**The Role of Ideology in the Genocide of the Chinese People During the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976**

**SOC251**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

 Chaos and confusion—the Chinese Cultural Revolution is remembered as it was lived. Occurring between 1966 and 1976, the Cultural Revolution can be described confidently as a period of great violence, but beyond that, features of the movement remain blurry. Controversy surrounds even questions as straightforward as how many people were killed—death figures range from one million to twenty million (White 1989: 7). Furthermore, one cannot even clearly distinguish the victims from the perpetrators. The Cultural Revolution was a movement aimed at eliminating capitalist sentiments from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This fact leads many to assume that the Chinese Revolution was a clear-cut case in which the CCP committed acts of violence against Chinese civilians. However, this viewpoint ignores the fact that “millions of Party members themselves became victims of the movement" (Schoenhals 1996: 93). In this strange period of history, many of the victims were also the perpetrators of violence and, likewise, many of the perpetrators were also victims. Initially, the contradiction and confusion that characterize the Chinese Cultural Revolution are overwhelming. However, the following paper will ameliorate the fog surrounding this topic.
 This paper will concentrate on the concept of ideology, revealing its role in the genocide of the Chinese people during the period of the Cultural Revolution. Ideology refers to the “set of beliefs that are used to justify or challenge a given social-political order and are used to interpret the political world” (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996:262). Specifically, this paper will analyze the ideology of Maoism. Maoism is a form of Communist thought heavily influenced by the ideas and teachings of Mao Zedong. Chairman of the CCP from 1949 until his death in 1976, Mao is the greatest single cause the Cultural Revolution and the genocide of the Chinese people associated with that movement.

 Genocide is another key term in this paper. This paper will use the definition composed by sociologists Daniel Chirot and Jennifer Edwards in their 2003 essay “Making Sense of the Senseless: Understanding Genocide.” According to these scholars and in the framework of this paper, “Genocides are politically motivated mass murders” (Chirot and Edwards 2003: 15). China's Cultural Revolution fits this classification of genocide in that at least a million people were killed in a politically motivated scheme to eradicate the nation of anything associated with capitalism.

**THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS:**

 The theoretical perspectives regarding genocide that will be used in this paper include those of scholars Chirot and Edwards (2003), Ben Kiernan (2007), Roger W. Smith (1999), and Ervin Staub (2000). Chirot and Edwards outline four basic types of genocide based on the motivations of the perpetrators (2003: 15). The categories of genocide, which are not mutually exclusive, include those genocides which are motivated by convenience (Chirot and Edwards 2003: 15-16), revenge (16), fear (16-17), and a desire for purification (18). “Convenience genocides”, motivated by convenience and greed, occur when the victims have resources, such as territory, that the perpetrators want. “Revenge genocides” are those in which the perpetrators feel that they have been wronged or humiliated and violence is justified as a form of justice (Chirot and Edwards 2003: 16). Alternatively, “fear genocides” occur when the perpetrators feel that they must act violently in order to save their group from the destruction of another group (Chirot and Edwards 2003:16). Lastly, “purification genocides” are those in which the perpetrators yearn for a perfect society which can be only realized once polluting elements (including people) are eliminated (Chirot and Edwards 2003: 18).

 The research of Ben Kiernan is also relevant to this paper. Kiernan's findings point to five common ideological features of genocide (2007: 1-40). These include racism (Kiernan 2007: 21-23), nostalgia or an utopian ideal (23-27), the restoration of purity and order (27-29), territorial expansion (29-33), and the fear of economic competition (33). Racism, Kiernan states, “involves prejudice against a race or subgroup on the grounds of its imagined inferiority or threat” (Kiernan 2007: 22). This conception of otherness as a polluting or threatening force causes racism to be associated with genocidal crimes. Similarly, nostalgia or an utopian ideal are connected with genocide because they cause people to believe in the possibility of a perfect world if only specific kinds of people were eliminated (Kiernan 2007: 23). The restoration of purity and order, which Kiernan also refers to as “cults of antiquity”, is another ideological feature related to genocide. This type of thinking encourages people to view themselves as victims who have been cheated out of the power they once had and feel is rightfully theirs (Kiernan 2007: 29). The perpetrators of genocide who are motivated by this thinking usually look to restore this past ideal on some other group's land (Kiernan 2007: 27). Another ideological feature Kiernan links with genocide is territorial expansion, which he calls “cults of cultivation”. This has to do with a romanticism of agrarianism (Kiernan 2007: 32). Essentially, a group believes that they are creating a new, better society that is better because it has expanded and there is more room to live. The last ideological feature identified by Kiernan is the fear of economic competition. This is especially relevant in the sphere of agriculture but can apply to other arenas as well. Kiernan argues that genocide usually preceded by an obsession with one or more of these five ideologies.

