

Removing the Blame from Mao

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Jung Chang, a former Red Guard disillusioned by the violence of the Cultural Revolution, claimed that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, or GPCR, was “a terrorization of society.”¹ Despite the outcome of the revolution, an examination of the core elements that guided the revolution shows that Mao’s principles truly were intended to help the Chinese people and it was the implementation of those principles by the leaders of PLA and Red Guards that led to the failure of the revolution. Jung Chang claims that Mao only used the revolution as a move to enhance his power. While Mao may have been cynical and shown a lack of care for human life, he believed that his guidelines for revolution would be successful. In this paper, I will demonstrate that the problems of Maoism were not always the fault of Mao himself. Mao had honest intentions, there were positive effects of ideology, and there were people who genuinely sought to carry out revolution. However, corrupt and opportunistic officials undermined these efforts.

Mao Zedong had never intended his ideas to be used for the mass of the Chinese people. Instead, he believed his ideology would be the path to freedom from the bourgeois, or the upper class, who were oppressing the lower and middle classes. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhal’s account of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, claims that “saving the

¹ Jung Chang, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Random House, 2012), 514.

country from upheaval was not what Mao had in mind.”² MacFarquhar and Schoenhal’s claim that Mao did not want to save the country is inaccurate. Mao had actually planned for a level of anarchy to occur in China. Mao believed that the success of the GPCR would not be an easy task and would experience many difficulties that would need to be solved on their own.³ One of Mao’s main principles, “let the masses educate themselves,” also disputes MacFarquhar and Schoenhal’s claim.⁴ Mao was not ignoring the problems that faced the revolution; instead, he was following his own ideology. If Mao were only using the revolution to gain more power, there would be no reason to educate the masses. There was no reason for Mao to publicly support the masses if he did not have faith in them. Mao believed the masses, consisting of the youth and working proletariat, had to experience the problems of the revolution themselves so that they could create their own solutions. The idea of “letting the masses educate themselves” proves that Mao was not ignoring the revolution due to cynical reasons. He was actually just following his own principles.

Had Mao intervened and saved the country from upheaval, as MacFarquhar and Schoenhals seem to wish, he would have created a contradiction with his own ideology. If Mao were to have adopted the authoritative position he denounced, the revolution would be based on false policies. Students and workers would not follow the policies of Mao if he contradicted his own ideology. By intervening in the revolution, Mao would

² Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 147.

³ This idea is present in Mao’s own principle from *The Sixteen Points*: “Because the resistance is fairly strong, there will be reversals and even repeated reversals in this struggle. There is no harm in this. It tempers the proletariat and ~ other working people, and especially the younger generation, teaches them lessons and gives them experience, and helps them to understand that the revolutionary road zigzags and does not run Smoothly.”

⁴ Mao Tse-Tung, *Mao Tse-Tung’s Quotations* (Nashville, TN: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1967). 88.

have taken the power away from the revolutionary masses and would instead represent the power of authority that he was against. Mao as expressed in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is founded in his belief that the proletarian masses will destroy the old cultural ideas that allow people in authority to be oppressive.

After destroying the old ideas the proletarian masses will emerge class will have to continuously struggle-against bourgeois and capitalist ideas that would give way to oppressing the revolution the name of the great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Mao knew exactly what he wanted from the movement. Stuart Schram, author of *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung*, believes that the goal of the revolution contradicts the meaning of its name, but by following Mao's ideology Schram's claim is obviously incorrect.⁵ The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is exactly that: a revolution by the proletarian masses to destroy old culture and eliminate the oppressive bourgeois society goal of the revolution. Schram's first claim that the revolution was "assuredly not proletarian" demonstrates his lack of effort to understand what Mao meant by the proletariat.⁶ Although Schram declares that the use of students rather than workers as the main revolutionary force makes the revolution anything but proletarian, he only discusses the movement of students to the countryside in passing.

The movement to bring students to the countryside was designed to bring the students back to reality and establish firm proletarian roots by living alongside workers. Once the workers in the country educated the students, the students would be proletarian by nature of experience. The students who learned

⁵ Stuart R. Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 178-179.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

from the workers would have the experience available to work.⁷ Even if the students did not go to the country to learn from the workers, their schooling would have supplied them with the skills necessary for the labor Schram uses to define proletariat. The interdependence of the workers in the country and the students is described in *Mao Tse-Tung's Quotations*: "Whoever wants to know a thing has no way of doing so except by coming into contact with that is living (practicing) in its environment."⁸ Mao had intended for the students to learn from the workers in order to become a part of the proletarian class. The workers also needed the students to act as the main revolutionary force so that the industry in the country would not be devastated. Mao's ideology states that the cooperation of the students and workers evolves into a growing proletariat class. The proletariat used in the name of the revolution was referring to that cooperative student and worker force.

