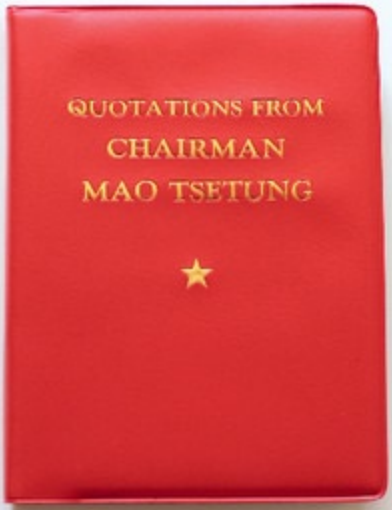
MAO'S LITTLE RED BOOK

A GLOBAL HISTORY



EDITED BY ALEXANDER C. COOK

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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.

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Edited by

Alexander C. Cook

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).

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.

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

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.

1 Introduction
The spiritual atom bomb and its global fallout

Alexander C. Cook

> Once Mao Tse-tung's thought is grasped by the broad masses, it becomes a source of strength and a spiritual atom bomb of infinite power.
> Lin Biao, foreword to the second edition

This introduction is not so much about Mao's quotations themselves, but rather the effusive foreword that introduced Chinese and foreign readers to *Quotations from Chairman Mao* at the height of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Credited to Lin Biao, Mao's top military man and tireless promoter of the Little Red Book, it described how the written word could transform ideas into a material force for revolution. According to the foreword, the Little Red Book was a weapon of mass instruction – the intercontinental delivery system for a potentially world-shattering ideological payload: "Once Mao Tse-tung's thought is grasped by the broad masses, it becomes a source of strength and a spiritual atom bomb of infinite power."[1] Lin Biao's metaphor was an adulatory exaggeration, of course, but it should not be dismissed as only that. I will show, through an extended exegesis, that the spiritual atom bomb was in fact a coherent concept within its own Maoist intellectual context. More broadly, I will argue that the spiritual atom bomb was also a telling symptom of anxieties about the Cultural Revolution in China, about the Sino-Soviet split within the socialist world, about the larger Cold War between capitalism and socialism, and about the global confrontation with the real prospect of nuclear Armageddon. Lin Biao's foreword to the Little Red Book arose from historical conditions specific to China in the 1960s, yet it was also a product of the global Atomic Age. In that moment of global existential crisis, when faceless

[1] Lin Biao, Foreword to the Second Chinese Edition (December 16, 1966). Full text of the official English translation is available at www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1966/12/16.htm, accessed October 1, 2012. A rousing choral version of the foreword, composed by Tang Ke and Sheng Mao and performed by the China Railway Art Troupe in 1968, can be heard at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Chgz2meXKd0, accessed September 30, 2012.

technology threatened to destroy all mankind, the spiritual atom bomb was an alternate vision of the atomic that affirmed the primacy of the spiritual over the material.

The era of the spiritual atom bomb was brief but explosive, roughly corresponding to the height of the Cultural Revolution in China and including the global movements of 1968. The Little Red Book originated in the Chinese military under the leadership of Lin Biao, who helped to build the cult of Mao. Lin Biao incorporated the study of Maoist texts into daily drill and encouraged the emulation of moral exemplars such as the model soldier Lei Feng; these practices culminated in May 1964 in the internal-use publication by the General Political Department of the PLA of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. According to the foreword added to the reprint of August 1965, and "in conformity with Comrade Lin Biao's instructions," the Little Red Book was to be issued "to every soldier in the whole army, just as we issue weapons." Amidst the nationwide campaign to "Learn from the People's Liberation Army," this handy piece of standard-issue equipment also became a prized trophy for ardent youth activists. In late August 1966, in the push that gave the Cultural Revolution its chaotic momentum, Mao approvingly reviewed throngs of young Red Guards waving Little Red Books in Tiananmen Square. The book was soon made available to the general public in order to, as Lin Biao's new foreword said, "arm the minds of the people throughout the country" with Mao Zedong Thought.[2] Mastery of Mao Zedong Thought could split the atom of the mind and unleash the power of human consciousness to destroy the old world – and create a better one in its place.

