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RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN COMMUNIST CHINA

The publicity given the Chinese Communist cultural purge by its own and foreign news media has been gaining momentum particularly as the purge has widened to include all foreigners and foreign institutions in Communist China. The publicity became a torrent when the Red Guard began their vicious and seemingly undisciplined attacks on mosques, temples, Christian churches and religious relics of all faiths (about 20 August).

China's months-old cultural purge was first directed against its own intellectual and cultural elite, then spread out to include literally thousands in other walks of life whose sins ranged from wearing Western-style clothes and haircuts to carrying luxury items in their shops. The group most recently employed to whip up revolutionary zeal among the population and to damn and destroy everything foreign is the Red Guard,* high school and university students distinguished primarily by their red arm bands which have become the license for destruction and terror in China.

Until August when the Red Guard turned to the desecration of religious institutions, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) controls over the young zealots seemed relaxed and the reactions of the world news media relatively moderate. Now, however, even the CCP leadership seems to have concluded that the excesses and abuses of "Mao's youngsters" are doing the party and the cultural revolution irreparable damage. In a 28 August People's Daily (major CCP organ) editorial, the party leaders belatedly counseled moderation; possibly it is too late for them to preserve the image.

The Red Guard attacks have spared no religious group in China. On 23 August the mosque near the Indonesian Embassy in Peking was closed by Red Guards and its front gates covered with Mao posters; three days later the aged Imam of the mosque was beaten by the Red Guards and forced to confess to numerous crimes against Islam; land, livestock and other property belonging to other mosques have been expropriated; religious

*the name is resurrected from the Long March days of the 1930's when the Red Guards were peasants who served MAO Tse-tung's fleeing army as porters and scouts.

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instruction in Arabic is now forbidden and Peking's propaganda media have stepped up their attacks on the Peking Center for Islamic Studies (see attached unclassified excerpts from "Peking and Religion").

The Buddhists have fared no better despite the fact that China has systematically tried to convince Asian Buddhist countries that China is a friendly country with a similar culture and that, should those countries turn communist, Buddhism would still flourish. The Red Guards are now dispelling any illusions along these lines which may have taken hold in the Buddhist world by closing temples, removing Buddhist books and religious furnishings from the temples and burning them in bonfires at the temple doors, and by stealing and defacing statues of Buddha. The 1950's and the tragedy of Tibet are being revived in new attacks on Tibet where the main targets again are the monasteries and the monks (see unclassified attachment, "China Incorporates Tibet" and others for details).

The Christian world was horrified and aroused by the much-publicized story of the Roman Catholic nuns of the Convent of the Sacred Heart who had been humiliated and terrorized by the Red Guards for eight days, were expelled from China and eventually arrived in Hong Kong where one nun died the next day (1 September) from heart failure and strain. This tragic event was only the most dramatic in a mounting series of attacks against Christianity in China -- Red Guards have closed and defaced churches, cathedrals and missionary societies; altars and stained glass windows have been smashed; MAO's picture has replaced that of Christ; Red flags are flying over the churches and Christian cemeteries have been closed (see attachments for details on the nuns' story and others).

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