Mao's ideology was called for a fundamental shift in the cultural ideas of society in order to eliminate oppression. Schram's second criticism of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution questions whether the events of 1966 had anything to do with a cultural revolution.⁹ Again, Schram shows a misunderstanding of Maoist ideology by suggesting that the revolution was only "about doing away with culture" and therefore was not at all cultural.¹⁰ Despite Schram's intensive research on Mao Zedong, he seems to miss the main points of Maoist ideology.

Mao had intended for the old culture to be destroyed, as that would remove the ideas that allowed rulers to gain power and become oppressive. Alain Badiou explains the necessity of destroying old ideas in his *It is Right to*

⁷ Feng Jicai, *Voices from the Whirlwind*, 25n3.

⁸ Mao, *Mao Tse-Tung's Quotations*, 209.

⁹ Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung*, 179

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 179

Rebel against the Reactionaries; Every truth affirms itself in the destruction of nonsense.”¹¹ Mao Zedong’s ideology declares that the only way to remove the oppressive bourgeois rulers and prevent them from gaining power again is to destroy the culture that supports the respect of people in power. Without destroying the cultural idea of a respect for power, the oppressed masses will not be able to succeed in a revolution without becoming the oppressive bourgeois class themselves.

Here is where Mao’s continuous revolution is demonstrated. Mao acknowledges that after a successful revolution the proletarian revolutionaries will still hold onto some of the bourgeois ideas of the past oppressors. Mao calls for an absolute destruction of culture to prevent the old ideas from remaining in the minds of future generations. Red Guards, students, and other activists criticize themselves to acknowledge their faults and fix them. Mao also deployed big-character posters that contained directives such as the poster in 1967 that “told all Xinhua bookstores ... to destroy all pictures of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping.”¹² Mao’s little red book was widely distributed and available across China. The availability of Mao’s policies and ideas allowed activists to carry out the revolution exactly as Mao had planned. Joseph Esherick’s analysis on Mao’s thoughts on wage grades and economic titles describes remaining bourgeois elements ability to allow a state to “easily transform the entire social system back to capitalism.”¹³ The bourgeois remnants described by Esherick are the reason Mao’s ideology declares a constant destruction of old culture. Although Schram

¹¹ Alain Badiou, “It is Right to Rebel Against the Reactionaries,” *Positions: east asia cultures critique*, 13:3 (2005): 676.

¹² Goran Leijonhufvud, *Going Against the Tide: On Dissent and Big-Character Posters in China*. (London: Curzon Press: 1990), 69.

¹³ Joseph Esherick, “On the Restoration of Capitalism: Mao and Marxist Theory,” *Modern China*, 5: 1 (1979): 62.

claims that the destruction of culture was not cultural at all, it is exactly what Mao had called for and what his ideology proposes.

Mao's idea for a revolution was hardly traditional. Mao's continuous revolution does not meet the typical end result of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead Mao's revolution declares that the dictatorship of the proletariat will always be under criticism to prevent a rise of a bourgeois class. The so-called successors of the revolution, or a few leaders of the revolutionary masses, do not end with absolute power as with other revolutions, such as the American Revolution and the Russian Revolution.¹⁴ Badiou explains the meaning of "it is right to rebel against the reactionaries," claiming that Mao's policy means that there will always be a proletariat to rebel and the proletariat will be right in their rebellion. Badiou concludes that the proletarian rebellion can strengthen itself by criticizing its weaknesses and praising its strengths.¹⁵ Schram claims that the revolution can only be called so due to the use of Mao's power to change society.¹⁶ Schram believes that Mao was using the revolution to eliminate any opposition labeling them as bourgeois elements and reactionaries. What Schram does not describe is the idea that, while Mao was indeed using the label of bourgeois elements to rid China of bad elements, Mao was removing the elements of society that allowed oppression to rise in the form of power. Schram's criticism of the title of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution demonstrates a misunderstanding in Maoist ideology. The truth behind the name of the movement actually describes Mao's goals in that he wanted the masses to become proletarian, represented in the travel to the countryside movement, and a destruction of old cultures demonstrated in the destroy the four olds movement. Mao's revolution, despite Schram's claims, was aimed at creating a

¹⁴ Badiou, "It is Right to Rebel Against the Reactionaries," 673.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 673-675.

¹⁶ Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse- Tung*, 180.

socialist society where oppression could be reduced by the removal of culture by the masses.