The rise and fall of the spiritual atom bomb was tied to the personal fortunes of Lin Biao, with whom the book is so closely associated. Although Lin Biao did not take an active role in creating the Little Red Book – it was not his style to take an active role in much of anything – and it is doubtful that he even wrote the foreword credited to him, nevertheless his name was the recognizable corporate mark for a particular

[2] The previous foreword addressed to the army had said "to arm the minds of all our commanders": General Political Department, Foreword to the Reprint of the First Edition (August 1, 1965). For a word-by-word comparison of the forewords to the first and second editions, see Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. xxxi–xxxiii. Schram, the foremost Western interpreter of Mao in the postwar era, was a polymath and polyglot who had assisted the Manhattan Project before turning to the study of politics. "Having worked on the bomb," his widow explained in his obituary, "he wanted to study more of human beings." See William Yardley, "Stuart R. Schram, Nuclear Physicist and Mao Scholar, Dies at 88," *New York Times* (July 21, 2012).

reading of Maoist ideology.[3] The appearance of the phrase "spiritual atom bomb" in PLA publications beginning in 1960 typified Lin Biao's signature brand of "politics in command" and his calls to structure all aspects of military affairs around Mao Zedong Thought.[4] Lin Biao had ascended to power in the late 1950s on the strength of his unquestioned loyalty to Mao in the Chairman's darkest moment, the collapse of the Great Leap Forward. Ever passive and deferential by disposition, Lin's reliable hold on "the barrel of the gun" proved indispensable in Mao's subsequent return to political power.[5] For while the Cultural Revolution had the appearance of a popular movement – and it is true that much of its violence unfolded in decentralized and unpredictable ways – it was Lin Biao's access to military power that secured Mao's mobilization of the masses to "bombard the headquarters" in August 1966. At key moments in Mao's attack on rivals in the power structure, which developed over the next three years, Lin Biao's loyal units protected the radical insurgents, presided over the purge of the bureaucracy, held disgruntled military commanders in check, and stepped in when internecine struggles ceased to be useful to Mao.[6] For his contributions, Lin Biao was a prime beneficiary of the Cultural Revolution, explicitly designated Mao's successor in the constitution passed by the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969. In truly dialectical fashion, however, the pinnacle of Lin Biao's rise also marked the precipice from which he fell. At the same party congress, Mao voiced annoyance with Lin Biao's insistence that the new constitution incorporate another phrase from his foreword to the Little Red Book, which stated that "Comrade Mao Zedong is the greatest Marxist–Leninist of our era. He has inherited, defended, and developed Marxism–Leninism with genius, creatively and comprehensively, and has brought it to a higher and completely new stage." The seemingly arcane debate that ensued (whether "genius" was a bourgeois concept) provided the first of several hints that the

[3] It was common practice among Chinese communist ideologues, including Mao, to read speeches and issue public documents edited, compiled, or written by others. Daniel Leese dispels the myth of Lin Biao as architect of the Little Red Book in *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 109. On Lin Biao's plagiarism of himself or others in the foreword, see Schram, ed., *Quotations*, p. xxv–xxvi.

[4] See for example the Army Day (August 1) 1960 editorial in *PLA Daily*. On "politics in command," see Henry Yuhuai He, *Dictionary of Political Thought in the People's Republic of China* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), pp. 457–60.

[5] Characterization of Lin Biao based on Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The Tragedy of Lin Biao: Riding the Tiger during the Cultural Revolution, 1966–1971* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), pp. 1–18.

