was arrested and imprisoned in solitary confinement for six and a half years. She was never put on trial and never convicted of any crime. In the context of the 'revolutionary justice' of the Cultural Revolution, however, to be accused was to be found guilty.

**The impact in rural areas**

In contrast with the cities, much of China's countryside was largely untouched by the violence and disruption of the Cultural Revolution.

Away from the big cities, especially in remote regions, there was relatively little Red Guard activity and peasants were not drawn into the power struggles of the Cultural Revolution. In rural areas close to the cities, however, peasants were more likely to get involved in 'revolutionary action'. Nearly two-thirds of all places where 'rural disorder' was reported between July 1966 and December 1968 were within 50 km (30 miles) of large cities. The countryside around Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou were the rural areas that witnessed the most revolutionary activity.

Agricultural output, like that of industry, declined in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. Grain production fell in both 1966 and 1967, and then dropped even lower in 1968, although the poor weather in 1968 was undoubtedly a major factor in producing a bad harvest. By 1969, however,

grain production had regained the level achieved in 1966 and continued to rise in subsequent years. As with industry, the impact of the Cultural Revolution on agriculture was short-lived and limited.

In matters of health the rural areas gained some benefit from the Cultural Revolution. After 1966 the emphasis in health policy shifted to the countryside. In 1968, a rural cooperative medical scheme was introduced at commune level. 'Barefoot doctors', who were essentially paramedics with less training than fully qualified doctors, were introduced to provide basic health care. In the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, however, many of these new doctors were put to work with little or no training. For example, Jung Chang became a barefoot doctor in a rural commune with no training whatsoever.

**The impact on education and youth**

In the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, schools and universities were the main battlegrounds in the struggle against 'incorrect ideas'. Teachers were selected as the first victims because they were the people primarily responsible for instilling ideas and knowledge. On 18 June 1966 many teachers at Beijing University were dragged out of their

classes, beaten, had their faces blackened and dunce's caps placed on their heads. Attacks on teachers rapidly spread to other institutions and other cities.



**Fig. 4** During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards often paraded their victims through the streets wearing dunce's caps. Here, soldiers jeer at several victims as they are taken on a truck through Beijing in February 1967

On 5 August, in a Beijing girls' school, the first known death by torture took place. The headmistress, a 54-year-old mother of four, was kicked and trampled by the girls, and boiling water was poured over her. She was ordered to carry heavy bricks back and forth; as she stumbled past, she was thrashed with leather army belts with brass buckles, and with wooden sticks studded with nails. She soon collapsed and died.

**4** From Jung Chang and J. Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, 2006

During these [struggle] meetings, dirty water and spoiled food was poured over the heads of the victims. Our headmaster, Mr Sha, was dragged to one. His hair was pulled so that he had to bend forward, but his arms were lifted backwards. It was a favourite way to inflict pain, called 'flying a plane', and was used extensively to punish capitalist roadsters. A long list of his 'crimes' was read out to him, not least of which was the building of the swimming pool, now closed, which had sabotaged Mao's call to swim in the big rivers and the sea. Other charges included 'growing the revisionist seedlings', which referred to the students with good marks. He was forced to crawl on all fours around the big playground, barking like a dog until his voice became a croak, and his hands and knees left a trail of blood. Then, with other teachers, he was paraded through the streets. They had to wear pointed witches' hats made of white paper, and big cardboard squares hung round their necks, bearing their names.

**5** From Anhua Gao, *To the Edge of the Sky*, 2000

**Activity**

**Source analysis**

Study Sources 4 and 5.

- 1** What can we learn from these sources about the treatment of teachers in schools during the Cultural Revolution?
- 2** Explain what effect incidents such as those described might have had on the students involved.

In the summer of 1966, all universities were closed and did not reopen for two years. Middle schools were closed between the autumn of 1966 and spring 1967. In the final stages of the Cultural Revolution, when the activities of the Red Guards were being suppressed, millions of young people from the cities were sent to the countryside to work among and learn from the peasants. Between 1968 and 1976, over 12 million young people were sent to the countryside. Among those who were rusticated in this way was Jung Chang.

### Activity

#### Source analysis

Study Source 6. What can we learn from this source about the culture gap between Chinese peasants and educated young people from the cities?

I was not very popular in the village, although the peasants largely left me alone. They disapproved of me for not working as hard as they thought I should. Work was their whole life, and the major criterion by which they judged anyone. Their eye for hard work was both uncompromising and fair, and it was clear to them that I hated physical labour and took every opportunity to stay at home and read my books. Virtually every day I had some sort of diarrhoea and my legs broke out in infected sores. I constantly felt weak and dizzy, but it was no good complaining to the peasants; their harsh life had made them regard all non-fatal illnesses as trivial.