 In addition to Kiernan and Chirot and Edwards, Staub's theoretical perspective on genocide will be important for this paper. Staub states that there are two main conditions which are likely to precipitate mass killings or genocide. These include difficult life conditions in a society and group conflict (Staub 2000: 369). By difficult life conditions, Staub is referring to economic problems, political conflict and/or disorganization, and significant and sudden social change (Staub 2000: 369-370). He argues that these factors cause people to turn to a group which oftentimes adopts an ideology which establishes an enemy group (Staub 2000: 370). Another cause of violence according to Staub is group conflict. This could manifest itself in conflict over territory (Staub 2000: 371), or conflict between a dominant and a subordinate group in a society (Staub 2000: 372). Staub states that “such groups act not only to defend their privilege and status, but also to defend an identity and world view, a legitimizing ideology” (Staub 2000: 372). It is in this way that group conflict can lead to genocide.

 Finally, this paper will rely on Smith's division of genocide into five different types. Smith identifies retributive, institutional, utilitarian, monopolistic, and ideological genocides (Smith 1999: 5). Retributive genocide is genocide motivated by revenge. However, Smith argues that this is simply an example of “blaming the victim” and these victims are really targeted for who than are—not what they have done (Smith 1999:5). More common in the ancient and medieval time periods, institutional genocide is “routinized genocide” used to show the power of the perpetrators and the weakness of the victims (Smith 1995: 6). Utilitarian genocide on the other hand, is thought by its perpetrators to be crucial to progress and development (Smith 1995: 6). The idea is that the population must be decreased so that those alive will have sufficient resources (Smith 1995: 6). According to Smith, monopolistic genocide is the most common cause of genocide in the twentieth century (Smith 1995: 7). Monopolistic genocide refers to genocide in which people or groups are fighting for the “monopolization of power” (Smith 1995: 7). The final type of genocide discussed by Smith is ideological genocide. Ideological genocide occurs when the genocide of a group is seen as a necessary step in restoring order and justice believed to be missing from a society (Smith 1995: 9).

 Among the different theoretical perspectives regarding genocide used in this paper, certain trends emerge. Fear, for example is deemed an important aspect of genocide by both Chirot and Edwards and Kiernan. Chirot and Edwards point to fear in general as a motivator for many genocides. Kiernan, on the other hand, identifies the specific fear of economic competition as an important ideological feature associated with genocide. Purification is another major theme in the theoretical literature. Again, Chirot and Edwards note that the desire to purify society of polluting elements motivates many genocides. Kiernan, too, asserts that many perpetrators of genocide seek a restoration of purity and order. In Kiernan's analysis, this purity is thought to have been a feature of the past. Likewise, Smith discusses the goal of restoring order through ideological genocide.

 While the different theories have similarities, each source offers a unique perspective. Chirot and Edwards focuses on the motivations of the perpetrators of genocide while Kiernan concentrates instead on the ideological principles that tend to appear alongside genocide. Furthermore, Staub's analysis reveals the social conditions that are likely to cause genocidal violence. And Smith divides genocide into different types, focusing on which types are most suitable for the modern era and why.

**MAIN BODY:**

 **Ideologies:**

In the aftermath of a genocide, one is left to speculate why a group of people committed such acts of horror on another group of people and also what cultural context could have enabled the success of such horrific intentions. This section of this paper, which will focus on the ideologies that fueled the emotion and dictated the actions of the perpetrators of the violence of the Cultural Revolution, will help answer this first question: why the Chinese people engaged in the genocide of its own people.

