



## Chinese Cultural Revolution

### Background Guide

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#### *The Rise of Modern China*

The reign of the Chinese dynasties ended in 1911 leading to China's emergence into the modern world. China's weakness in the 20th century, as seen in the devastating loss in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, stirred unrest and murmurs of uprising among the population. In 1911, armed rebellions broke out in response to the nationalization of railways in the Sichuan province, word of which spread across China. This snowballed and led warlords to rebel against the weak imperial regime. Such rebellion in Wuchuan led to the overthrow of the provincial government and revolutionary leader Sun Yixian took advantage of the regime's weakness. He later returned from exile, elected provisional president. He saw that the emperor be abdicated, and resign power allowing Yuan Shikai, imperial minister entrusted with full power via the courts, to become the nation's first president.<sup>1</sup> In early 1912, the reign of Imperial China, Yuan Shikai's attempt to become military dictator was thwarted and the Nationalist party, the Guomindang, also known as the Kuomintang (GMD) took control of the country in 1923. Sun Yixian, now president, reorganized the party that made it a centralized, democratic party. The GMD worked with the nearly formed Chinese Communist Party, with Soviet assistance, to reunite China and end the control of warlords running rampant in the

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<sup>1</sup> Wang, Yi Chu. "Sun Yat-sen : Chinese Leader." n.d. *Britannica*. Accessed November 9, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sun-Yat-sen>

country. During this period of conflict, Yixian died. Regardless, China, in 1926, became unified under the Guomindang Nationalists and new leader Chiang Kei-shek rose to national power. China, now with its capital in Nanjing and controlled by the Guomindang, entered the Nanjing decade.<sup>2</sup>

### *Origins of Chinese Communism*

The origins of Chinese Communism are traced to the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921.<sup>3</sup> With influence from the Soviets, the Marxist idealism took root in the country while the Qing dynasty was poorly governing the people. The party's early efforts were lackluster, unable to find a base in urban and rural China, but one of the Party's founders, Mao Zedong, began to formulate plans to utilizing the power of the peasantry in the countryside.<sup>4</sup> While not disassociating from the leadership of the party, Mao continued to push to focus on the peasant masses. The party expanded their influence and start growing as the decade progressed growing more and more. The Communists joined the Guomindang in the Northern Expedition in 1926-1927 to rid the nation of warlords unifying the nation. This teamwork lasted until the "White Terror" situation of 1927.

Chiang Kei-shek turned on the CCP in April 1927 and culled the communist ranks. Numbers in Shanghai fell from 8000 when the culling started to around 300 seven years later in 1934, and numbers across the board met all time lows. In 1931 CCP special services unit leader was caught in April 1931 and resulted in 40 high ranking CCP officials and 800 local leaders being caught. The CCP was close to extinction until the Japanese drew the Nationalist government's attention, allowing the CCP to survive and recover.

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<sup>2</sup> Giorgi, Laura D. and Samarani, Guido. "Guomindang (1912-1949)." November 28, 2016. *Oxford Bibliographies*. Accessed November 9, 2018. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199920082/obo-9780199920082-0138.xml>

<sup>3</sup>"The Chinese Revolution of 1949." n.d. *United States Department of State* Accessed November 8, 2018. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/chinese-rev>

<sup>4</sup> Saich, Tony. "The Chinese Communist Party During the Era of Comintern (1919-1943)." *Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University*. Accessed November 9, 2018. <https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/asaich/chinese-communisty-party-during-comintern.pdf>

Members of the party began to reintegrate and infiltrate the government organizations of Shanghai, "Red Mass Leagues", which allowed the communists to embrace the population's interests. Militant forces of the CCP formed a Red Army in preparation to seize urban areas.<sup>5</sup>

The danger against Communists was greater than ever though, as the GMD continued their efforts to suppress and wipe them out. The Red Army attempted to flee Southern China but the withdrawal in September 1934 went very poorly with one-third of the forces being wiped out. In January 1935, eventually arrive in northern Guizhou and find respite. Mao during this time rose to power during the Long March. There was infighting and Mao ultimately took control of the party. The Long March lasted until 1937 when the GMD unified with the CCP to defeat the Japanese invasion of World War II.