6

From Jung Chang, *Wild Swans*, 1992

For Chairman Mao, the disruption to formal education and the process of learning through hard labour were essential elements in his Cultural Revolution. His 1965 remark that 'The more books you read, the more stupid you become' justified the educational policies pursued during the Cultural Revolution. For millions of China's young people, however, the disruption to their education seriously damaged their long-term prospects. Unable to complete their education and graduate, their careers were blighted, leading many to become cynical, disillusioned and lacking in ambition. Their experiences in the countryside also dented the revolutionary idealism of many former Red Guards. Confronted with the reality of rural poverty, backwardness and lack of proper education and health care, few young people could continue to swallow the official propaganda vision of a communist utopia in China. For many, their



Fig. 5 A propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution showing the Red Guards

### Activity

#### Talking point

'Learning from the peasants had much greater educational value than reading books for young people from the cities.' Discuss this statement in groups or as a class.

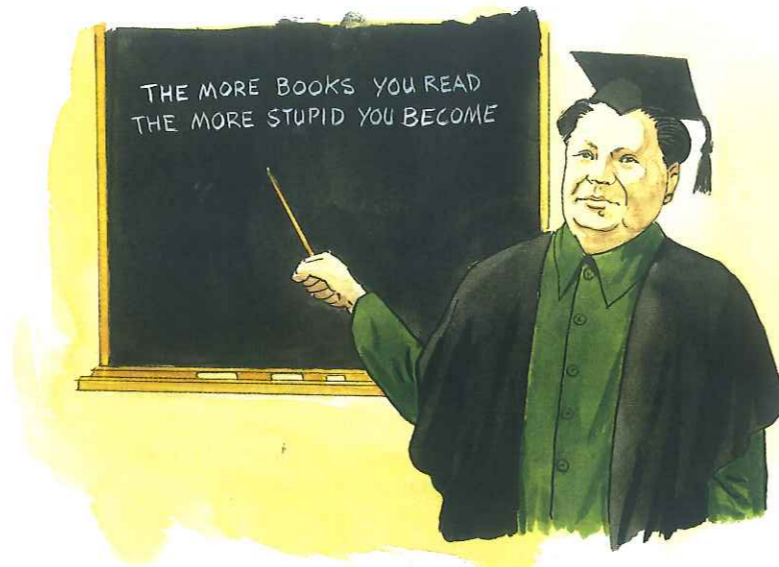


Fig. 6 Mao's views on education

faith in Maoist ideology and China's political system was severely undermined, although few would venture to express their doubts openly.

After the Cultural Revolution, once schools and universities had reopened, there were a number of changes to the education system. There were fewer examinations for pupils to take and the content of school and university courses was reduced. Instead there was a much greater emphasis on practical work and vocational training. Pupils and students were required to undertake manual labour, for as long as two months a year, as part of their courses.

### The impact on cultural and intellectual life

What changed was life outside work. Leisure disappeared. Instead, there were endless mind-numbing – but nerve-racking – meetings to read and reread Mao's works and *People's Daily* articles. People were herded into numerous violent denunciation rallies against 'capitalist-roaders' and other appointed enemies. Public brutality became an inescapable part of everyday life ... Moreover, there were no ways to relax, as there were now virtually no books to read, or magazines or films, plays, opera; no light music on the radio. For entertainment there were only Mao Thought Propaganda Teams, who sang Mao's quotations set to raucous music, and danced militantly waving the *Little Red Book*.

7

From Jung Chang and J. Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, 2006

As a result of the Cultural Revolution, China became a cultural desert. Scholars, writers, intellectuals and teachers were persecuted, imprisoned or killed. Mao's wife Jiang Qing set herself up as the supreme authority over cultural life. Theatres and cinemas were only allowed to put on 'revolutionary' plays and films. Operas and ballets had to be personally approved by Jiang Qing. The sale of traditional and foreign literature was banned and the possession of such material was evidence of a counter-revolutionary crime. Libraries and museums were closed and their valuable collections of books and artefacts damaged or dispersed by the Red Guards. Books were piled high in town squares and set on fire in symbolic acts of destruction of 'old' culture.

