**The Causes of the Cultural Revolution**

In 1966 Mao summoned the young people of China to the same central square in Beijing where, in 1949, he had announced the victory of the CCP in the civil war. Now, however, he had a different message. He told the students that the **communist revolution** was in danger from leaders of the CCP. These young people, who were known as the **Red Guards**, were told that they had the task of **saving the revolution**.

However what were Mao’s motives behind carrying out the Cultural Revolution?

Reorder the paragraphs below under the following headings:

* **Power Struggle**
* **Purify Communism**
* **Education & Culture**
* **Mao’s Comeback**

Communist Party officials were the worst culprits in Mao’s eyes. Instead of setting an example by serving the people, they were using their power for their own ends such as obtaining seaside holidays, extra rations of food and clothing and bigger flats for their families to live in.

Mao also argued for change in Chinese culture. In January 1964, a new drama festival was launched in Shanghai. The sponsor of the festival was Chiang Ching (Mao’s third wife). The aim was to produce new socialist dramas. This drama group changed the nature of Chinese opera with its Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes, which depicted political struggles in present-day China and replaced traditional Chinese opera.

After the Great Leap Forward Mao’s own political position was weakened whilst his economic policies had been rejected. So one of his initial aims in the Cultural Revolution was to defeat his opponents, regain his political supremacy and ensure that his economic policies were accepted.

Mao totally opposed the policies of moderates in the Party and, in 1962, he launched a Socialist Education Movement to get people back on to the right road for communism. He also launched a ‘four clean-up campaign’ to get rid of corruption and bad management in the Party and to discourage people who showed signs of ‘capitalist’ behaviour. One example was peasants who spent more time on their private plots than on the communal land.

From 1962 to 1966 Mao continually encouraged the members of the CCP to keep in touch with the ordinary people but with little support. However, in 1965, Mao gained the support of Lin Biao, the Minister of Defence. Lin abolished all ranks in the People’s Liberation Army whilst every soldier was given a copy of a new book, ‘Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong’ which became known as the Little Red Book. Mao now had the support of four million soldiers in the People’s Liberation Army.

Mao totally opposed these policies. He argued that these changes were turning China into a sick and selfish society where people were more concerned about themselves than their neighbours. The peasants were working harder on their own land than they were on the communes. In the cities, the young were more interested in the latest fashions in clothes and pop music than in studying how to become good communists.

During the Cultural Revolution city dwellers, intellectuals, university lecturers and the like were sent to the countryside to learn from the peasants by working on the farms.

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In 1966, Mao announced his return to public life with a 15 kilometre swim in the Changjiang river in front of a large crowd and shortly afterwards he launched the Cultural Revolution. To achieve all his aims, Mao drew on the traditional Chinese adulation of a God-like emperor to build a cult of personality. His main instruments of power were the youthful ‘Red Guards’ and behind them the Peoples Liberation Army.

Mao wanted a purer form of communism and gave this priority over economic efficiency. Incentives for individual work destroyed his ideal of equality. He wanted a decentralised industry, which encouraged maximum participation of all the workers. If that meant less use of modern technology then it was a price worth paying.

From 1962 to 1966 the leaders of the CCP argued with one another about which road they should follow in developing China. The moderates, led by Lui Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, wanted to introduce more incentives to get the peasants in the communes working hard. They wanted, for example, to let the peasants have larger private plots and pay them wages according to how much work they did.

Throughout the Cultural Revolution, Mao and his supporters used certain labels to attack and discredit their opponents such as ‘Capitalist’ or ‘Revisionist Contra-Revolutionary’.

The Cultural Revolution also aimed to change the education of ordinary Chinese people. Education needed to be more revolutionary, less academic and more practical and more influenced by the peasants. In June 1964, Mao complained that education had produced ‘high and mighty bureaucrats’ who did not reflect the ideals of the communist revolution.

They also believed in going back to the ideas of the first Five-Year Plan to build up industry on Russian lines. To manage industry more effectively, they wanted to create a new class of skilled managers.

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