 The main ideology responsible for the violence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was the ideology of Maoism. As previously stated in the introduction, Maoism is Mao's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism (Zuo 1991: 99). The teachings of Maoismdirected the Chinese people to hate people who were believed to be capitalist, have capitalist ideas, or in some other way represent capitalist notions. The ideology caused such widespread hatred of this idea that in the months of August and September of 1966, the homes 33,695 families in Beijing were looted by Red Guards (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 117). Furthermore, “in an official document circulated for reference at the central party work conference in October 1966, the confiscation by Red Guards all over China of a total of 1,188,000 liang (about 65 tons) of gold was praised as the 'confiscation of the ill-gotten wealth of the exploiting classes'(MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 117). The Maoist ideology espoused the ideas that capitalists did not deserve their money. Their money was money cheated off of weaker people. This explains the hatred of capitalism that characterized the Cultural Revolution, but how did the ideology justify the violence and chaos of this movement?

 Maoist ideology functioned as an endorsement of the chaotic and violent aspects of the Cultural Revolution because central to the Marxist aspect of this ideology are the notions of tension, conflict, and rebellion. This helps to explain why, the Chinese population, leaders and masses alike, turned against each other in such paranoid and violent ways during the Cultural Revolution. Scholars MacFarquhar and Schoenhals confirm that when “Mao announced that 'to rebel is justified'--then the red terror really begin” (2006: 124). In fact, in the following two months in 1966, 1,772 people were murdered in the city of Beijing alone (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 124).

 Another scholar of the Cultural Revolution, Wei-ming, also recognizes the power of the rebellious aspect Maoism had on Chinese followers. He states that “the Marxist theory of 'class struggle,' and the conviction that 'political power grows out of the barrel of the gun,' inherent in Maoism is a fundamental propensity toward deconstruction” (Wei-ming 1996: 164). The Marxist element of Maoism encouraged violent and destructive rebellion. The ideology taught people that they must rebel in this way and also that no violence was justified. Additionally, the deconstructive feature of Maoism Wei-ming mentions refers to the disordered nature of people's actions. Social institutions or anything that appeared to be bureaucratized, and therefore capitalist, was deemed untrustworthy. This encouraged people to rebel in ways that were especially chaotic and random. Living survivor of the Cultural Revolution Zuo Jiping recalls that “thousands of innocent people were beaten to death without knowing why” (1991: 103). Such was the combative nature that trickled down from the Maoist ideology to Chinese citizens. Not only did this ideology encourage hostile relations, it taught its adherents to behave inhumanely towards other people. Sympathy was “condemned as weakness of the will (Wei-ming 1996: 167). The “revolutionary spirit” of Maoist ideology helps explain why the Chinese people turned against each other in such violent ways during this tragic historic event.

 Separate from Maoism, other ideological features of Chinese society during this time period can help explain this society's vulnerability to genocide. Flight to an utopian ideal, agrarianism, and restoration of purity are three ideological features of the CCP during the Cultural Revolution that are also linked by Kiernan with genocide. The association of these three features with the Cultural Revolution are all interconnected. Flight to an utopian ideal, which is related to the desire for purity, describes societies which “imagine a world without certain kinds of people in it” (Kiernan 2007: 23). Such describes China under Mao's rule. By definition, as a communist ideology, Maoism believes in and strives towards the perfect, ideal society. Despite the impossibility of perfection, the belief in the possibility of the attainment of a perfect society serves as the perpetrators' justification for violence against the victims of the Cultural Revolution.

 MacFarquhar and Schoenhals recount how people were forced to leave their homes and villages. According to a Beijing Red Guard handbill, “these things were done 'in order to make our capital purer and redder and give our great seventeenth National day a clean welcome'” (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 122). This use of words like “clean” illustrates the mindset of Mao and the Chinese people, who believed that their society would be perfect once certain people were eliminated. According to Kiernan, an utopian ideal is related to agrarianism in that both are related to a disconnect with reality (2007: 23). Agrarianism is reflected in the CCP as Mao invested a lot of revolutionary power in the peasant/farmer class (Kiernan 2007: 513). Another aspect of agrarianism reflected in the CCP was attempts at territorial expansion, something traditionally incompatible with communist ideology (Kiernan 2007: 513).