[6] Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

Chairman's trust in his "best student" and "closest comrade-in-arms" was less than complete.[7] Even so, no one expected the revelation in September 1971, just two-and-a-half years later, that Lin Biao had died in a plane crash – allegedly fleeing the country after an aborted assassination attempt on Mao! Naturally, Lin Biao's foreword to the Little Red Book was expunged, and the era of the spiritual atom bomb was over. Nevertheless, from the mid 1960s to the early 1970s in China, and somewhat later elsewhere, Lin Biao's doctrine of the spiritual atom bomb was the orthodox interpretation that introduced Mao's Little Red Book to the world.

The Foolish Old Man

Lin Biao's elevation of Mao Zedong Thought to the power of an atom bomb sounds like a foolish boast, emblematic of the belligerent irrationality of the Mao cult at the height of the Cultural Revolution. It would seem to vastly overestimate the power of ideology, on the one hand, and to vastly underestimate the power of the actual atom bomb, on the other. Be that as it may, Lin Biao's spiritual atom bomb metaphor is so bizarre, and yet so symptomatic of its times, that it merits serious consideration on its own terms. Mao's own defense of such "foolishness" is found in "The Foolish Old Man who Removed the Mountains" (1945), a story canonized by Lin Biao as one of the Three Constantly Read Articles. "The Foolish Old Man" is one of the longest continuous passages in the Little Red Book, and the only text to appear there in its entirety:

> There is an ancient Chinese fable called "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains." It tells of an old man who lived in northern China long, long ago and was known as the Foolish Old Man of North Mountain. His house faced south and beyond his doorway stood two great peaks obstructing the way. He called his sons, and hoe in hand they began to dig up these mountains with great determination. Another graybeard, known as the Wise Old Man, saw them and said derisively, "How silly of you to do this! It is quite impossible for you few to dig up those two huge mountains." The Foolish Old Man replied, "When I die, my sons will carry on; when they die, there will be my grandsons, and then their sons and grandsons, and so on to infinity. High as they are, the mountains cannot grow any higher and with every bit we dig, they will be that much lower. Why can't we clear them away?" Having refuted the Wise Old Man's wrongheaded view, he went on digging every day, unshaken in his conviction. God was moved by this, and he sent down two angels, who carried the mountains away on their backs. Today, two big mountains lie like a dead weight on the Chinese people. One is imperialism, the other is feudalism. The Chinese Communist Party has

[7] Ibid., pp. 285–336.

long made up its mind to dig them up. We must persevere and work unceasingly, and we, too, will touch God's heart. Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people. If they stand up and dig together with us, why can't these two mountains be cleared away?

This passage has been interpreted primarily as a story of perseverance, determination, and strength of will, as it concludes the chapter of the Little Red Book on "Self-Reliance and Arduous Struggle." But there are deeper meanings that surface when we answer possible objections to the application of this traditional fable to the socialist revolution in China: Isn't it contrary to the logic of self-reliance to invoke external forces: the literal *dei ex machina* of gods and angels? Aren't such manifestations of the spiritual alien to the materialist viewpoint of Marxism–Leninism? And isn't their sudden intervention contrary to the lesson of persistence and accumulated effort? To answer, we must reinterpret "The Foolish Old Man" as Mao's followers would, from the viewpoint of Mao's interpretation of dialectical materialism and with special attention to the *mass* character of revolutionary change.

First, the agency referred to by the fable is not external. The demystified God, as Mao explains somewhat clumsily, "is none other than the masses," and the angels are their agents, the revolutionary vanguard of the Chinese Communist Party. The party cannot succeed on its own; it needs to touch the hearts of the people and enlist their support in removing the mountains. The same idea is expressed more clearly in a metaphor from the guerrilla days: the party and its army must be like fish in the water.[8] The masses are not external, but rather are the medium in which the party operates. The revolutionary force is drawn from the masses, and the masses will become the revolutionary force; without the masses the party will flounder and die. Thus in his introductory remarks to the story of "The Foolish Old Man," Mao says, "We must first raise the political consciousness of the vanguard so that, resolute and unafraid of sacrifice, they will surmount every difficulty to win victory. But this is not enough; we must also arouse the political consciousness of the entire people so that they may willingly and gladly fight together with us for victory." The revolution is necessarily a mass movement.

