

Reading selection come from the book
Wild Swans written by Jung Chang
Mao's Economic Goals

Mao's fixation on steel went largely unquestioned, as did his other obsessions. He took a dislike to sparrows- they devour grain. So every household was mobilized. We sat outside ferociously beating any metal object, from cymbals to saucepans, to scare the sparrows off the trees so they would eventually drop dead from exhaustion. Even today I can vividly hear the din made by my siblings and me, as well as by the government officials, sitting under a mammoth wolfberry tree in our courtyard.

There were also fantastic economic goals. Mao claimed that China's industrial output could overtake that of the United States and Britain within five years. For the Chinese, these countries represented the capitalist world. Overtaking them would be seen as triumph over their enemies. This appealed to people's pride, and boosted their enthusiasms enormously. They had felt humiliated by the refusal of the United States and most major Western countries to grant diplomatic recognition, and were so keen to show the world that they could make it on their own that they wanted to believe in miracles. Mao provided the inspiration. The energy of the population had been eager to find an outlet. And here it was. The gung-ho spirit overrode caution, and ignorance triumphed over reason.

1. What examples can you find in this reading to support the writer's statement that ignorance triumphed over reason?
2. What is the motive for Mao's five year plan?

Food

As Party officials, my parents also had special food coupons. I used to go with my grandmother to a special store outside the compound to buy food with them. My mother's coupons were blue. She was entitled to five eggs, almost an ounce of soybeans, and the same amount of sugar per month. My father's coupons were yellow. He was entitled to twice as much as my mother because of his higher rank. My family pooled the food from the canteens and the other sources and ate together. But the adults all suffered from malnutrition, and my grandmother developed slight edema. She grew chlorella at home and I was aware that the adults were eating it, although they would not tell me what it was for. Once I tried a little, and immediately spat it out as it tasted revolting. I never had it again.

I had little idea that famine was raging all around me. One day on my way to school, as I was eating a small steamed roll, someone rushed up and snatched it from my hands.

I often had to visit the hospital for my teeth at the time. Whenever I went there I had an attack of nausea at the horrible sight of dozens of people with shiny, almost transparent swollen limbs, as big as barrels. The patients were carried to the hospital on flat carts, there were so many of them. When I asked my dentist what was wrong with them she said, Edema.

These people with edema were mostly peasants. Starvation was much worse in the countryside because there were no guaranteed rations. Government policy was to provide food for the cities first, and commune officials had to seize grain from the peasant by force. In many areas, peasant who tried to hide food were arrested, or beaten and tortured. Commune officials who were reluctant to take food from the hungry peasants were themselves dismissed, and some were physically maltreated. As a result, the peasant who had actually grown the food died in the millions all over China.

1. What are some differences between Karl Marx idea of communism to Mao's idea of communism? What are some facts to support your conclusion?
2. Why do you think the writer had no idea that famine was all around her?

Communes

That summer, all of China was organized into these new units, each containing between 2,000 and 20,000 households. One of the forerunners of this drive was an area called Xushui, in Hebei province in North China, to which Mao took a shine. In his eagerness to prove that they deserved Mao's attention, the local boss there claimed they were going to produce over ten times as much grain as before. Mao smiled broadly and responded: "What are you going to do with all that food? On second thought, it's not too bad to have too much food, really. That state doesn't want it. Everybody else has plenty of their own. But the farmers here can just eat and eat. You can eat five meals a day! Mao was intoxicated, indulging in the eternal dream of the Chinese peasant- surplus food. After these remarks, the villagers further stoked the desires of their Great Leader by claiming that they were producing more than a million pounds of potatoes per mu (one mu is one-sixth of an acre), over 130,000 pounds of wheat per mu, and cabbages weighing 500 pounds each.

Under a dictatorship like Mao's, where information was withheld and fabricated, it was very difficult for ordinary people to have confidence in their won experience or knowledge. It was easy to start ignoring reality and simply put one's faith in Mao. To go along with the frenzy was by far the easiest course. To pause and think and be circumspect meant trouble. In many places, people who reused to boast of massive increases in output were beaten up until they gave in.

1. Describe the relationship with people had with Mao. Why do you think the people were so eager to please him?
2. Based on this paragraph and your knowledge of social studies what is Mao's goal for the peasants?

Red Guards

Mao made a speech calling on Red Guards to charge out of their schools and “smash up the four olds” – defined as “old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.”

Following this obscure call, Red Guards all over China took to the streets, giving full vent to their vandalism, ignorance, and fanaticism. They raided people’s houses, smashed their antiques, tore up paintings and works of calligraphy. Bonfires were lit to consume books. Very soon nearly all treasures in private collections were destroyed. Many writers and artists committed suicide after being cruelly beaten and humiliated, and being forced to witness their works being burned to ashes. Museums were raided. Palaces, temples, ancient tombs, statues, pagodas, city walls- anything “old” was pillaged. The few things that survived, such as the Forbidden City, did so only because Premier Zhou Enlai sent the army to guard them, and issued specific orders that they should be protected. The Red Guards only pressed on when they were encouraged.

Mao encouraged the Red Guards to pick on a wider range of victims in order to increase the terror. Prominent writers, artists, scholars, and most other top professionals, who had been privileged under the Communist regime, were now categorically condemned as “reactionary bourgeois authorities.” With the help of some of these people’s colleagues who hated them for various reasons, ranging from fanaticism to envy, the Red Guards began to abuse them. Then there were the old “class enemies”: former landlords and capitalists, people who had political connections.

A wave of beating and torture swept the country, mainly during house raids. Almost invariably, the families would be ordered to kneel on the floor and kowtow to the Red Guards; they were then beaten with brass buckles of the Guards’ leather belts. They were kicked around, and one side of their head was shaved, a humiliating style called the “yin and Yang head,” because it resembled the classic Chinese symbol of a dark side and a light side. Most of their possessions were either smashed or taken away.

1. How did the Cultural Revolution deny people of their culture? Give examples

2. Why did you think the youth was targeted to carry out the Cultural Revolution?

3. What people were a target of the Red Guards and why?

4. Define or list the four olds

