



CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN CHINA

Abdusalom GIYOSOV,

National Research University Higher School of Economics

Article history:		Abstract:
Received:	24 th November 2024	Storm clouds were gathering around the Great Helmsman. After the failure of the "Great Leap Forward", the party elite was slowly but surely pushing the leader out of power. Mao watched passively as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping turned his China 180 degrees. There were plenty of signs that Mao's time was running out. Bad news came from the neighboring Soviet Union. A coup had taken place, resulting in the overthrow of Nikita Khrushchev. The conspirators included almost the entire Politburo, including Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. It seemed that the Soviet Union was merely ahead of China by a few years and that Mao was facing the same, if not a worse, fate. Mao finally became convinced that conspirators, capitalists, and revisionists could not be eradicated through mere party purges. The system of power in China had to be radically changed, the communist state had to be reinvented and reimagined.
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By the early 1960s, Mao Zedong was already over 70 years old. Storm clouds were gathering around the Great Helmsman. After the failure of the "Great Leap Forward", the party elite was slowly but surely pushing the leader out of power. Mao watched passively as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping turned his China 180 degrees. There were plenty of signs that Mao's time was running out. Bad news came from the neighboring Soviet Union. A coup had taken place, resulting in the overthrow of Nikita Khrushchev. The conspirators included almost the entire Politburo, including Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. It seemed that the Soviet Union was merely ahead of China by a few years and that Mao was facing the same, if not a worse, fate. Mao finally became convinced that conspirators, capitalists, and revisionists could not be eradicated through mere party purges. The system of power in China had to be radically changed, the communist state had to be reinvented and reimagined. Everything began in the summer of 1966. On August 8, all Chinese newspapers published a resolution on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Artists began enthusiastically creating new posters declaring the victory of this revolution. Leading the process was the great Mao himself. The goal was to crush the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all those who opposed communism. Mao Zedong's new master plan consisted of two parts. First, culture was to be the lever

with which he would overturn the country. Second, the driving force of the new revolution would not be the army or party cadres—these comrades could no longer be trusted—but rather the masses, primarily the youth. After all, who, if not the youth, would best embrace the rhetoric of a war against the remnants of the past?

In this regard, I propose the following hypothesis: The Cultural Revolution in China, initiated by Mao Zedong, was driven both by internal political conflicts within the Communist Party and by profound social changes aimed at achieving ideological purity. Its consequences, including the destruction of cultural heritage and mass repression, led to significant changes in Chinese society and the economy, laying the foundation for subsequent reforms and transformations. Research question: What factors contributed to the start of the Cultural Revolution in China, and what were its outcomes?

Although the Cultural Revolution formally lasted about ten years, most scholars agree that, in reality, it lasted only about two years, as its mass phase, known as the "Radical Period", took place from 1966 to 1968. From that point onward, it essentially transitioned into a period of inter-factional struggle, resembling a civil war. Shortly after Mao's death in 1976 and the prosecution of the "Gang of Four"¹, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Deng Xiaoping, officially

¹ «Банда четырёх» (кит. трад. 四人幫, упр. 四人帮, пиньинь Sìrén bāng, палл. Сы жэнь бан) — идеологическое клише, используемое в официальной китайской пропаганде и историографии для обозначения группы высших руководителей Коммунистической

партии Китая, выдвинувшихся в ходе Культурной революции 1966—1976 годов, являвшихся наиболее приближёнными к Мао Цзэду лицами в последние годы его жизни. В состав этой группы входили: Цзян Цин



declared the Cultural Revolution a “ten-year catastrophe that brought about the most severe setbacks and heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state, and the people since the founding of the People’s Republic of China”. The CCP enforces its own version of events and suppresses any investigations or discussions regarding alternative interpretations through strict state censorship on the matter, as well as the dissemination of state-sanctioned propaganda. Naturally, the ruling elite of the CCP and China’s new governing class have a vested political interest in this. The CCP continues to proclaim itself socialist and avoids condemning Mao, still utilizing Mao Zedong’s iconography and largely portraying him as a national hero who merely “made a few mistakes”. All of this is part of its efforts to restore the legitimacy of the party-state, which was significantly damaged by the mass uprisings during the Cultural Revolution. This is why Chinese state authorities have banned the publication of books about the Cultural Revolution that describe it in ways not approved by the Party. Despite its obvious one-sidedness, the official Chinese state representation of the Cultural Revolution as a time of anarchic chaos is comparatively more accurate and less misleading than most Western portrayals, which insist on depicting it as totalitarian to fit the broader anti-communist narrative—painting all communist experiments with the same broad brush.