### *Communist Wins within World War II*

The 1930s saw the beginning of Japanese invasions of China and the beginning of World War II. In 1931 Manchuria, Kai-shek continued his civil war to wipe out the Communists within his country. Luckily for the CCP, the National Salvation Movement of 1935 had the public demanding the GMD to end the internal war campaigns in order to deal with the Japanese. Kai-shek gave into the movement and cooperated with the Communist Army again to fight against the Japanese. The Nationalists lost a lot of influence during this period trying to contain Communism while the CCP garnered more influence and support in rural communities with its land reform and ear to the ground approach of understanding interests. During their involvement in World War II, the wartime Nationalists laws and act corrupt in their attempts to deal with the internal and external threats which further worsened their popularity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Coble Jr., Parks M. "Chiang Kai-shek and the Anti-Japanese Movement in China: Zou Tao-fen and the National Salvation Association, 1931-1937." n.d. *The Association for Asian Studies*. Accessed November 9th, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2055924.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> "The Chinese Revolution of 1949." n.d. *United States Department of State* Accessed November 8, 2018. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/chinese-rev>

After the Japanese defeat, the CCP and GMD attempted to reconcile and create a unified post-war government. After these talks in 1945 fell through and US efforts to broker an agreement, the two sides were fighting once again in 1946. It continued to ramp up through 1947-1949. The Communists were a powerhouse because of their grassroots support, better organization, motivation, and abandoned supply caches from the defeated Japanese in Manchuria. The Nationalists looked much weaker with their scandals and corrupt reputation losing them much of their prior support. With the Red Army's superiority, the Chinese were forced to retreat from mainland China to the island of Taiwan which led to the Communist takeover of China and the creation of the People's Republic of China with Mao Zedong at its head.

Cultural Revolution

### *The Cultural Revolution*

The Cultural Revolution was a decade long policy that had massive consequences for the Chinese people. The Revolution was Mao Zedong's attempt at reasserting control and sending radical youths against the Communist party hierarchy. Intellectuals, those with Nationalist party alliances, class enemies, those with Western ties, and anyone else deemed an enemy. Many top ranking officials were prosecuted, killed, committed suicide, or suffered long term repercussions as a result of this.<sup>7</sup> The Cultural Revolution was such a jarring event in Chinese history that the effects had economic and cultural repercussions for decades to come. The challenge of this committee will be in dealing with some of the events of the cultural revolution.

The Cultural Revolution began in 1966 when the Chinese Communist Party released a May 16 issued a notice for the beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The announcement called for the purge "representatives of the bourgeoisie who have sneaked into the Party, the government, the army and various spheres of culture" and destroy the "Four Olds"—old ideas, old customs, old

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<sup>7</sup> Phillips, T. (2016, May 11). The Cultural Revolution: All you need to know about China's political convulsion. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion>

culture and old habits. He began Phillips, T. (2016, May 11). The Cultural Revolution: All you need to know about China's political convulsion. n by placing the seeds of distrust within the communist party and wanted to promote the idea that there were enemies within the party itself. Many elite party members were purged and prosecuted against.<sup>8</sup>

On May 25, a poster was created and hung up in Beijing University denouncing the school leaders. Eventually, this sentiment began spreading to schools all across the country, spurred along by Red Guards. Classes across the country were being cancelled until nationwide suspension of the classes was called in July. Students began protesting and lining the streets in support of Mao Zedong and angrily shouting against his enemies.<sup>9</sup> This time was filled with a great deal of confusion, as many top officials were being removed from office and many in the Communist Party were in a state of confusion. Mao Zedong on August 1 publicly supported the Red Guard and later, issued a deadline calling for people to Bombard the Headquarters. While he didn't outwardly say it, it was clear that he was denouncing the current President, Liu Shaoqi and Vice Premier, Deng Xiaoping.<sup>10</sup>

The first few months of the Cultural Revolution were some of the most violent and bloody. Teachers and intellectuals across the nation were publicly humiliated, beaten, killed, and driven to commit suicide. Over the course of August and November of 1966, 1800 people were killed total.<sup>11</sup> This will be one of the biggest initial challenges of committee and the success of the Cultural Revolution will depend on how delegates deal with this.