Many of the victims of this cultural purge were selected at random by the Red Guards. Others, however, were victimised by Jiang Qing personally. There were episodes in her past as an actress in Shanghai in the 1930s that she wanted to keep hidden. Those who had known her personally in those years, or who had evidence about her former life, were selected as targets for persecution. The Cultural Revolution Group, which included Jiang Qing, specifically ordered Red Guards from Beijing to travel to Shandong and desecrate the museum dedicated to Confucius, who symbolised traditional Chinese culture. 'Confucius and Co.' became, during the Cultural Revolution, a convenient label for everything that belonged to the past in Chinese culture and therefore a legitimate target for attack.

The effects of the Cultural Revolution on Chinese culture lasted until Mao's death in 1976 and the subsequent ousting from power of Jiang Qing and her allies. Only those arts that served propaganda purposes and fed the personality cult of Mao were permitted in the decade 1966–76.

### Activity

#### Source analysis

Study Source 7. What can we learn from this source about the effects of the Cultural Revolution on the private lives of Chinese citizens?

### Exploring the detail

#### Plays and operas

Eight 'model plays' were approved by Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution. These included *The Legend of the Red Lantern*, an opera produced by the China Beijing Opera House, and *The Red Detachment of Women*, a ballet that offered an idealised, propagandist version of the role played by women in the Chinese revolution. No other plays, operas or ballets could be performed and Chinese orchestras were forbidden from performing Western music. In the words of a newspaper article in the *Beijing Review*, 'reverence for foreign things is actually reverence for the bourgeoisie'.

## Exploring the detail

## Failure to eliminate the Four Olds

One striking example of the failure of the Cultural Revolution to eliminate old thought was in evidence in 1976 after the death of Zhou Enlai. The Festival of the Dead ceremony in Tiananmen Square, a ritual that had its origins in the Confucian idea of reverence for ancestors, was attended by tens of thousands of people.

## Cross-reference

For more on the Festival of the Dead ceremony, see page 134.

## Activity

## Thinking point

'The Cultural Revolution was in many ways a device for Jiang Qing to pursue her personal agenda.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.



Fig. 7 A propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution showing the leading role played by Jiang Qing

The campaign against the Four Olds, and the incitement of youthful Red Guards to rebel, had one lasting effect. The attack on Confucian principles meant that it became a counter-revolutionary crime to show respect for the aged or one's parents. Old thought and old customs were never completely eradicated, however, nor did Mao and Jiang Qing succeed in their aim of remoulding the people – their habits, customs, ideas, attitudes, loyalties and motivations. Changing people proved to be much more difficult than changing institutions or systems.

## Exploring the detail

## Kang Sheng's execution squads

Kang Sheng, a close ally of Mao and the head of the Central Case Examination Group (a form of political police force), was given a free hand to use violence and torture. In Yunnan province, 14,000 Party cadres were executed at the hands of Kang Sheng's 'police'. In Nei Menggu (Inner Mongolia), 350,000 were arrested, of whom 89,000 were beaten and maimed and another 16,000 killed. There were also large numbers of executions in Hebei, Guangdong and Shanghai.

## Cross-reference

Further details about Kang Sheng can be found on page 92.

## The impact on the Communist Party

Since 1949 the CPC had been the cornerstone of the political power structure in the People's Republic of China. As the 'vanguard' party, the CPC was involved in, and had control over, political decision-making and the implementation of policy at all levels. In theory, the CPC was organised on the basis of the Leninist theory of 'democratic centralism'. In other words, Party members at the lower levels in the organisation had the right to be involved in discussions about Party policies, but it was the collective leadership of the Party through the Central Committee, the Politburo and the Party Congress that made the final decisions. Once decisions had been made by the Central Committee, and ratified by the Party Congress, Party members at the lower levels were expected to accept and implement these policies. Party members had the theoretical right to appeal to higher authority if they wished to take issue with the way policies were being implemented, but in practice the exercise of this right would lay the members open to charges of factionalism, right-oppositionism and counter-revolutionary crime. Lower-level Party cadres were, therefore, under pressure to conform and accept unquestioningly the policies handed down from above. Successive purges during the 1950s and early 1960s had reinforced the authoritarian tendencies within the Party leadership and strengthened Mao's position.

The Cultural Revolution was conceived by Mao partly as another purge of the CPC. This time the purge cut a deep swathe through all ranks of the CPC. Higher ranking officials were affected most. Over 70 per cent of provincial and regional officials, including four out of six Regional Party First Secretaries, were purged. At national level, over 60 per cent of higher-ranking officials lost their jobs; only 9 of the 23 Politburo members of 1966 survived the purge. At local level, about 20 per cent of the Party bureaucracy were labelled as 'revisionists' or as 'persons in authority taking the capitalist road'; 3 million cadres were sent to May 7th Cadre Schools where they were forced to undertake hard physical labour and intense ideological study. Most of these people survived the Cultural Revolution and were later rehabilitated but a large number were tortured, beaten to death, died of exhaustion and malnutrition, or committed suicide.