After the failure of the infamous “Great Leap Forward”, Mao Zedong largely lost his political legitimacy within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The “Great Leap Forward” was an ambitious plan aimed at industrializing China’s productive forces while simultaneously creating an egalitarian social structure. However, it ended in catastrophic mass famine, leading to the deaths of millions. This was a major failure, and Mao bore much of the responsibility since he was the one who had actively promoted this policy. Mao stepped down from the position of Head of State in favor of Liu Shaoqi, a veteran of the communist underground during the Chinese Civil War. Although Mao’s actual political power was significantly reduced, he remained a symbolic leader due to his immense public authority. Mao had a legendary status as the founder of the People’s Republic of China and a great leader. He was both a military strategist and an intellectual theorist, although he was not particularly knowledgeable in

economics and had very little real political power in terms of decision-making. Daily governance was now in the hands of Liu Shaoqi and the Party’s General Secretary, Deng Xiaoping, who were considered more competent economic administrators². When making important decisions, Mao was consulted, but his ideas were no longer followed, and he complained that he “felt like a dead man at his own funeral.” Because of this, most Western historical sources claim that Mao began developing a Machiavellian strategy aimed at restoring absolute power. Many argue that the motives behind this were triggered by events in the Soviet Union. Mao’s paranoia is said to have started with Nikita Khrushchev’s speech condemning Stalin’s crimes and personality cult after his death. Mao feared that the same would happen to his own legacy and became even more paranoid about ten years later when Nikita Khrushchev was removed from power by Brezhnev. This culminated in the Sino-Soviet split, which occurred for a variety of reasons but was officially framed as a conflict over revisionism. The accusation was that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, under Khrushchev, had abandoned class struggle. Mao used the concept of revisionism and paranoia over the restoration of capitalism as a pretext to mobilize his supporters—also known as the Red Guards (Hongweibing)—against his political rivals in order to return to power.

Although the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution became one of the largest mass movements in history, taking on an extremely anarchic and decentralized character, the Party leadership initially supported it but did not control it. It did not take long before the movement took on a life of its own, beyond the control of either Mao or the Party. Most scholars agree that the key series of events leading to the Cultural Revolution occurred between 1965 and 1966, triggered by highly politicized debates surrounding a play titled *The Dismissal of Hai Rui*³. The play was written five years earlier by a man named Wu Han, who was a historian, playwright, and politician. It was an allegorical drama set during the Ming dynasty, portraying the heroism of a virtuous official who was overthrown by a tyrannical emperor for standing against him. In this play, one could recognize a subtle reference to the conflict between Mao and Peng Dehuai⁴.

— последняя жена Мао, а также Ван Хунвэнь (один из пяти заместителей Председателя ЦК КПК, член Политбюро ЦК КПК), Чжан Чуньцяо (мэр Шанхая и секретарь Шанхайского горкома КПК) и Яо Вэньюань (член Политбюро, ответственный за идеологическую работу)

² История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликсетова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ,

Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 674. https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf

³ Китай и сверхдержавы. История внешней политики КНР (1949-1991), Г. В. Зиновьев; Санкт-Петербургский гос. ун-т, Восточный фак. — Санкт-Петербург : Изд-во Санкт-Петербургского ун-та, 2010. — 328, с. 181.

