

Chapter summary

- After the Great Leap Forward it was clear that there was a split within the CCP. 'Ideologues' argued in favour of continued commitment to Mao Zedong Thought. The 'pragmatists' believed that ideological purity was less important than practical needs.
- By the mid-1960s Mao was increasingly worried that his colleagues within the Communist Party, particularly Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, were not committed to his communism and really wanted to 'take the capitalist road' to development.
- Mao believed that once revolutionaries took power they inevitably became a new elite, taking advantage of their new authority and exploiting the masses. Mao advocated permanent, ongoing revolution to prevent this happening.
- During the Cultural Revolution Mao's cult of personality reached absurd heights. He used the fact that the young people of China had been taught to view him as having near-supernatural powers to convince them to attack his opponents.
- Urged on at massive rallies where the young people worshipped Mao like a god, the Red Guards launched attacks on the so-called 'Four Olds': culture, customs, habits and ideas.
- Soon Mao's urging them to 'Bombard the Headquarters' – in other words attack figures in authority – spiralled out of control. China descended into anarchy as rival Red Guards and worker groups battled against each other, each believing themselves to be the true defenders of Mao's revolution.
- The PLA was loyal to Mao. It was led by Lin Biao who served Mao without question. When the Red Guard violence got out of hand, Mao was able to use Lin and the PLA to end it.
- Ultimately, Mao's most important target was Liu Shaoqi. His former colleague and head of the Chinese state was publicly humiliated at huge struggle meetings, tortured and beaten. He died in 1969.
- After the PLA had restored order, Mao sent millions of former Red Guards into the countryside to help peasants in their villages. This had two effects: it was meant to teach the Red Guards about the hardships of their rural comrades' lives but also to disperse them across China so that they could not cause more unrest.
- One of the targets of the purge, Deng Xiaoping, was brought back to political power by Mao. Deng was an experienced and able administrator and Mao needed him to rebuild China.
- Mao died in September 1976. Before he died, he named a little-known bureaucrat, Hua Guofeng, as his successor.
- Mao's wife and her radical colleagues, damned later as 'The Gang of Four', had increased their power greatly through the Cultural Revolution. They did not want the violence to end. Knowing that Hua was inexperienced, they believed that they could also seize power from him.
- Fearing a coup, Hua ordered the arrest of the Gang of Four. They were sent to prison for their part in the violence and terror of the Cultural Revolution.
- Deng, crafty and popular, was then able to undermine Hua's influence. He became China's main leader and set the nation on the path to becoming the economic superpower that it is today.