

The Cultural Revolution (Timeline)

Main dates of the Great Chaos that began on May 6, 1966, when the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was launched, and ended on October 6, 1976, when the Gang of Four was arrested.



May 16, 1966 – The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) issues the May 16 notice announcing the start of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

May 25 – A big-character poster (*dàzìbào* in Chinese) is put up at Beijing University denouncing school leaders; sparks soon spread to other universities and secondary schools, with Red Guards spurning classes to join the revolution and vowing to "die fighting to protect Chairman Mao"

August 1 – Mao Zedong supports the Red Guards in a speech to the 11th plenum of the eighth CCP Congress

August 5 – Mao writes a *dàzìbào* headlined "Bomb the Headquarters"—a clear attack on State President Liu Shaoqi.

August 8 – The party plenum ends with a 16-point document on the revolution setting down so-called guidelines

August-November – Mao receives an estimated 11 million Red Guards from across the country on eight occasions in Tiananmen Square

August – The Cultural Revolution condemns every form of religion and bans all open expression of faith—churches and temples are shut down and destroyed; believers are imprisoned

January 1967 – Red Guards and workers seize power in Shanghai; the revolution reaches the army provoking clashes

July 18 – Liu Shaoqi and his wife Wang Guangmei are publicly denounced; Liu is stripped of his duties weeks later and power is left in the hands of Lin Biao and Mao's wife, Jiang Qing

July – Insurrections erupt in big cities

August – The eighth Central Committee of the CCP approves the Cultural Revolution

October 1968 – Liu is expelled from the party

December – "Down to the Countryside Movement" begins with hundreds of thousands of purged cadres sent to rural areas for re-education.

Summer 1969 – The party ratifies the overthrow of Liu, branding him a "renegade, traitor, and scab"

November 12 – Liu dies in Kaifang, Henan but the news of his death is not immediately announced

September 13, 1971 – Mao's designated successor, Lin, dies in a plane crash in Mongolia

April 1973 – Deng Xiaoping is rehabilitated and named vice-premier

January 8, 1976 – Premier Zhou Enlai dies

April – Hua Guofeng succeeds Zhou as premier

April 5 – About 2 million people gather in Tiananmen Square to protest against the Gang of Four

September 9 – Mao dies

October 6 – Hua orders the arrest of Gang of Four, marking the end of the Cultural Revolution

June 1981 – A "resolution on several historic issues of the CCP since the founding of the People's Republic" is adopted by the party; the resolution states that Mao should shoulder "main responsibility" for the Cultural Revolution, which resulted in "the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the party and the people since the founding of the People's Republic"