⁴ История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликсетова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во



At first, Mao really liked the play, but many people around him eventually interpreted it as an implicit criticism of Chairman Mao and the dismissal of party members who opposed the Great Leap Forward. The first mention of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China came in November 1965, when the literary critic Yao Wenyuan wrote a critical analysis of the play on behalf of Mao and his wife Jiang Qing.⁵ Yao's criticism of the play was not only that it was indirectly about Chairman Mao, but rather that the main criticism was that the play portrayed the peasant as politically powerless over a benevolent bureaucrat, which, among other things, the left did not like. This criticism sparked a debate that took on a distinctly political character and brought to the surface long-standing grievances, provoking public debates about party officials' corruption, China's revolutionary path, and concerns about elements of bourgeois or feudalism in Chinese culture that were said to hold back transitional communism. These disputes further paved the way for the Cultural Revolution. Mao used the Hai Rui case to reinforce a long-standing criticism that the existing state and party apparatus is supposedly dominated by bourgeois ideology and that this threatens the reproduction of capitalist-type socio-economic relations in society as a whole. Mao believed that the Chinese revolution had reached a point of stagnation and that a departure from communism could be avoided only by raising the political consciousness of the masses, reviving the socialist spirit and ideals of the revolution, and changing the state structure based on the so-called proletarian ideology.

At the same time, although most of the party did not support Mao's radical policies, Mao had several allies in the military and security apparatus who would later become key players in the Cultural Revolution, most notably China's internal security chief Kang Sheng and Marshal Lin Biao, who became the new defense minister.⁶ Lin Biao was one of Mao Zedong's closest associates during the Cultural Revolution, and was appointed Mao Zedong's successor until his mysterious death, which was the subject of many unsolved plots to this day. Lin Biao was able to secretly carry out many of Mao's orders by corresponding with his wife Jiang Qing. During the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao was also the

person most responsible for maintaining Mao's infamous personality cult, even more so than Mao himself. By leading the Cultural Revolution with Lin Biao's help, Mao was able to get rid of some high-ranking officials in the military elite in order to seriously undermine the military apparatus so that they could not stand in the way of his Ultra-cultural revolution. At first, many of the top party leaders simply assumed that the purges that were unfolding would be similar to previous campaigns that targeted individuals who were not trustworthy, according to Mao.⁷ Thus, the conservative faction of the party did not fully realize the full scale of the tragedy that had unfolded, at least until it was too late. Assuming that Mao was simply trying to carry out a few of his typical purges, party officials could not imagine that Mao's true purpose in the Cultural Revolution was to challenge the Communist Party state as a whole. When Mao discovered that his party was run by people opposed to his far-left policies, he turned to new allies outside of ordinary political life, such as the many radicals among the masses themselves. First of all, radical students and peasants.⁸ Students were encouraged to criticize the conservative counterrevolutionary tendencies that the professors and teachers allegedly adhered to. And workers and peasants were encouraged to speak out against corrupt bosses and party organs. In addition, because of Mao Zedong's prestige, it was very difficult for party members to openly oppose the policies of the Cultural revolution without losing public support, as this would increase suspicions that they were counter-revolutionaries. This reflects a problem that is often seen in one-party States. When you actually have only one party that people can join, what happens is that very different people with very different political views join the same party and mask their political differences by formulating their proposals in the same language, which makes the political differences seem very ambiguous and their differences are very different, hard to detect. No one really knows who's on whose side.

The most politically active part of the masses during the Cultural Revolution was obviously the independent organizations known as the Red Guards. The Red Guards were not created by Mao or the state, but rather spontaneously. The vast majority of them

МГУ, Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 671.

https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf

⁵ История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликsetова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ, Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 675. https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf

⁶ Культурная революция в Китае // Образовательный портал «Справочник». — Дата последнего обновления статьи: 15.02.2024. — URL

https://spravochnik.ru/istoriya/kulturnaya_revolyuciya_v_kitae (дата обращения: 18.12.2024).

⁷ История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликsetова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ, Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 672. https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf

⁸ История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликsetова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ, Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 677 https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf



were high school and university students. Because the red Guard movement initially started in secondary schools, then spread to universities. And then it spread rapidly, reaching factory workers and employees in all industries. Some of these organizations later acquired their own independent press and newspapers. And some later even turned into mini-militias. One of the iconic tools of the Red Guards was a large wall newspaper "Dazibao", for propaganda, hung on the wall of public use. They mostly depicted polemics, self-criticism, announcements, accusations, or exposing evidence of past political behavior of officials under scrutiny. Red Guards often turned to radical allies within the party to find leaked documents that could reveal information about so-called revisionists or rightists within the party. As a rule, they interrogated teachers, professors, artists, party officials, and a wide variety of people and looked for any evidence that this person said something in the past or in the present that could indicate that he was a counter-revolutionary, revisionist, or right-wing. It was a bit like how people perceive the cancellation culture. The Cultural Revolution allowed workers, peasants, and students to voice their grievances and gave them the freedom to form their own organizations. The result was the spontaneous emergence of a wide variety of popular insurgency organizations, each of which professed loyalty to Mao and Maoist principles, but interpreted these principles in accordance with their own personal interests. The famous demonstrations in which masses of Red Guards almost reverently hold the red book of Mao in their hands give the impression of a superficial unity of Maoist totalitarianism, but in fact, The Red Guards were split into many completely different factions.