Mao's ideology did not call for the use of extreme violence; therefore, Mao should not take sole responsibility for any harm caused during the revolution. Mao strongly believed that peaceful negotiations would be suffice to convert reactionaries to the revolution, "the only way to settle questions of... controversial issues among the people is by the democratic method, the method of discussion, of criticism, of persuasion and education, and not by the method of coercion or repression."¹⁷ The idea of conducting a discussion with the opposition is proposed by Mao to create as much peace as possible during the revolution. It is important to note that Mao's idea of a peaceful rebellion is based on his previous experience in Anyuan. Elizabeth Perry's article "Reclaiming the Chinese Revolution" describes a peaceful rebellion led by Mao and his comrades; "After a five-day strike, with no loss of life, no injuries, and no serious property damage, the workers won a major victory."¹⁸ Mao's idea for a peaceful rebellion has its roots in reality, as he successfully organized a labor strike in Anyuan in the 1920s. The evidence that the Maoist idea of a peaceful revolution was based on past experience shows that Mao believed in his own ideas and was not promoting peaceful rebellion to enhance his public opinion. Mao had endorsed violence but only as a last resort and in self-defense. If Mao had actually wanted to gain power he could have fully endorsed widespread violence to eliminate his opposition. Mao opted for a peaceful alternative but acknowledged that violence would be necessary in certain scenarios.

It is important to note that Mao's ideology, which fueled the revolution, was not evil from the outset. The nature of the main ideas of Maoist ideology are

¹⁷ Mao, *Mao Tse-Tung Quotations*, 52.

¹⁸ Elizabeth J. Perry, "Reclaiming the Chinese Revolution", *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 67:4 (2008): 1152.

relatively peaceful, unless using “discussion and the democratic method” to argue with the opposition is considered violent.¹⁹ Mao’s ideas revolved around criticism which was guided by the “dare to go against the ~current” policy. Mao believed that revolutionaries that were daring, in that they took risks in criticizing society, would create a successful revolution. Historians tend to place the blame for violence that erupted in the revolution on Mao.

The actual culprits of the violence are Mao’s supposed comrades, the Red Guard and the PLA. The Red Guard failed to uphold Maoist ideology over the course of the revolution. Red Guards were supposed to be the forerunners of the revolution and the driving force behind Mao’s ideology. Unfortunately for Mao and the revolution, certain Red Guards acted as if they were better than the rest of their fellow revolutionaries. Mao believed that the future of the revolution depended on the younger generation to remain proletariat and continue criticism.²⁰

Although Mao supplied the ideology for the Red Guard to follow for a successful revolution, some children of high-ranking cadres failed to follow Mao’s plan. The different levels of the Red Guards were actually planned by Mao, but his definition of a higher level did not include the authority to act entitled. Mao believed that to reward a good cadre, they should be given the training in theoretical thought and proper labor experience.²¹ Celebrating good cadres by improving their dialectical ability and educating them on work would allow them to efficiently criticize and also strengthen their roots to the proletariat. The idea that cadres should be promoted by learning about work is related to the movement of students to the countryside, which attempted to

¹⁹ Mao, *Mao Tse-Tung Quotations*, 52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 278. “From our highest organizations down to the grass-roots, we must everywhere give constant attention to the training and upbringing of successors to the revolutionary cause.” (Mao).

²¹ Mao, *Mao Tse-Tung’s Quotations*, 283.

increase the students' relationship with the proletariat. A deputy company commander of a state farm in Heilongjiang province explained certain Red Guards' lack of interest in the revolution: "Some educated youths were always wavering in their commitment ... children of high-ranking cadres relied on the influence of their parents to get them into the People's Liberation Army."²²

The students' faulty loyalty to the revolution detracted from the potential success of the movement. To some of the students) the PLA seemed like the easier option than participating in the Red Guard. Mao saw a potential issue in the children of cadres and old revolutionaries.²³ The children of high-ranking cadres felt that they should automatically obtain leadership positions. The entitled Red Guards' logic was that because their family background held importance, then that gave them privileges, an idea that is almost identical to a respect for power Mao was determined caused corruption. The entitlement was not always present in the revolution. The formation of the Red Guard saw a promising union of students that were, unfortunately, all from elite schools. Students from elite schools had access to official documents from their parents.²⁴ The students that read the documents acted as if they had a deeper understanding of the revolution than their comrades from working class backgrounds. While it may seem beneficial for Red Guards to have access to revolutionary documents, it actually gave those Red Guard the feeling of superiority over their comrades who did not have the same access. Once the cultural idea that authority represents power had been destroyed then

²² Feng Jikai, *Voices from the Whirlwind*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 20.

²³ Esherick, "On the Restoration of Capitalism," 6. Mao also commented that "the children of cadres cause great concern. They lack life experiences and social experience, but they put on airs and have great feelings of superiority. We must teach them not to rely on their parents, or on revolutionary martyrs, but to rely completely on themselves." Quoted in Geoffrey Benton, *Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 169.

²⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 105-106.

entitlement from familial occupation would disappear from society. The children of high ranking Red Guards felt entitled only because their parents were respected because of their positions of authority.

The cadres who did hold positions of power sometimes abused their power for their own benefit, straying from Maoist ideology. Mao believed that power would corrupt and lead to bourgeois ideas of capitalism. Mao even discussed this issue officially to prevent the spread of corruption.²⁵ Some cadres retained the cultural idea of respect for authority and believed they were better than the workers. Mao wanted the Red Guard to be synonymous with the workers. Failure by a Red Guard to see themselves as equal to workers meant a failure of them to rectify themselves to Mao's thought. The ideas themselves were not at fault. Due to Red Guard entitlement resulting in them feeling superior to workers prevented them from implementing Mao's ideas. Mao believed that the idea of authority created conflict between the groups who were the main force of the revolution.²⁶ One bookkeeper in the Heilongjiang province raped a fellow cadre's sister and was not punished due to his rank²⁷. The cadre's abuse of power humiliated other Red Guards and demoralized them. Misuse of authority and abuse of female cadres was not uncommon. The same Heilongjiang cadre company commander describes the widespread abuse: "I worked in the department of reorganization... I discovered that many state farm cadres-they had power-bullied the girls."²⁸ The abuse of female cadres, let alone any Red Guard, was not permitted by Mao. The Red Guards who held positions of power abused their status for their own personal interest benefit.

²⁵ Esherick, "On the Restoration of Capitalism," 53.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 64. "Mao writes: 'In our experience, if cadres do not discard their airs, do not become one with the workers, the workers often do not regard the factory as their own, but as the cadres.'"

²⁷ Feng, *Voices from the Whirlwind*, 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

Instead of focusing on the progress of the revolution, the abusive Red Guard cadres were taking advantage of the chaotic time. Despite Mao's ideology that proposes equality among Red Guards, cadres did faithfully follow Mao's thought, even if that's what they claimed.

However, there were revolutionaries who did truthfully follow just Mao's ideals, but there were not enough true activists. Kuai Dafu is one example of a true Maoist revolutionary. Kuai was a radical student revolutionary from Tsinghua University who followed Mao's ideology but did not agree with some of the policies of the revolution. Kuai Dafu's outlook on the revolution differed from most of his comrades, "We knew we would be on the losing side and would be suppressed ... But we felt we were an important minority ... we were fighting for ideals, for a new world." Joel Andreas, the author of "The Structure of Charismatic Mobilization," claims that Kuai Dafu was motivated by personal ambitions to change his social status.²⁹ Even if Andrea's claim is true and Kuai Dafu was motivated by personal goals, he was also dedicated to the revolution. There were numerous revolutionaries who had intrinsic motivations but had no real desire to see the revolution succeed. It was not the personal motivations of the Red Guard alone that detracted from the revolution's potential. It was personal motivations combined with the lack of faith in the revolution that crippled the strength of the Red Guard.

The faithfulness of the Red Guard diminished after the increase in PLA power. Due to increasing conflicts between cadres, the Red Guard split into numerous factions. Student organizations often conflicted with the groups consisting of workers. Three groups in Wuhan, the "Steel-Tempered 2nd Headquarters," "Steel-Tempered Workers General" and the "Steel Tempered

²⁹ Joel Andreas, "The Structure of Charismatic Mobilization: A Case Study of Rebellion during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *American Sociological Review*, 72:3 (2007): 447.

September 13", allied with each other creating the "Wuhan Steel-Tempered Three."³⁰ The importance of the alliance between the workers and students was that it proposed a viable opponent to the PLA. Instead of fighting against the PLA and their corruption, the revolutionary organizations were funded and supplied by them. The groups would support their PLA backers' goals instead of fighting for the Maoist line. The PLA gained influence and control over important sectors of Wuhan by manipulating the revolutionary groups they funded.

After the 1967 Wuhan Incident and the increasing rise of PLA influence on revolutionary activities students lost interest in the true meaning of the revolution. Many students were no longer as zealous as they had been at the start of the revolution. The factionalist conflicts combined with the increase in military equipment supplied by the PLA resulted in fights that were based on materialistic motives. The students were instead fighting for power, territory, and wealth, instead of upholding the Maoist ideology.³¹ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals explain the result of the violent fighting between the Red Guard groups: "Mao and Lin emphasized that Red Guard violence had alienated all sections of the population, including many students."³² What MacFarquhar and Schoenhals fail to mention was that the reason for the increase in violence was due to the rising influence of the PLA. Had the Red Guards not been motivated by money and power, they would have been able to remain faithful to Maoist ideology and only fight over upholding Mao's beliefs. Mao was not demanding the Red Guard to fight for money or power. It is true that Mao wanted the Red

³⁰ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 200.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 248 The violently opportunistic students were described in a 1967 Central Document, "Most of them spend most of their time just playing ... Some students form gangs ... carry knives, clubs, leather belts ... and hide in dark corners in public parks ... When the opportunity arises, they lure others into fights."