In 1968, the Cultural Revolution was beginning to spin out of control and Mao attempted to regain control by essentially making China a military dictatorship.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, Lin Biao began gaining power within the party and factioning began erupting within the party as groups began developing. Mao himself began to

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<sup>8</sup> MacFarquhar, Roderick and Schoenhals, Michael. Mao's Last Revolution. Harvard University Press, 2006

<sup>9</sup> Szczepanski, K. (2018, April 15). What Happened During China's Cultural Revolution? Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-was-the-cultural-revolution-195607>

<sup>10</sup> Tang Tsou. [1986] (1986). The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>11</sup> Phillips, T. (2016, May 11). The Cultural Revolution: All you need to know about China's political convulsion.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

suspect his purported successor of sabotage and began to lose trust. It was believed that Lin Biao may have attempted to assassinate Mao by placing a bomb under a bridge, but intelligence allowed Mao to avoid this. It is believed that Lin Biao and his wife attempted to find asylum in the Soviet Union, however, their plane crashed, killing them.<sup>13</sup>

After Lin Biao died, Mao became increasingly reclusive, and often wondered who would be his successor. In this state of confusion, Jiang Qing formed a political clique with Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyan, and Wang Hongwen to form the "Gang of Four". The Gang of Four used multiple propaganda campaigns and prosecution techniques to denounce anyone they viewed as a threat to their vision of the post-Mao Chinese Order. Ultimately, this helped lead to the factionalization between the radicals in the Gang of Four and the moderates with Zhou and Deng.<sup>14</sup>

On January 8, 1976, Zhou Enlai died from cancer and during a day of mourning for Zhou Enlai, thousands of people gathered in Tiananmen with wreaths, posters, poems, and banners. While it was clear these protests were meant to memorialize Zhou Enlai, the Gang of Four used it as a chance to attack the actions against the current Premier. Jiang Qiang labeled the event as counter revolutionary and cleared the square of the memorial items. Attempts to suppress the mourners quickly turned violent with many people getting sent to prison camps afterwards. Jiang Qiang blamed the incident on Deng Xiaoping and stripped him of all of his power soon afterwards.<sup>15</sup>

On September 9, 1976, Mao passed away leading to political clashes between the person that was his appointed successor, Hua Guofeng, and the Gang of Four. However, the Gang of Four had many opponents within the army so on October 6, 1976, during a silent coup, the Gang of Four was arrested. The arrest of the Gang of Four officially marks the end of the Cultural Revolution though the effects were

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<sup>13</sup> Qiu, Jin (1999). *The Culture of Power: The Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution*. Stanford, California: Standard University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica (Ed.). (2016, July 18). Gang of Four. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gang-of-Four>

<sup>15</sup> Teiwes, Frederick C. & Sun, Warren. (2004). "The First Tiananmen Incident Revisited: Elite Politics and Crisis Management at the End of the Maoist Era". *Pacific Affairs*. Vol. 77, No. 2, Summer.

felt for many years afterwards.<sup>16</sup> The goal of this committee is to creatively interact with events in history as they unfold to bring new perspectives and thoughts to this time in history.

### *Impact*

The Cultural Revolution impacted almost every single person in China and its effects are still felt to this day. Many people were persecuted against and the exact count of those that died is unknown since so many people were singled out and publicly denounced during the Revolution's fervor. Many of the people in the country who were prosecuted against were unable to take the sheer amount of torture they were going through so suicide rates peaked during this time. Millions of people were displaced during this time and were forced to abandon traditional education systems for ones riddled with progopanda.<sup>17</sup>

The education system of China was in total upheaval as the education system was shut down during the early stages of the Revolution. Many of the intellectuals and educators that were persecuted against were sent to rural labor camps and, those that survived the Revolution, left the country soon afterwards.<sup>18</sup>

Ethnic minorities were heavily persecuted against resulting in the deaths of many hundred thousands. Mongolians, Muslims, and any other group that reflected ideals not in alignment suffered massive losses.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Phillips, T. (2016, May 11). The Cultural Revolution: All you need to know about China's political convulsion.

<sup>17</sup> Szczepanski, K. (2018, April 15). What Happened During China's Cultural Revolution? Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-was-the-cultural-revolution-195607>

<sup>18</sup> Silbergeld, J., & Wilbur, C. M. (2018, December 18). China. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/China/Consequences-of-the-Cultural-Revolution>

<sup>19</sup> Szczepanski, K. (2018, April 15). What Happened During China's Cultural Revolution? Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-was-the-cultural-revolution-195607>

## **Character Bios**

### **Chen Boda**

Chen Boda was the chief interpreter of the “thought of Mao Zedong”. Before the Communist Takeover, he was an underground agent for the CCP becoming a teacher in party schools and propagandist. During the civil war, he acted as a political secretary to Mao Zedong. He later published many works supporting Mao and the party. He drafted many articles of the “People’s Daily” that were extremely influential and became the chief editor of the party’s journal the “Red Flag”<sup>20</sup>