At first, skeptical party officials like Liao Shaoxi didn't want to stop the Cultural revolution, but wanted to contain it before it escalated into something dangerous. More importantly, they wanted the uprising not to threaten their own power, so they sent so-called workers' groups to lead the Ultra-cultural revolution, but their real goal was to contain the activism that Mao was trying to encourage. The work groups that the rebellious students initially welcomed, thinking that they were sent by the party's central leadership to support their criticism and standoff with top officials on campuses, soon came under open and repeated criticism. A key turning point in the Cultural revolution was when Mao sided with the radicals (the Zaofans) after they reacted negatively to these workers' groups⁹. Mao declared to the masses that they had the right to rebel against their authorities and called on the security forces not to interfere in the actions of the Red Guards. From that moment on, the slogan "rebel when it is justified"

became the defining slogan of the Cultural Revolution. Now students were free to rebel without obeying the party organization.

The quasi-anti-authoritarian nature of Mao's Cultural Revolution is recognized even by some anti-communist scholars, who are at least honest enough to recognize the paradox that a totalitarian dictator encouraged his people to think for themselves and gave them the means to revolt against their own party states. The whole stereotype of totalitarianism is that the government concentrates all the power and does not give it to its population. What totalitarian dictator would take power from the government and hand it over to his people? Mao encouraged popular revolt by providing an unprecedented level of freedom and transparency for China. Independent Red Guard organizations were allowed to create their own press, newspapers, publish public articles against various politicians, and hold the government accountable by investigating party leaders, finding and distributing their speeches. The Cultural Revolution, far from being totalitarianism, was in fact more of an attempt to delegitimize power. "Throw the emperor off his horse" was a popular slogan among the rebels for an ultramarital revolution. Even the CCP under Deng Xiaoping recognized that the greatest danger of a Ketur revolution was that it undermined the CCP's credibility. But the Cultural revolution sought to change the model of Chinese political culture, where independent thinking and honest opinions were discouraged because state authorities behaved like what Chinese peasants called local emperors, which was largely encouraged by the Confucian tradition of sacralization of power. One of the reasons that supporters of the Saturn Revolution opposed Confucianism was that they wanted to undermine the authority of the local emperors and expose them to mass criticism. At the time of the cultural Revolution, freedom of speech and the press were the most widespread in Chinese history. It is easy to argue that Mao simply defended freedom of speech solely because it was convenient for his anti-revisionist purposes at the time, rather than defending freedom of speech as a right in itself. However, while there is some truth in this, it does not change the fact that during the Cultural Revolution, the masses were given the right to far more freedom and power than at any time in history. Even if this freedom quickly turned into anarchic chaos.

Undoubtedly, one of the most pernicious aspects of the Cultural revolution was the appalling treatment of teachers. Teachers and professors have become political scapegoats for all Red Guards' factions, both radical and conservative. They were subjected to violence, bullying and harassment. Local officials not

⁹ История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликсетова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ,

Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 679. https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf



only allowed this to happen, but even supported them, as they sought to deflect political attacks from themselves. XKhusveybins often raided the homes of teachers and scientists, burned their books and destroyed their works. During this time, research in the social sciences and humanities has virtually stopped, and scientific and technological institutions were afraid that they would be criticized. As a result, significantly fewer scientific papers were published during this time. Artists and musicians were also pretty scared, unless they decided to openly use their skills to support the Cultural revolution. Student Red Guards searched bookstores to get rid of any foreign literature they considered revisionist or bourgeois, which is especially ironic given that Mao and especially his wife Jiang Qing were themselves great connoisseurs of Western literature and art.