**MOTIVATIONS:**

The ideology of Maoism and the ideological features associated with the CCP help explain why the Chinese people were inclined to commit horrific acts of violence and harassment against one another. This section of the paper, however, will focus on the specific motivations for the Cultural Revolution. One motivation is quite similar to the discussion in the last section about the utopian ideal. Chirot and Edwards note that many genocides are motivated by a desire for purification (2003: 18). Again, use of words such as “clean” are indicators of this mindset. They are also not difficult to find in Mao's campaign against capitalism.

 For example,“'Cleansing the class ranks' was the first major campaign carried out by the new revolutionary committees” (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 253). This campaign was about getting rid of “all real and imagined enemies of the unity that was professedly the basis of the political order that the revolutionary committees were inaugurating” (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 253). One of Mao's ghostwriters even wrote that “socialist society was once more about to 'defecate'” (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 253). This biological metaphor shows the disgust with which Mao regarded people with different political views from him. He felt that they needed to be eliminated from society like waste matter.

 Mao deemed that capitalist “pollution” was permeating throughout all levels of society. A CCP directive read that the main purpose of the Cultural Revolution “is to rectify those people in positions of authority within the Party who take the capitalist road...[some of which] are out in the open and some are concealed... Among those at higher levels there are some people in the communes, districts, counties [xian], special districts, and even in the work of provincial and Central Committee departments who oppose socialism” (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 13).

The murders and the destruction of private property and the public humiliation of individuals which led to thousands of suicide are the most horrendous aspects of the “purification” of China during the Cultural Revolution. However, it is useful to note that public property was also a target of “purification.” According to MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, “4,922 of the 6,843 officially designated 'places of cultural or historical interest' in Beijing had been destroyed by the end of the cultural revolution” (2006: 118). Mao's obsessive desire for absolute “purification” of China meant that destruction was to be waged without hesitation or consideration. Valuable elements of China's culture are lost forever because of this decade of destruction. However, this destruction and the social degradation of millions was “perceived by the victimizers as a necessary sacrifice for maintaining the purity of the socialist spirit” (Wei-ming 1996: 167).

 In addition to the desire for purification, Mao and other perpetrators of violence in the Chinese Cultural Revolution were also motivated by fear. Chirot and Edwards state that “fear can quickly escalate and provoke mass murder by a group, clan, tribe, or nation that feels it must save itself from the destruction by another group” (2003: 16). This is clearly the case in the genocide that was the Cultural Rebvolution. The Ninth Polemic listed reasons for a Cultural Revolution and clearly spelled out the deep fear and paranoia that consumed Mao and his confidantes. The Ninth Polemic reads “In short, it is an extremely important question, a matter of life or death for our Party and our country. It is a question of fundamental importance to the proletarian revolutionary cause for a hundred, a thousand, nay ten thousand years.” (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 12). This document shows what Mao felt was at stake as a result of a portion of the population disagreeing with him. Most likely what he feared most was any threat to his dictatorial power. However he instilled his citizens with the far that they were living in an extremely historic time that would determine the morality or corruption of future centuries.

 Though it played a less significant role than the fear and the desire for purification, revenge was also a motivator for the violence of the Cultural Revolution. In this same way, the Chinese Cultural Revolution can, at least in part, classified as what Smith would call “retributive genocide” (1999: 5). Revenge, Smith clarifies, is more of a rationalization of the perpetrator's violence than a real motivation (1999: 5). This is certainly true of the persecution of the Chinese people, who, at most, were guilty of having certain opinions. This classification of the Cultural Revolution as retributive is also useful in its acknowledgment of the intense emotion surrounding this conflict. “Disappointment at those who had lost their faith in socialist idealism, hatred of those who had abused their privileges, and a desire to settle old scores blinded the fanatical leaders of the Red Guards to all other issues” (Wei-ming 1996: 176). People were so entrenched in the ideology of Maoism, that, in a sense, they had lost their ability to view the world in a rational way.