³² *Ibid.*, 251.

Guard to have conflicts among themselves, as that would mean that they are actually criticizing each other.³³ What he did not call for was the materialistic motives that the Red Guard developed, solely because of the involvement of the PLA. With PLA support, the Red Guard conflicts became more militarized than ever before and with this militarization came the motives of power and territory, originally demonstrated by the PLA officers. Members of the PLA received promotions, wealth, and other material items that increased their sense of superiority over the Red Guard.

Leaders of the PLA had shown their true colors months before the 1967 Wuhan Incident. Old cadres became nervous that their positions would soon be usurped by the new revolutionaries. Tan Zhenlin, member of the CCP Politburo and old comrade of Mao, expressed his concern over the issues that were facing the PLA and the senior leaders.³⁴ At a meeting of the Central Caucus in February 1967, the CCRG broke into debate with the vice premiers and marshals. Marshal Ye Jianying, a general of the MAC who also supervised the PLA, attacked Chen Boda, director of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, accusing him of “making a mess of the government, and a mess of the factories and the countryside ... still you’re not satisfied.”³⁵

The attack on Chen Boda exposed Ye Jianying’s questionable motives in the revolution. To attack Chen Boda meant an attack on the CCRG, the group that was supporting the revolutionaries. Ye Jianying’s attack is an indication that the leaders of the military were not fully invested in Mao’s idea of a revolution.

³³ Mao, *Mao Tse-Tung’s Quotations*, 52. “The only way to settle questions of an ideological nature or controversial issues among the people is by the democratic method, the method of discussion, of criticism, of persuasion and education, and not by the method of coercion or repression.”

³⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 191. “Those were all issues of a fundamental nature, ones that had cropped up in the course of this so-called ‘Great Revolution’ movement.”

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 191-192

Although criticism was welcomed by Mao, Ye Jianying's comments proved that he did not care for the success of the proletariat.

Ye Jianying was not alone in his attack against the CCRG, Marshal Xu Xingqian also criticized Chen Boda. Xu Xingqian accused Chen Boda of not supporting the military. He also insists that Chen Boda would rather have a student, such as Kuai Dafu, lead the military rather than a marshal.³⁶ Xingqian could not have made his stance in the revolution any clearer. Xu Xingqian's lack of faith in Kuai Dafu, or any revolutionary student, proves that the military was run by people who did not want the revolution to be successful according to Mao's ideas. Xu's disapproval of Kuai Dafu shows that he did not believe the proletarian masses, which consisted of students and workers, could successfully carry out the revolution. Either Xu did not believe in the proletariat or he simply did not want them to be successful as that would mean he would lose the power that came with his authority.

While not all of the PLA was run by self-serving anti-revolutionaries, the leaders who were against Mao's ideas corrupted the entire entity of the military. The leaders who did not follow Mao's ideas detracted from the potential success by avoiding policies that aligned with Maoist ideology. The marshals' lack of faith in the Red Guard and the workers resulted in increased tension between the CCRG and the PLA. More cooperation between two of the most important groups in the revolution would have allowed for concise policies that aligned with Mao's thought.'-.

The second attempt at the Central Caucus resulted in even attacks against the CCRG. Vice Premier Tan Zhenlin, Mao's old comrade from the Great Leap

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

Forward, questioned the ability of the masses.³⁷ Even if Tan Zhenlin's accusation is correct and the CCRG are trying to eliminate the old cadres, it is not necessarily against Mao's philosophy. The CCRG are only acting in accordance with Mao's ideas in their elimination of the old cadres.

The old cadres reveal their true nature of an elitist, bourgeois class at the meetings of the Central Caucus. They believe that because they are senior cadres, they should be immune to the criticisms of the revolution. Their attitudes show that they know nothing about Maoist ideology or they know it and don't want it to be successful. The impact that the old guards had on the demise of the revolution was that they were occupying positions that could have been given to true revolutionaries. If a revolutionary student, such as Kuai Dafu, was put in charge of a powerful political organ than it is possible the revolution would have been successful. The treacherous leaders of the military impeded the revolution by not fully supporting it and retaining the cultural ideas of respect for authority. Mao dealt with the opponents of the February Countercurrent peacefully, only denouncing them by name. Mao was not showing a sign of weakness, but instead was protecting the revolution from the outbreak of the PLA. Had Mao angered the marshals of the PLA they could have revolted against him ruining any chance the revolution had at succeeding.

