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Cultural Revolution of China – I

Lead: In 1966, Chinese leader Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution. It was an attempt to shore up his power and secure his legacy long into the future. It ended up nearly destroying China.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Mao had been the leader and the heart of Chinese Communism since the 1920s. Though not the founder of the party, he had nursed the movement in its infancy, preserved it during the dark years when in order to survive, the Red

Army in various groups had to flee by the Long March into interior China during the Civil War. He had led the Communists in common cause with Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang against the Japanese in the 1930s and 1940s and in 1949 had triumphed over Chiang, banishing the latter to Taiwan and establishing undisputed Communist control of the mainland.

Yet, by the 1960s he was becoming a very old man. A new generation of leaders was rising that while loyal to himself as the Great Leader and to Party principle, might eclipse his power. He worried in the same way as did his old Russian collaborator, Joseph Stalin that they might forget him and his legacy and the spirit of

the Revolution might be undermined by compromises with the true faith. In Russia, Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin convinced Mao that the Soviet Union was a political failure and the return of ancient tensions between China and Russia for dominance in East Asia seemed to threaten the very survival of Communism in the Chinese way.

Thus, obsessed with power and his own mortality, in Summer 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution against challengers to his leadership such as Liu Shaoqi, whose growing popularity in the Central Committee worried the old man, and those compromises with Party ideology that he called the "Four Olds:" old ideas,

old culture, old customs, and old habits of exploiting the classes.

The means he used was the Red Guards, idealistic urban youth gangs that were turned loose to attack his enemies and to ravage the elderly and the Chinese middle class whose material possessions and suspect opinions were seen as threats to the Revolution and Mao's legacy. He ordered the military and the police to stand aside and not oppose the Red Guards, but soon his instrument grew into a monster that nearly destroyed China. Next time: Red Guards and Terror.

Research by Tenzin Tsayang and Ashleigh Greene, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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