The decentralized nature of the Cultural Revolution, the vast geographical size of China, and the lack of technological resources capable of controlling all activities in every city or rural area made it virtually impossible to manage the Cultural Revolution from above. By the end of August 1967, China was in complete chaos. By this point, Mao had already become convinced that the continuation of the Cultural Revolution as a mass-led movement was fraught with a large-scale civil war. Therefore, Mao decided to support the military more actively and opted for order, which essentially ended the Cultural Revolution as a mass movement¹⁰. In September 1967, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) was officially instructed to restore order with Mao's consent. The masses were ordered to lay down their arms and were forbidden to interfere with the PLA mission. Students were encouraged to return to their schools. The whole attempt to suppress the Cultural Revolution and return to normal life was accompanied by an abundance of revolutionary rhetoric, which preserved many of the slogans and battle cries of the Cultural Revolution, but clearly stated that the right of the masses to revolt was lost. The PLA began carrying out mass arrests and executions of Red Guards, who still refused to back down and surrender. The military's attempt to suppress the Cultural Revolution resulted in about five times more casualties than the mass violence that took place during the Cultural Revolution before the military crackdown. Andrew Walder, American political sociologist and professor at Stanford University, writes: "The losses caused by the insurgency and violent factionalism in 1967-1968 were insignificant compared to those caused by the repression of rebel

groups and the subsequent restoration of political order. The vast majority of deaths and casualties caused by the events of 1966-1969 were caused by the military or civilian authorities. This may come as a surprise to those whose impressions of the Cultural Revolution were formed after reading horrific accounts of the brutality and violence committed by Red Guards and rebels in schools and workplaces, or dramatic descriptions of the chaotic civil unrest and armed clashes during the coups of 1967 and 1968. Throughout this period, actors who were usually seen as forces of order fueled and accelerated the unrest. This is the most sobering and perhaps the most frightening conclusion to draw from this study".

By the early 1970s, Mao Zedong had assumed partial responsibility for the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution¹¹. By 1970, the mass phase of the Cultural Revolution was over, and by 1973, most of the Old Guard party cadres who had been removed during the Cultural Revolution were now back in power. But the Cultural Revolution officially ended only after Mao's death in 1976. After the end of the mass revolt phase, the Cultural Revolution mainly consisted of socio-economic reforms, mainly in the field of education. Everything seemed to return to its normal circles. Before the Cultural Revolution, China experienced a period of relative stability after finally recovering from the effects of Japanese imperialism, the Chinese Civil War, and the Great Leap Forward. So why did Mao choose to risk destroying this relative stability by instigating a Cultural revolution?

Many mainstream interpretations of the Cultural Revolution tend to rationalize Mao's encouragement to rebel against his own party as a kind of clever ploy to turn the masses against his own political enemies, only to allow him to return to power and establish his own absolute power. They mistakenly believe that Mao is some kind of cynical Machiavellian who didn't care about China and that in fact, he didn't believe in the ideology he preached, and that his faith in the masses was ostentatious. This is a largely incorrect but convenient narrative, not only for anti-communists, but also for socialists who want to distance themselves from failed socialist experiments and find a common narrative to justify why they failed. Proponents of this theory like to compare the Cultural Revolution to the 1957 "Let 100 Flowers Bloom" campaign, which was also an attempt by Mao to encourage the masses to express their criticism of the party. Although the "Let 100 Flowers Bloom" campaign was initially presented as a

¹⁰ Россия и Китай: четыре века взаимодействия. История, современное состояние и перспективы развития российско-китайских отношений / Под ред. А.В. Лукина. М.: «Весь Мир», 2013. С.670 <https://publications.hse.ru/books/134135044>

¹¹ История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликsetова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ, Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 669. https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf



democratic initiative, it was later followed by an anti-right campaign, during which thousands of people who expressed criticism that was perceived as counter-revolutionary were declared right-wing bourgeois. Ultimately, the "Let the 100 Flowers Bloom" campaign was really an attempt to weed out people who disliked Mao and his faction. But unlike the Cultural Revolution, it wasn't really designed to challenge the power of the party state.