The Wuhan Incident highlighted the peak of the PLA power in the revolution. The PLA leaders saw an opportunity in the factional conflicts in Wuhan. In 1967 Wuhan had fifty-four reported Red Guard groups. Faction allegiances became more important than upholding Mao's ideology and conflicts were common between the groups. Chen Zaidao, the regional military

³⁷ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 193. Tan Zhenlin accused the CCRG, "Your aim is to purge the old cadres ... But what about the children of high-level cadres: how come none [of you] speak up on their behalf... Who is this Kuai Dafu person? A counterrevolutionary, that's what he is!"

commander, saw an opportunity amongst the chaos. He used his PLA troops to capture key institutions and infrastructure. By commandeering important facilities such as the banks, warehouses, and granaries, Chen Zaidao forces gained more power in Wuhan. Chen Zaidao's PLA forces posed a threat to the balance of the revolution. Factional conflicts between the Red Guard groups might have diminished after a while, but because of the PLA involvement they were instigated even further.³⁸

Convinced that he had clearance from Mao, Chen Zaidao outlawed the "Steel-Tempered Workers' General" and arrested 2,000-3,000 leading activists.³⁹ By arresting the revolutionaries, Chen Zaidao destroyed the student activist groups in Wuhan. According to MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, "no less than five battalions, commanded by Chen's deputy Yang Xiushan, descended on the Higher Infantry School in Hankou." Chen Zaidao's forces arrested two organizations in Hankou and took control of the PLA Air Force Radar School where a "Red Rebel Headquarters" was located.⁴⁰ The disruption of the rebel activists in Wuhan destroyed the students' morale and increased tensions between the PLA and revolutionaries. Chen even went as far as to set up a provincial government in Wuhan.

Ignoring Mao's order that all new committees must consist of a three-in-one leadership of the rebels, PLA, and old cadres, Chen Zaidao removed the rebels and had old cadres take on roles they previously held. Not only was Chen directly disobeying Mao's orders he was purposefully eliminating the rebels and establishing the power of the old cadres. Chen Zaidao's actions in Wuhan

³⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 199-201.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Chen Zaidao and Yang Xiushan both claimed they had the clearance to disrupt rebel organizations.

effectively hurt the revolution by suppressing what could have been promising uprisings by the radical rebels.

Chen Zaidao also had the backing of the massive organization, the Million Heroes. Composed of cadres, workers, militiamen, and activists, the Million Heroes claimed that Chen Zaidao and his forces were correct in their aims to “support the left.” The Million Heroes faced opposition in the rebel organizations, both sides backed by PLA soldiers. The Million Heroes saw themselves as liberating Wuhan from the rebels. They were “liberating” Wuhan from the rebels only to assure their own power.

One of the major problems with the PLA involvement in factional conflicts was a change in students’ attitudes to a ruthless militarism. With the increase in the number of conflicts and the violence escalating, the efficiency of combatants became more important. To promote efficient violence, students were paid for their kills in combat. Due to the monetary rewards, the students’ motives became more about materialism and less about upholding the Maoist line. Mao did not advocate paying for acts of violence and especially not for the abandonment of Maoism for materialism.

The students who were fighting for money were not following the revolutionary policies of Mao and were ultimately detracting from the potential of the revolution. Instead of fighting for money and power the students should have been fighting against the PLA forces of Chen Zaidao. Unfortunately, Chen’s forces had more power and influence than the students and could use their finances to support rebels in order to gain their favor. ⁴¹ Alain Badiou’s “to dominate is to interrupt interruption” accurately describes the reasons for the PLA marshals to eliminate the rebels. ⁴² PLA leaders, such as Chen Zaidao,

⁴¹ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 202-205.

⁴² Alain Badiou, “Selections from *Theorie du sujet* on the Cultural Revolution,” *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 13:3(2005): 642.

understand that their ability to retain power is based on their ability to continuously suppress the revolution. The leaders of the military who acted to keep themselves in power took away the military power that Mao could have had on his side.

Mao's policy to "arm the left" was not intended to create conflicts between the Red Guard that used artillery, as it ended up doing.⁴³ It was the PLA's poor implementation of the policy that led to the mass militarization of the rebels. Michael Schoenhals claims that "to ensure that he himself remained in ultimate control, Mao ... ordered the PLA to support the power seizures, which it did, albeit reluctantly."⁴⁴ Where Schoenhals is incorrect is in his assertion that Mao made the order to "support the left" to protect his power and also the quickness of the PLA to support the rebels. Mao would not have made the order for the PLA to help the rebels if he had not believed it was the best option for the revolution.

