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Mao's Little Red Book

Mao Zedong's Little Red Book (*Quotations from Chairman Mao*) – a compilation of the Chinese leader's speeches and writings – is one of the most visible and ubiquitous symbols of twentieth-century radicalism. Published for the first time in 1964, it rapidly became the must-have accessory for Red Guards and revolutionaries from Berkeley to Bamako. Yet, despite its worldwide circulation and enduring presence there has, until now, been no serious scholarly effort to understand this seminal text as a global historical phenomenon. *Mao's Little Red Book* brings together a range of innovative scholars from around the world to explore the fascinating variety of uses and forms that Mao's *Quotations* has taken, from rhetoric, art, and song, to talisman, badge, and weapon. The authors of this pioneering volume use Mao's *Quotations* as a medium through which to re-examine the history of the twentieth-century world, challenging established ideas about the book to reveal its remarkable global impact.

ALEXANDER C. COOK is Assistant Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley, where he teaches modern Chinese history. His research examines Maoism in its domestic and global contexts. His publications include the chapter on "Third World Maoism" in *Critical Introduction to Mao* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and a forthcoming book on the Gang of Four trial in China.

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A Global History

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University of California, Berkeley



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Preface

The year 2014 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, commonly known outside China as the Little Red Book. At the height of its influence, the decade from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, this compact tome was the most printed book in the world. Official editions numbered well over a billion copies in three dozen languages, plus untold numbers of unofficial local reprints and unofficial translations in more than fifty languages.¹ The book's characteristic physical form – pocket-sized, bright red, clad in sturdy vinyl – reflected its practical origins as an ideological field manual for soldiers of the Chinese military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA).² The canonical revised edition that first appeared in 1965 arranged its 427 quotations into 33 thematic chapters, presenting extracts from Mao Zedong's writings and speeches from 1929 to 1964, ranging in subject matter from philosophy to warfare to art.³ This easily digestible format drew upon two distinct literary genres: an ancient Chinese genre of collected wisdom dating back to the *Analects* of Confucius, and a modern genre of ideological primers embraced especially, but by no means exclusively, by Marxist–Leninists around the world. After Mao's death, the book's unsystematic presentation of fragments torn from their historical and textual contexts was widely dismissed as a vulgarization of Maoism (not to mention Marxism). During Mao's lifetime, however, his quotations were adapted in China and elsewhere for many uses and in many forms – as a little red

¹ By comparison, the entire population of the world in the early 1970s did not exceed four billion people. See www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/informationGateway.php, accessed October 1, 2012.

² For a history of the compilation of various editions, see Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in Mao's China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 108–27, and his expanded discussion in the first chapter of this volume.

³ On the distribution of quotations by source and date, see Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger, 1967), pp. xiv–xvii. For linguistic analysis, see John De Francis, *Annotated Quotations from Chairman Mao* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

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book, of course, but also as rhetoric, art, song, performance, accessory, symbol, talisman, badge, and weapon.

This volume is the first scholarly effort to understand *Quotations from Chairman Mao* as a global historical phenomenon. A foundational premise of our work is that the Little Red Book was (and is) not just one thing. Its mass production, global circulation, and multifarious appropriation in multiple historical contexts produced meanings that cannot be exhausted from any single perspective. This demands that a global history of the Little Red Book be a collaborative effort. Each of the contributors to this volume was specially selected for his or her unique experience and expertise. The chapters that follow are the products of original research by leading scholars working around the world in a dozen different languages. As a group, we are diverse with respect to age, gender, ethnicity, and political sympathies. About half of the chapters are written by historians with various regional specializations, while the other half come from historically minded scholars of literature, area studies, political science, and sociology. While we do not pretend to provide a comprehensive history of the Little Red Book, our analytical toolkit allows us to cut sharply from a number of different angles.

From this diversity of perspectives, we have tried to identify some common themes. To this end, the contributors gathered for a conference held at the University of California, Berkeley on October 21–22, 2011, with major funding from the Townsend Center for the Humanities, the Institute for East Asian Studies, the Center for Chinese Studies, and the Department of History, and with superb logistical support by Elinor Levine. There we enjoyed intensive conversations amongst ourselves, as well as commentary and discussion from John Connelly, Brandon County, Thomas Mullaney, Daniel Sargent, Tyler Stovall, Darren Zook, and a spirited audience. (I can report that even in the twenty-first century there is no lack of public interest in the Little Red Book in Berkeley.) Later, three anonymous reviewers helped us to expand and refine our ideas. Our editors Marigold Acland and Lucy Rhymer, along with Claire Poole and the rest of the expert staff at Cambridge University Press, had the vision and skill to bring this volume to print. Throughout the process, the contributors have remained in close communication, exchanging ideas and advice. This ongoing collaboration helped us to draw together the common threads running through our work.