Mao was so determined to build communism as quickly as possible that he may have ignored Marx's initial belief that a country must first pass through the stage of capitalist development before society becomes rich and industrialized enough to move toward communism. Mao is known to have disagreed with those who believed that communism only meant raising the standard of living. He believed that to keep the revolutionary spirit alive, the masses needed to be constantly politicized and experimented with new forms of egalitarian organization. Unlike most Communist leaders, who believed in the doctrine of historical materialism, Mao did not believe in the inevitability of communism or in the linear course of history. And unlike many other Communist leaders, Mao was convinced that the greatest threat to socialism was the Communist Party itself. Although concerns that the bureaucracy is sabotaging the revolution have been raised before, primarily by Trotsky, Lenin, and Stalin, Mao is the first Communist leader in power to actually solve these problems in practice, by transferring power to the masses themselves, rather than simply eliminating bureaucrats from above, as he did Stalin. Since it was the revisionists within the party who allegedly threatened the revolutionary path, Mao concluded that fighting bourgeois counter-revolution would require independent organizations led by the masses. In doing so, Mao wanted to overcome the mistakes of the bureaucratic Leninist model of state socialism, and that is why he wanted the masses to challenge the supremacy of the party, which in Marxist-Leninist regimes was usually considered the main focus of the revolution. Mao still believed in the need for a Leninist-type party, but insisted that the masses themselves should play a more direct role in building it socialism.

One of the most significant achievements of the Cultural revolution was the reform of education, which enabled tens of thousands of young people living in rural areas to complete secondary and high school education for the first time. In the course of

educational reforms, a new curriculum was developed that was adapted to local needs. Most of these reforms were continued in the early 1970s, when the situation calmed down and became much more stable. During the decade leading up to the cultural revolution, China saw a significant increase in adult literacy and life expectancy. Although the ten official years of the Cultural Revolution are often portrayed as one big decade of chaos, China's GDP still grew at an average rate of 6% per year, which was higher than in India and Indonesia during that time.¹² The decade leading up to the Cultural revolution was also marked by reforms that allowed students and teachers to criticize education policies, participate in the restoration of power, and voice criticism of their party bodies through local party committees.

In general, the consequences of the Cultural Revolution, especially during its active phase, were no less devastating than during the "Great Leap Forward" policy: a) industrial production declined (in 1967 it fell by 20%), agricultural production stagnated, b) cultural life and education were greatly damaged, c) the main book of Mao's citation book became the most popular book in the country, and recognized examples of world classical literature were publicly burned, primary and secondary educational institutions did not work during these years, as a result of which the number of illiterate people in the country sharply increased, and the national economy lacked millions of qualified personnel¹³.

Foreign policy has also been hit hard. Foreign embassies and consulates were destroyed, many foreign diplomats left China in a hurry, and Soviet-Chinese relations seriously deteriorated, which led to armed clashes on the border¹⁴. In total about 5 million party members were subjected to repressions during the "Cultural Revolution", according to various sources, the number of victims during the cultural revolution varies from 40 to 100 million people. Despite all the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, Mao remains the light of communist China. His portrait still adorns the gates of Ploshchad and Tiananmen, where he proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China, his native village is visited by millions of pilgrims every year, his embalmed body rests in a mausoleum in central Beijing, and his profile is emblazoned on Chinese banknotes. In modern China, they prefer to say that all the failures and tragedies of Mao's policy are not related to Mao's mistakes and

¹² История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликсетова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ, Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 674. https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf

¹³ История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликсетова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ,

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¹⁴ История Китая; Учебник / Под редакцией А.В. Меликсетова. — 2-е изд., испр. и доп. — М.: Изд-во МГУ, Изд-во «Высшая школа», 2002. — 736 с. 685. https://istfak-brsu.narod.ru/32578_meliksetov_a_v_istoriya_kitaya.pdf



personal political interests and goals, but that the main responsibility is shifted to foreign sanctions, the termination of Soviet aid and natural disasters. Preserving Mao Zedong's positive reputation is the foundation of China's modern political history. Otherwise, it is not clear from what to rebuild the state and on what foundation its revolutionary history will lie. But this does not mean that the party approves of the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution. In 1981, the plenum of the Central Committee worked out the official position of the party: "The Cultural Revolution was not a revolution, but a turmoil, and it was the fault of the main leader, and there was nothing good in it".

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