

Chinese Historical Figures: 1966 - 1976

Bian Zhongyun (1916-1966)

Bian Zhongyun, female, born in 1916 in Wuwei County, Anhui Province.

In the spring of 1938, Bian moved to Changsha city in Hunan Province due to the relocation of Wuhu Girls High School she attended, and joined the Battlefield Service Group. She then enrolled in the Department of Economics of Yanching University (later merged into Peking University) before transferring to Cheeloo University.

In 1941, Bian joined the Communist Party of China (CPC) and moved into the Party's area with her husband Wang Jinyao. During the Liberation War, Bian worked in the editorial department of People's Daily for Shanxi, Hebei, Shandong, and He'nan Provinces. From June 1948, she participated in setting up People's Daily, an organ under the newly established North China Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. She was one of the few female editors during the wartime.

After the establishment of new China, Bian was invited by her comrades to teach at the Affiliated Girls High School of Beijing Normal University. Began with teaching Chinese Literature and Politics, she was later promoted to the positions of teaching supervisor, Deputy Secretary of Party Branch in School, Party Branch Secretary then Vice Principal. In 1966, before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, she had worked in the school for 17 years and was a mother of four children.

On June 1, 1966, three students put up a big-character poster on campus, staging a serious political attack against the school leadership. On June 3, a group that represented the party was sent into the school. "Revolution" swept swiftly across the campus. Some students posted big-character posters on the front door of Bian's house. A poster on Bian's bedroom door saying "Fucking listen up, You, dog-like feudalistic tyrant and venomous Bian: If you ever dare to swagger around and bully the working people, we will pull out your doggy tendon, cut off your doggy head! Dare you even think about staging a comeback, we will kill your offspring, extinct your family line and crush you into pieces."

On June 23, the party representatives convened a school assembly to criticize and denounce Bian. Being pushed up to a platform, she was humiliated mentally and physically. After the assembly, Bian wrote to party leaders asking for protection. In the letter, she declared support for the Cultural Revolution and requested to be free from violence. She wrote, "Under explosive indignation of the public, I was tortured for four, five hours. Wearing a tall hat, forcing to kneel down with head bowed (actually, a 90 degree bow), I was beaten, kicked and pinched. My hands were tied behind my back with ropes. Students poked my backbones with two military training rifles. They stuffed filthy dirt into my mouth and smeared it onto my face. They also spat on my body and in my face."

On the afternoon of August 5, the Red Guards of the school held a "mass denigration gathering". Five school heads including Bian were taken to the school's sports field. The Red Guards cut their hair off, splitting ink on their bodies, and putting tall hats on them and hanging signs around their necks saying "Gang of Counter-revolutionary", "Representative of Three Evils". They first were forced to kneel down in line to receive public condemnation before parading down the street banging on metal dustpans and shouting repeatedly, "I am a cow monster, a snake demon." Finally the Red Guards forced them to carry buckets of sand. When Bian was too weak to work - after hours of torture, the Red Guards swarmed in and beat her down to the ground with fists and sticks. They then dragged her all the way to a dormitory building, leaving blood stains all over the white walls in the corridor.

The torture and humiliation continued for more than two hours. By 5 pm, Bian, who received the harshest torture, had already lost her consciousness, as well as bladder and bowel control. She passed out on the staircase. Still, a swarm of female Red Guards encircled her, kicked her, threw rubbish on her and shouted, "Stop pretending!"

When the denigration gathering eventually came to its end, people from the "Cultural Revolution Organizing Committee" made a call to the city government for further instructions. They were instructed to ask school janitors carrying Bian to the Post Office Hospital across the campus. Bian, by then, was covered with wounds; her eyes slightly opened, and her pupils were already dilated. It was still bright outside; one of the Red Guards thought that it would give the school "a bad reputation" to expose Bian's condition to the public. Therefore they

covered her body with big-character posters and putting a broom atop to hold the posters. It was already 7 pm by the time Bian arrived at the hospital – hours after she died. Bian was the first educator in Beijing became a victim of the Cultural Revolution.

The next day, in an attempt to shun the responsibility, the Red Guards of the Affiliated Girls High School demanded an autopsy and doctors' statement that she died of heart attack, not torture. Wang Jinyao, Bian's husband, rejected the request for he could not let her to be cut open ruthless after such a tragic death. In the end, under the pressure of the head of the Red Guards, it was written "Cause of Death: Unknown" in her death certificate issued by the hospital.