

The Cultural Revolution Document Based Question

Historical Context: The documents below provide information about China's Cultural Revolution, the movement during the 1960s that sought to rid China of its old ways and create a society in which peasants and physical labor were the ideal.

Question: How did the government's claims about the Cultural Revolution differ from the reality of the revolution?


Document 1: Mao and the Army

The poster below was created during 1969, at the height of the Cultural Revolution. It shows Mao watching over a group of Chinese soldiers, most of whom are holding a copy of the so-called "Little Red Book" - a collection of Mao's writings and political ideas. The Chinese characters at the bottom of the poster translate as "The Chinese People's Liberation Army is the great school of Mao Zedong thought."



Analysis:

1. How is Mao depicted in this poster?
2. Does this document support the government's claims or the reality regarding the Cultural Revolution?

 The document below is from a June 7, 1966, editorial in the People's Liberation Army Daily, the official newspaper of the Chinese military.

The current great socialist cultural revolution is a great revolution to sweep away all monsters and a great revolution that remolds the ideology of people and touches their souls. What weapon should be used to sweep away all monsters? What ideology should be applied to arm people's minds and remold their souls? The most powerful ideological weapon, the only one, is the great Mao Tse-tung's thought.

In this great, stormy cultural revolution, the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers are playing the role of the main force - this is the result of their efforts in creatively studying and applying Mao Tse-tung's thought and arming their ideology with it.

Chairman Mao is the radiant sun lighting our minds. Mao Tse-tung's thought is our lifeline. Those who oppose Mao Tse-tung's thought, no matter when they do so and what kind of "authorities" they are, will be denounced by the entire Party and the whole nation.

Analysis:

1. What are the goals of the Cultural Revolution?
2. How will the "weapon" described here help win the Revolution?
3. Does this document support the government's claims or the reality regarding the Cultural Revolution?

Document 3 The Song of Ox-Ghosts and Snake Dreams

This song was composed by a Chinese student and quickly spread throughout the country during the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guards punished certain teachers in part by forcing the teachers to sing this song several times a day. If the singing was unsatisfactory, the teachers would be beaten or otherwise punished.

I am an ox-ghost and snake-demon.
I am an ox-ghost and snake-demon.
I am guilty. I am guilty.
I committed crimes against the people,

So the people take me as the object of the dictatorship.
I have to lower my head and admit my guilt.
I must be obedient.
I am not allowed to speak or act incorrectly.

If I speak or act incorrectly,
May you beat me and smash me,
Beat me and smash me.

Analysis:

1. What are the singers of the song allegedly guilty of?
2. Does this document support the government's claims or the reality regarding the Cultural Revolution?

Document 4 Violence Against Teachers

This excerpt from a 1966 paper written by historian Youqin Wang describes the violence against teachers that was common during the Cultural Revolution.

In the afternoon of August 5, 1966, some tenth grade students at the Girls Middle School attached to Beijing Teachers University started [beating]... a group comprised of three vice principals and two deans... Many students came to join them. The students... forced them to kneel on the ground, hit them with nail-spiked clubs, scalded them with boiling water, and so on. After three hours of torture, the first vice principal, Bian Zhongyun, lost consciousness and was put into a garbage cart. Two hours later she was sent to the hospital across the street. There, she was later found to have been dead for some time...

In most cases, beatings were a collective activity, conducted not by single students but by a group of Red Guards. A group of Red Guards acted together, inciting each other and encouraging hostilities. Sometimes, a beating happened in front of hundreds of people... Bian Zhongyun, the first victim of the violence of 1966, died after being beaten by many students. During the several hours of torture, no one at this school of more than 1,600 students tried to dissuade the beaters from these inhuman actions... at the student dining hall some talked loudly about how they forced her to eat dirt from the toilet or how they fetched hot water to scald her. There was no sense of guilt, but rather an excited, giddy atmosphere.

Analysis:

1. What does the author of this excerpt say that Red Guards did to teachers?
2. How does this description of the Cultural Revolution differ from that shown in Document 1? Does it support the government's claims or reality of the Cultural Revolution?