With so many experienced Party cadres falling victim to the Cultural Revolution, it is perhaps surprising that the CPC survived at all. It seemed in the early months of the Cultural Revolution, when officials were being hounded out of office by the Red Guards who were heeding Mao's call to 'Bombard the Headquarters', that Mao's aim was to replace the CPC with some other form of revolutionary organisation. A critical point in the power struggle was reached in January 1967 when revolutionary activists began to seize power from the Party bureaucracy in Shanghai and moved to establish a people's commune in which the CPC would no longer have a vanguard role. Mao was forced to make a choice. Should he allow this new revolutionary organisation to replace his Party or would he draw back and defend the CPC's vanguard role? His answer was unequivocal: 'You can call it what you please, Communist Party or Socialist Party, but we must have a Party. This must not be forgotten.'

During 1967 and 1968 Mao's focus began to shift away from the destruction of the old order towards the creation of a new one. Alongside the drive to establish revolutionary committees in which the CPC exercised a leadership role, Mao also set about rebuilding and restructuring the CPC. Arrangements were put in place for the election of a new Central Committee and the convening of a national Party Congress. Recruitment of new members was resumed and many former Red Guards were absorbed into the CPC, although only if they could demonstrate that they came from the correct 'worker-peasant-soldier' class background.

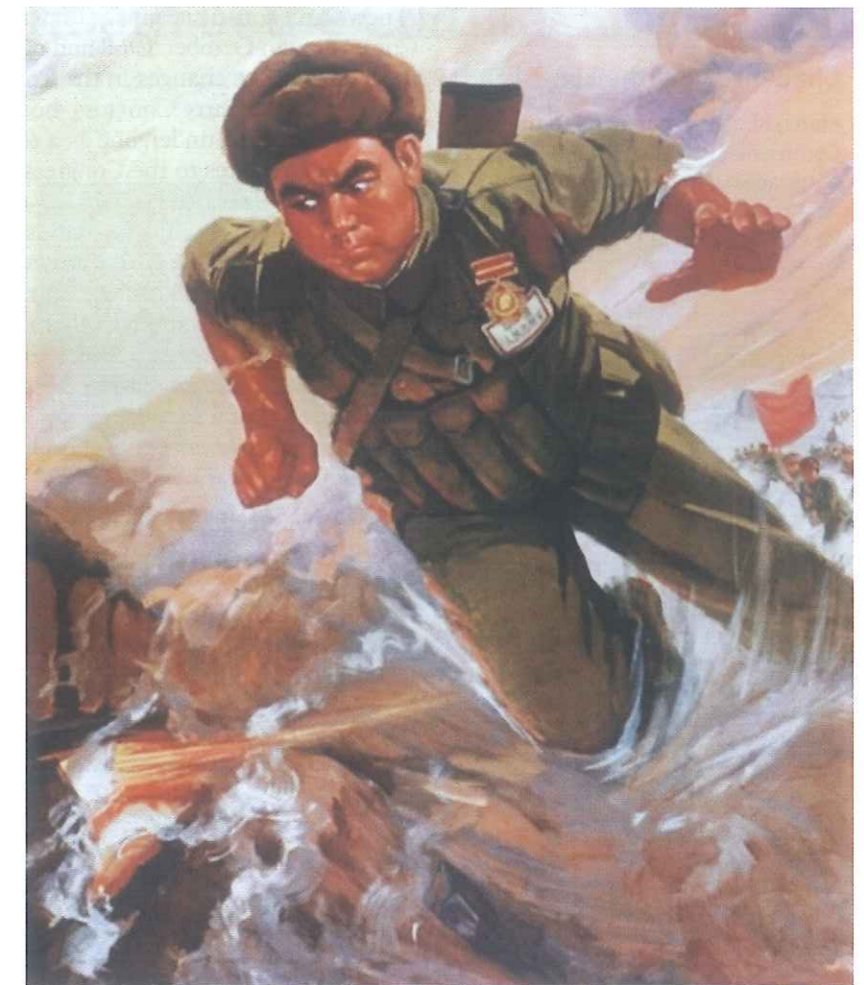


Fig. 8 'The Red Army victorious', a propaganda poster from the 1950s