### **Gao Xingjian**

Gao Xingjian was a novelist, playwright, and critic. He was highly educated and was persecuted for it during the Cultural Revolution. He was sent to reeducation camps and afterwards was forced to work at the Foreign Languages Press as a translator. After his ban from being able to publish was lifted, he produced many works that were condemned by the party. One of his most controversial works focused on the Tiananmen Square protests.<sup>21</sup>

### **He Long**

He Long was one of the ten marshals of the People’s Liberation Army. He was a leader and organizer in the GMD before the Civil War commanded large forces of soldiers during the Civil War and the Second Sino-Japanese War. He served as vice premier of China after the Communist Party took control and held much influence in military and civilian affairs<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Chen Boda : Chinese Revolutionist and Propagandist.” n.d. *Britannica*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Chen-Boda>

<sup>21</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Gao Xingjian : Chinese Author and Critic.” n.d. *Britannica*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Chen-Boda>

<sup>22</sup> “He Long.” n.d. *Chineseposters.net*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <https://chineseposters.net/themes/helong.php>

## **Hu Yaobang**

Hu Yaobang was a political commissarin in the 2nd Field Army during the Civil War under Deng Xiaoping. During the Cultural Revolution, Hu was purged and rehabilitated twice and became director of the party's organization department. He became a member of the Political Bureau and propaganda chief. He was appointed general secretary of the CCP and was elected to the Political Bureau's Standing Committee.<sup>23</sup>

## **Hua Guofeng**

Hua Guofeng was a local party secretary in Hunan. He became head of the party apparatus in Xiangtan county and vice governor soon after. During the Cultural Revolution he became the most important man in the Hunan province and becmiae vice premier after moving to Beijing.<sup>24</sup>

## **Jiang Qing**

Jiang Qing was the wife of Mao Zedong. In the 1960s she supported theatre and art's merging with Communist themes. She began a wave of cultural reforms against cultural and intellectual figures of China that led to the Cultural Revolution. She spread her rhetoric to the masses and was greatly involved with the radical Red Guard groups. She garnered immense power over the culture of China and oversaw the suppression of a large degree of traditional culture during the revolution.<sup>25</sup>

## **Kang Sheng**

Kang Sheng was a labor organizer for the CCP and became director of the party's intelligence bureau. Sheng would take many positions within the party before and after the Communist takeover and would rise through the political ranks. He was

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<sup>23</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Hu Yaobang : Chinese Political Leader." n.d. *Britannica*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hu-Yaobang>

<sup>24</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Hua Guofeng : Premier of CHina." n.d. *Britannica*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hua-Guofeng>

<sup>25</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Jiang Qing : Chinese Politician." n.d. *Britannica*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jiang-Qing>

linked with the intelligence and security operations of China during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>26</sup>

### **Lin Fengmian**

Lin Fengmian was painter who focused on blending Eastern and Western influences. He was director of the National Art Academy. During the Cultural Revolution, he was persecuted, targeted, and imprisoned.<sup>27</sup>

### **Lin Ligu**

Lin Ligu was the son of Communist leader Lin Biao. He was a member of the People's Liberation Army Air Force and became director of the Office of the Air Force Command. He had ideas as an antagonist against Mao.<sup>28</sup>

### **Nie Yuanzi**

Nie Yuanzi was an academic who taught about the bourgeoisie control of Peking University. She was a significant influencer of the Cultural Revolution<sup>29</sup>

### **Peng Zhen**

Peng Zhen was the mayor of Beijing during the 50s. He held opposition sentiment towards Mao. He was appointed to the head of the Five Man Group and countered rightist ideas in culture.<sup>30</sup>

### **Qi Benyu**

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<sup>26</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Kang Sheng : Chinese Leader." n.d. *Britannica*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kang-Sheng>

<sup>27</sup> "Lin Fengmian." n.d. *Chinaonlinemuseum.com*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <http://www.chinaonlinemuseum.com/painting-lin-fengmian.php>

<sup>28</sup> Spence, J.D. (1999). "The search for modern China." New York: Norton. P. 585. Accessed December 21, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Dong, Guoqiang (2010). "The First Uprising of the Cultural Revolution at Nanjing University". *Journal of Cold War Studies*. 12 (3): 30–49

<sup>30</sup> "Peng Zhen." n.d. *Alphahistory.com*. Accessed December 21, 2018. <https://alphahistory.com/chineserevolution/peng-zhen/>

Qi Benyu was a CCP propagandist who gained significant influence during the Cultural Revolution. He was a member of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group. He was a close aide to Mao and Qiang.<sup>31</sup>

### **Wang Dongxing**

Wang Dongxing was Chinese politician who was Vice Chairman of the Communist Party of China from 1977 to 1980 after being Mao Zedong's principal bodyguard during the Cultural Revolution. He was one of the decision makers in the Huarentang incident. He was born in Yiyang County, Jiangxi and joined the Communist Youth League of China. He was key in the coup against the Gang of Four.