At the outset, we would like to draw the reader's attention to the most prominent of these threads. The Little Red Book as a global phenomenon is first and foremost a product of its era. Despite its diminutive size, perhaps no other object proved more useful for the projection and reflection of the complexities and contradictions of the global 1960s.

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The story of the Little Red Book speaks to the coming of age of the postwar generation; the unresolved legacies of fascism and totalitarianism; the disenchantment with liberalism and state socialism; the descent into the Cold War and the threat of nuclear confrontation; the often unfulfilled promises of national liberation in the postcolonial world; the accelerated globalization of capitalism; and the mass production and radical appropriation of popular culture. The Little Red Book allows us to talk about these abstract issues concretely, and each is emphasized to varying degrees within and across the chapters before you. Each chapter may be read profitably on its own, but the value of each increases as it is read in conjunction with the others. The number of different threads means that shared concerns are found in chapters far apart on the global map and in the table of contents. To take just one small example, Andrew Jones' discussion of the pop song "hook" in China finds echoes in Elizabeth McGuire's dissection of bawdy socialist humor in the Soviet Union and Dominique Reill's analysis of pop culture Orientalism in Italy. This means that the chapters could have been arranged in a number of different ways.

As it stands, the chapters are organized according to a logic explained more fully in my introduction. Briefly, I argue that the Little Red Book aimed to explode the Cold War order by exploiting various fissions and fusions within and between the First World of American-style capitalism, the Second World of Soviet-style socialism, and an underdeveloped but emerging Third World. We begin with chapters that examine the Little Red Book in China. Daniel Leese details the origins, production, and dissemination of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* in China, and also explains the book's eventual demise. Andrew Jones looks at the quotations set to music, exploring the technological and ideological implications of their proliferation in cross-platform and multimedia forms. Guobin Yang turns our attention to the violence wrought by Mao's quotations, using a case study of factionalism and conflicting interpretive commitments during the height of the Cultural Revolution. Lanjun Xu's chapter, which examines the mechanisms by which the Little Red Book was translated for export, pivots from China to the rest of the world. From there, the volume considers the Third World, Second World, and First World in turn. Sreemati Chakrabarti argues that in India, where Third World Maoism had the greatest influence during the Cultural Revolution period and where Maoism continues to exert influence today, the heyday of the Little Red Book was brief. Likewise, David Scott Palmer shows that the leaders of Peru's Shining Path patterned their violent crusade on simplistic adaptations of Maoist principles, often to the detriment of those they claimed to defend. Priya Lal's study of

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ujamaa socialism in Tanzania reminds us that the flow of Little Red Books was merely a surface indicator of the ongoing exchange of people, ideas, materials, and technologies throughout the Third World. Our discussion of the Second World begins with Elizabeth McGuire's chapter on Soviet reception of the Little Red Book, which was seen (like its Chinese promoters) as primitive, dangerous, and just a little bit funny. The scorn heaped on the Little Red Book in the Soviet Union earned it praise in Albania, China's closest European ally in the fight against Soviet domination of the socialist world. This poorly understood aspect of the Cold War is detailed in Elidor Mëhilli's chapter. Dominique Reill brings us through the Iron Curtain, revealing the Little Red Book as a symbol of common cause for anti-imperialist partisans in socialist Yugoslavia and capitalist Italy. On the other hand, Quinn Slobodian shows us both sides of the Berlin Wall to argue that fashionable fascination with the Little Red Book took fundamentally different forms in East and West Germany. In France, as Julian Bourg explains, the Little Red Book launched a popular intellectual movement rife with contradictions. Bill Mullen's chapter narrates the history of Afro-Asian radicalism in the United States, where the Little Red Book provided a textual basis for Third World solidarity in the heart of the First World.

Ban Wang's concluding chapter, originally delivered as the keynote address at our Berkeley conference, brings the discussion back to our fundamental premise: the Little Red Book is what people made of it. It is perhaps tempting to think of it as the sacred word of a totalitarian godhead, exerting its numinous power over the mass of enslaved idolaters – or as an ironic accessory for the nonbelievers who know better. Against the grain of such assumptions, Ban Wang argues that in China the Little Red Book – as a fixed text open to interpretation – set in motion a reformation with genuine possibilities for protest, agency, emancipation, and democracy. This volume is intended to challenge and provoke the reader; it is an opening. In the beginning is the word – but that is only the beginning.