Mao could not have known that after giving the order to "support the left" Chen Zaidao would go on his abusive rampage through Wuhan. Schoenhals' claim that the PLA was reluctant to help the rebels is also false. As is evident by Chen's actions, the PLA would not have shown any reluctance in a move to suppress the rebels especially a move endorsed by Mao. Another striking reaction to Mao's "arm the left" occurred in Sichuan in 1967. The Political Commissar of the People's Armed Department of Zigong municipality expressed his desire to supply weapons to rebels so he can use them to wipe out opponents. The deputy political commissar of the Chengdu Military Region, Liu

⁴³ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 217 "The Chaotianmen harbor district on the Yangtze River was razed to the ground in a battle that saw the use of tanks, mobile artillery pieces, and anti-aircraft guns."

⁴⁴ Michael Schoenhals, "'Why Don't We Arm the Left?' Mao's Culpability for the Cultural Revolution's 'Great Chaos' of 1967," *The China Quarterly* 182 (2005): 278.

JiETING, responded, "Arm them and ... shoot the dogs."⁴⁵ The political commissar's interpretation of "arm the left" was obviously designed to cement his position in power. Mao's "arm the left" did not make the rise of the PLA inevitable. It was the implementation and interpretation of that policy by the PLA that allowed them to gain power over the rebels.

Although Michael Schoenhals claims that it was Mao's "arm the left" that led to the violent conflicts between rebels, it was actually the PLA's role in supplying those rebels' Schoenhals claims that an observation of the death tolls of the "three campaigns in armed support of Luzhou" proves that the "arm the left" policy is to blame.⁴⁶ An examination of the deaths actually proves that Schoenhals is wrong and that it was the PLA who were to blame for the increase in violence. The first battle took place in 1967 before the PLA was officially allowed to distribute arms to the masses. The casualties from the first battle of Luzhou were four deaths and dozens wounded. The second battle occurred while the "arm the left" policy was active in Sichuan. There were over 30,000 people involved in the second battle with more than 2,000 casualties, while the third and final battle saw many fewer casualties. Schoenhals blames Mao for the increase in death with the reasoning that the "arm the left" policy caused more violence.⁴⁷

If Mao had wanted to see more violence, then why would he use rebels as a testing ground? Mao could have easily forced the PLA factions to fight against each other if that is what he truly wanted, which it was not. Mao's decision to arm the left was based on the idea that the rebels would be able to defend themselves against the growing power of the PLA. The PLA saw the "arm the left" policy as their opportunity to manipulate the rebels to eliminate each other.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 291

⁴⁶ Schoenhals, "Why Don't We Arm the Left?" 292.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 291-293. Schoenhals' article includes the statistics on the three battles of Luzhou.

Schoenhals argument that Mao's policy was the main reason for the increase in violence in 1967, even if true, does not mean that Mao himself planned the violent outcome. It was the misinterpretation and poor implementation of the policy that caused the extreme violence that severely crippled the chances of success of the revolution.

Even the supposed "revolutionary" committees were corrupted by the PLA in 1967. The formation of the committees varied, from the peaceful transition in Tianjin to the violent conflict at Guangxi. Guangxi was under the leadership of Wei Gouqing, the first political commissar of the Canton MR or military region. The two factions that were both supported by PLA units were the "Guangxi April 22, 1967 Revolutionary Action Command" and the "Guangxi United Command of Proletarian Revolutionaries." While both groups received backing from the PLA, the latter was loyal to Wei Gouqing. Wei's supporters won the violent conflict executing 2,324 allies of the April 22 group.⁴⁸ The support of the PLA on both sides of the conflict multiplied the level of violence between the groups. Even when the revolutionary committees were created under less dramatic circumstances the makeup of the committees were anything but equal. Mao believed that the proposed three-in-one composition of rebels, old cadres, and PLA would align everyone's thoughts to those of Mao's and the revolution.

The PLA's increased involvement allowed the military to take more seats on the revolutionary committees. The majority of the committee chairmen were officials in the military or had served previously.⁴⁹ The domination of the military on the committees allowed the PLA leaders to manipulate the committee

⁴⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 244.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 246. "Of the twenty-nine provincial-level revolutionary committee chairmen, six were generals, five were lieutenant generals, and nine were major generals. The remaining nine, though primarily party cadres, all served concurrently as PLA political commissars."

policies in their favor. The corruption of the PLA caused the failure of the revolutionary committees, not Mao's plan for the committees. Mao had intended for a peaceful cooperative between the rebels, old cadres, and the PLA that would promote Maoist thought and the revolution. The PLA's greed resulted in the unbalance in the committees. The unbalanced committees were unable to make decisions and policies that advanced the revolution.