### **Wang Guangmei**

Wang Guangmei was a Chinese politician and philanthropist who was the President of the PRC from 1959 to 1968. She was also the wife of Liu Shaoqi. She was born in Tianjin, China and from a young age learned to speak French, Russian, and English. In 1940, she was instrumental in serving as a translator between the US Statesman George Marshall, the Nationalist Government, and Communist Rebels. She eventually became a target in the Cultural Revolution, but became instrumental in the trial against the Gang of Four.

### **Wang Hongwen**

Wang Hongwen was the youngest member of the Gang of Four. He was born in a village on the outskirts of Changchun, Jilin province and worked his way up from a working class citizen to the highest ranks of the Chinese Communist Party. At the peak of his power, he was the third highest ranked member of the party. When he was young, he was sent to work in a Cotton Textile Mill in Shanghai, where he met Zhang Chunqiao and became involved with the Red Guards. He was brought into the national spotlight because of his bold and daring leadership.

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<sup>31</sup> Chris Buckley. "Qi Benyu, Mao Aide Unrepentant About cultural Revolution, Dies at 84." April 25. 2016. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/26/world/asia/qi-benyu-mao-aide-with-no-remorse-afterchinas-cultural-r-evolution-dies-at-84.html>

### **Wang Li**

Wang Li was a prominent member of the Cultural Revolution Group, the group in charge of overseeing the cultural revolution, and propagandist. Wang was born in Huai'an, Jiangsu province, where he joined the Communist Youth League. He soon became involved in a number of prominent party media outlets, like the *Masses Daily* and *Struggle*. He was the lead drafter of the May 16 Notification, which marked the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

### **Xie Fuzhi**

Xie Fuzhi was a member of the Communist Party of China, military commander, and national security specialist. He was born in Hong'an County, Hubei province. He served as Minister of Public Security from 1959 - 1972 under Mao and was instrumental in helping Mao track down enemies. He was an accomplished military leader and provided the Red Guards with the freedom to confiscate and kill their opponents.

### **Yang Shangkun**

Yang Shangkun was a very powerful political figure, and even held the Presidency after the Cultural Revolution between 1988 and 1993. He was born in Tongnan, Chongqing, Sichuan province in 1907 during the Qing dynasty. He studied in Shanghai before traveling to Moscow to study Marxist theory, making him one of the most educated members of the Communist Party.

### **Yao Wenyuan**

Yao Wenyuan was a Chinese literary critic, politician, and member of the Gang of Four. He was born in Zhuji, Zhejiang to a well educated family. His sharp tone was popular and he was eventually connected with the head of the Shanghai Propaganda Department. He worked on official Communist Party Propaganda, writing for the "Proletarian Writers of Purity" and the "Liberation Daily".

### **Ye Jianying**

Ye Jianying was a Communist general and was a member of the National People's Congress. During the Cultural Revolution, he used his military influence to provide support and protection for Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping. He was eventually the Defense Minister in 1975 and helped overthrow the Gang of Four.

### **Ye Qun**

Ye Qun was the wife of Lin Biao and was known for handling the politics for her husband. She was born in 1917 in Minhou County, Fujian. She had significant influence over Lin Biao, who was the Vice Chairman of China and controlled China's military power.

### **Zhang Chengzhi**

Zhang Chengzhi was born in 1948 in Beijing. Zhang was the first person to call himself a "Red Guard" and eventually formed the group that would have the collective name "Mao Zedong's Red Guards". He issued a posters denouncing his school officials that gained thousands of signatures.

### **Zhang Chunqiao**

Zhang Chunqiao was a prominent Chinese writer and politician and was also a member of the Gang of Four. Born in 1917 in Heze, Shandong, he later became a prominent journalist in Shanghai in charge of the *Liberation Daily* paper. There, he met Jiang Qing and helped start the Cultural Revolution

### **Zhao Ziyang**

Zhao Ziyang was a very prominent political figure in China. Born in 1919 in Hua County, Henan to a wealthy landlord, he joined the Communist Youth League in 1932 and became a member in 1938. He was supportive of the more moderate policies of Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi, leading him to be persecuted by the Red Guards.