 The desire to get revenge on these people perceived as disloyal to the Chinese nation made people act in inhumane ways. Wei-ming describes that “mean-spiritedness and vindictiveness soon overshadowed the appearance of distributive justice in struggle sessions. Numberous forms of humiliation, discipline, corporal punishment, and torture were invented to inflict pain and suffering upon social groups labeled as 'bad elements.'” (Wei-ming 1996: 176) People judged others solely on their fulfillment of Maoist principles. Evidently, such extreme emotion had brutal consequences as this “intense hatred of the enemy (landlord, capitalist, reactionary, bourgeois, nationalist agent, or imperial spy) led to torture, murder, and even cannibalism” (Wei-ming 1996: 176). Mao specifically was deeply enraged when dissenters expressed opinions incompatible with his own. “Fearing that his utopian vision was seriously blurred by what he would, with complete vindictiveness, call the poisonous ideas of the intellectuals, he enjoined the country to refocus its attention on the socialist path” (Wei-ming 1996: 166). While revenge cannot be considered a true motivation for the Cultural Revolution, one can certainly see that anger and vindictiveness gave the Cultural Revolution a particularly brutal flavor.

**INSTIGATORS:**

 Now, the focus of this paper will shift its focus and explain how the social environment and social structure made the realization of the genocide of the Chinese people possible. This section, specifically, will reveal how social conditions made the Chinese people vulnerable to genocide at the time leading up to and during the Cultural Revolution. Staub argues that there are two main instigators of genocide: difficult life conditions and the presence of group-conflict (2000: 370). Both these conditions were prominent in the Chinese social climate.

 As stated in the theoretical section of this paper, difficult life conditions include economic problems, and political conflict and/or disorganization (Staub 2000: 369-370). By the time of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people had had a recent but long history of economic troubles. Kiernan describes Chinese peasants, which made up eighty percent of the population, as “economically deprived” (2007: 513) and “poverty was still widespread” (2007: 525) in the decades preceding the Cultural Revolution. The Great Leap Forward famine, which caused the deaths of thirteen to thirty million people, ended only five years before the start of the Cultural Revolution (Kiernan 2007: 529-530).

 Political conflict and disorganization was also certainly present. Mao, preaching an ideology based on rebellious action, fostered an environment which closely resembled anarchy. Wei-ming shrewdly notes that “the delegitimation of all forms of authority in politics and culture created a power vacuum and a dangerous occasion for violence” (1996: 176). These difficult life conditions, argues Staub, cause people to turn to a group and adopt an ideology which typically identifies an enemy group as the scapegoat for these problems (2000: 370). All China’s problems were blamed on alleged capitalist elements, not the grave mistakes of Mao and the CCP.

 Group-conflict is the second major instigator of genocide according to Staub (2000: 371).

“A frequent form of conflict leading to collective violence is between dominant and subordinate groups in a society,” states Staub (2000: 372). Such describes the conflict between the dominant group of Maoist supporters and the subordinate group of Maoist dissenters. Wei-ming notes this “dichotomous mode of thinking” had a great impact on the character of the Cultural Revolution (Wei-ming 1996: 167). People thought in black-and-white terms which discouraged understanding and compromising. People and things were either socialist or capitalist, progressive or reactionary, leftist or rightist, native or foreign, new or old, selfless or selfish, or good or bad (Wei-ming 1996: 167). And there was no middle ground. People's perceptions were that there was a clear cut division between groups; but this was far from true. Consequently, those labeled as enemies were “alienated not only from the masses, but [...] from their own immediate families. Family members were urged, often under great pressure from relatives and friends, to draw a clear line of demarcation between themselves and the targets” (Wei-ming 1996: 166). Group-conflict was so prominent in the Cultural Revolution that people would abandon spouses and parents if they were suspected to belong to the subordinate group.

 White also identifies the division of society into two mutually exclusive groups as particularly problematic. White argues that this is the fault of policy makers. He states that the Party's use of absolute labels such as proletarians and capitalists created status levels that divided people (White 1989: 8). Naturally, people chose to interpret these labels in their own favor (White 1989: 8). This definitive yet arbitrary division of good and bad created by policy-makers caused confusion by directing hatred into contradictory places.

**CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES**

 The likelihood that such social conditions would give rise to a genocide were greatly increased by certain traits of Chinese culture. Certain social structures also increased the likelihood that certain social conditions would lead to mass violence. Staub notes that monolithic cultures, cultures which are nondemocratic and have a limited range of values, and cultures that have a very strong respect for authority are cultural characteristics likely to magnify the genocidal potential of the presence of the social conditions mentioned in the previous section of this paper (2000: 370).

 Obviously, Maoist China was a monolithic culture as it was communist, not democratic, and only Maoist values were deemed acceptable. There was no civil society to counterbalance the influence of Maoism (Wei-ming: 1996: 163). Similarly, citizens of Maoist China most definitely had a strong respect for authority. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals observed that Mao “was held in a reverence that even Stalin would have envied. Its 19 million members ensured that the Chairman's directives were heard and heeded at all levels of society” (2006: 2).

Zuo compares Chinese worship of Mao similar to Christian worship of Jesus. Children were expected to songs daily and “one song proclaimed, 'My love for my parents is great but greater still is my love for Chairman Mao'” (Zuo 1991: 101). People felt deep love for Mao and they also held his wisdom in the highest esteem. Zuo recalls that “the punishment for challenging the thought of Mao Ze-dong could be as severe as death” (1991: 102). This deification of Mao discouraged people from questioning his orders and contributed to the mass compliance and participation in the genocide that was the Cultural Revolution.

The social structures of Maoist China also enabled the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution. One such social structure was the work unit, or *danwei*, system, a method which allowed the CCP to implement policy through one's work, policy that had significant impacts on one's personal life (Wei-ming 1996: 163). Wei-ming observes that this institutional mechanism was crucial to the success of the anti-capitalist movement because “in theory and practice, every member of the society was susceptible to the disciplinary mechanism of this regime. This level of vulnerability and the deep fear evoked bound the society and its various subgroups, including the cadres, together” (1996: 163). This social structure made the Chinese people extremely vulnerable to dictatorship. It made them very malleable as a large, connected force. This system certainly played a big role in the mass mobilization of the Chinese people against capitalist elements in the Cultural Revolution.

 White argues that official support for certain leaders made people dependent on their local leaders (1989: 8). Ideological reasons made people have great reverence for authority. But this is an example of how social structures also encouraged this respect and dependence on authority even when this was not in people’s best interest.

**CONCLUSION:**

Maoism was the ideology most influential during the Cultural Revolution. Maoism is based on Marxism-Leninism, and for this reason caused people to persecute people they believed to be capitalist and to destroy cultural artifacts associated with history. Maoism also dictated the nature of the conflict because the ideology teaches that one must always be rebelling. Because bureaucratization was seen as an evil associated with capitalism, people’s actions were disordered and chaotic. This encouraged reckless destruction and the murders of innocent people.

 The desire for purification was the most significant motivation for the Cultural Revolution, which was designed to purge Chinese society of polluting elements. Fear was also an important motivator, as Mao feared the loss of his absolute power and he instilled Chinese citizens with paranoid ideas that capitalists were hiding and sabotoging them. Revenge motivated the violent and brutal nature of the cultural revolution because capitalism was seen as evil according to Maoist ideology.

 Difficult life conditions, particularly economic problems and the lack of political stability, encouraged mass violence. Economic problems caused people to be desperate for the support of a group and an ideology even when it encouraged them to use capitalists as scapegoats for their problems. Because Maoist ideology teaches that authority is evil, and Mao himself encouraged people to assault policemen, the Cultural Revolution occurred in an almost anarchist social atmosphere.

 The combination of the nondemocratic nature of Maoist China, the citizens’ god-like reverence for Mao, and the presence of binding social structures caused the Chinese people to be extremely vulnerable to dictatorship. This made the movement a particularly powerful one, enabling Mao to get people to go along with a violent movement against its one people and that had no reasonable justifications.

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