The aggressive officials of the PLA manipulated Mao's policies to allow them to gain more power and wealth. The PLA gained power by suppressing rebels and student activists, who were the true revolutionaries. The PLA funded factional conflicts and supplied rebels with military equipment under their interpretation of "arm the left." PLA involvement in rebel conflicts corrupted the motives behind the fighting. Once realizing that the PLA would provide funds and equipment, the rebels began fighting each other for material incentives. Rebels fought over territory, wealth, and power, and with the help of the PLA they increased their lethality. Conflicts no longer consisted of arguments and criticisms; they only involved violence. A Senior Red Guard describes the ease of acquiring weapons in 1967: "When we went to the PLA armory, the doors were wide open ... he [the PLA soldier] led us through the storeroom ... asking us what stuff we wanted."⁵⁰ Mao's policies did not support any of the violence that occurred in the late 1960s, which any true Maoist follower would know.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was not a power grab by Mao. Instead, the PLA and children of high-ranking cadres used the revolution to increase their status and wealth. Mao was correct in his suspicion of the children of old cadres because as he predicted, they were in the revolution for power and not for revolutionary success.⁵¹ Ye Weili, a former student Red Guard describes

⁵⁰ Feng Jicai, *Voices from the Whirlwind*, 91.

⁵¹ Esherick, "On the Restoration of Capitalism," 64.

the divide among Red Guard in 1966 as “divided into two camps: cadres’ children and non-cadres’ children.”⁵² The children of old cadres held a sense of superiority in which they believed they were the natural leaders of the revolution. The entitled students often crossed Mao’s thought in favor of attitudes that provided more benefits. Students opted to join the PLA in order to avoid physical labor on state farms. Other students would take advantage of the chaotic revolution and avoid both school and revolutionary work. Some students who believed they should reap the benefits of the revolution without any hard work often looked for ways out of participating in the revolution.⁵³

One obvious mean to avoid participating in the revolution that the children of old cadres could rely on was their family connections. Students used their connections to gain entry into the PLA, where they would not have to exert as much effort. Naturally, the PLA became filled with faux-revolutionary students looking for an easy alternative to the revolution. Mao’s Red Guard, the main force and vanguard of the revolution, was crippled from the beginning by the students who wanted nothing to do with the movement. The students who were not true revolutionaries or who acted out of self-interest failed Mao’s thought and ultimately destroyed one of the major organs of revolutionary power. Had all of the Red Guard taken the time to self-criticize, they would see the error in their ways and possibly change their attitudes.

It would have been possible, with a fully-functioning revolutionary Red Guard, to have destroyed the “four olds” and eliminate the bourgeois cultural ideas in China. However, it was not the Red Guard alone that doomed the revolution. The corrupt PLA’s manipulation of Mao’s policies transformed the revolutionary conflicts into materialistic endeavors. The PLA’s rise in power,

⁵² Ye Weili and Ma Xiaodong, *Growing Up in The People’s Republic: Conversations Between Two Daughters of China’s Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005), 74.

⁵³ Feng Jicai, *Voices from the Whirlwind*, 20.

peaking in the revolutionary committees, was fueled by the greed of several officers and marshals who retained the “old idea” of respect for authority. The Marshals of the PLA, who were supposed to be Mao’s allies, did not even follow the most basic policy of eliminating the four olds. The marshals and officials believed that the military was crucial to the success of the revolution. They wanted protection from criticism, also meaning that they wanted to retain their authoritative positions.⁵⁴

To protect their positions they manipulated Mao’s policies, most importantly the movement to “arm the left.” The PLA’s interpretation of the policy was to fuel factional conflicts with military grade equipment and large funds. The PLA’s intention was to encourage rebel factions to fight each other as to destroy both groups with one swift strike. The PLA was successful in diminishing the power of the rebels and old cadres, evident in the military dominance of revolutionary committees. While the PLA was supposed to “support the left” and defend Mao’s thought, they were essential in destroying any chance of a successful revolution. It is possible that, if the PLA marshals and officers had remained loyal to Mao, then the military would have been able to actually fight against real reactionary movements. The combination of corrupt PLA leaders and entitled children of high-ranking cadres was a death sentence to the revolution.

Maoist ideology and policies should not be blamed for the failure of the Cultural Revolution. Mao’s ideology offers a unique guide for a successful revolution, if followed correctly. Unlike other revolutions, such as the American and Russian revolutions, Mao’s guide to revolution does not culminate with a select few leaders. It is worth looking at Mao’s idea for a permanent revolution that offers the opportunity for a continuous removal of the bourgeois class.

⁵⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 192-193.

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Mao's guide to revolution is not necessarily the most effective, but the permanent revolution provides the least oppressive option.



Figure 4. Photo of the Official Portrait of Chairman Mao Zedong in Tiananmen Square.