Second, Mao's invocation of the spiritual is not necessarily contrary to the materialist outlook. The Chinese term "spiritual" (*jingshen*) here refers to phenomena with subjective existence in the human mind, as opposed to the material, which exists objectively outside of human consciousness. However, the material and the spiritual are not mutually

[8] Mao Zedong, "On Guerilla Warfare," www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch06.htm.

exclusive in Maoist doctrine, but instead are dialectically intertwined by the unity of opposites. Spiritual phenomena may be ultimately reducible to manifestations of the material. As such, subjective thought can motivate human beings to know and change their objective conditions.[9] Mao proposed this relationship between the material and the spiritual, in his seminal essay on dialectical ontology, "On Contradiction" (1937), which is more fully explored in Julian Bourg's chapter on French Maoism. Mao's essay introduces two concepts: first, the notion of the "principal contradiction," the one whose resolution is decisive for unraveling the complex knot of secondary contradictions; and second, the notion of the "principal aspect of the contradiction," the side of the contradiction whose positive development will be decisive in its resolution. Mao points out that these relationships are dialectical and dynamic: the secondary acts upon the principal, and at times may even become dominant. Therefore, concludes Mao, in the contradiction between the material and the spiritual, the material is only *generally* the principal aspect:

> When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive. Are we going against materialism when we say this? No. The reason is that while we recognize that in the general development of history the material determines the mental, and social being determines social consciousness, we also – and indeed must – recognize the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.[10]

At the crucial moment of revolution, the spiritual can become decisive in the transformation of the material.

Third, sudden transformation is not contrary to accumulation, perseverance, and protracted struggle – it results *from* accumulation. Of the three basic laws of dialectics identified by Engels, one is transformation of quantity into quality. (Mao, following Stalin, saw this not as a separate law, but as a special case of the unity and struggle of opposites.[11])

[9] Mao's philosophical position of ontological monism with epistemological dualism was developed through an active but nevertheless fairly orthodox reading of the basic texts of the Soviet New Philosophy of the 1930s. See Nick Knight, *Marxist Philosophy in China: From Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong, 1923–1945* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), esp. pp. 171–95.

[10] Mao Zedong, "On Contradiction" (August 1937), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm, accessed September 10, 2012. The latter half is excerpted in *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, chapter 22.

[11] See discussion at Slavoj Žižek, *On Practice and On Contradiction: Žižek Presents Mao* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 11, 181.

The classic example is the phase change of liquid water into steam: the incremental quantitative change in temperature leads to a sudden qualitative change in form. If the masses are the water, the medium of change, then it is the agitation of myriad individual molecules that will lead to a fundamental transformation in the collective whole –in other words, a revolution.

Spiritual fission and the weaponization of ideology

Lin Biao's spiritual atom bomb refers to an exceptionally powerful kind of agitation, however, and not merely to the external application of heat or kinetic energy. Fission seeks to release vast amounts of *internal* energy, by splitting from the inside, and this process is fundamental to the Maoist worldview. For Mao, the fundamental law of dialectical materialism is the unity and struggle of opposites, sometimes manifested as "two combine into one" but more often as "one divides into two." The universe is characterized by struggle: "In any given thing, the *unity* of opposites is conditional, temporary, and transitory, and hence relative, whereas the *struggle* of opposites is universal."[12] Moreover, struggle that is sufficiently violent to break nuclear bonds can release vast amounts of energy; the key to such fission is to strike at the apparently indivisible core.

As a "universal" phenomenon in Mao's worldview, fission has spiritual manifestations. A mass change of consciousness can initiate spiritual fission, releasing tremendous material force. In this example from 1958, Mao spoke of the Chinese nation as an atom to be split:

> Now our enthusiasm has been aroused. Ours is an ardent nation, now swept by a burning tide. There is a good metaphor for this: our nation is like an atom . . . When this atom's nucleus is smashed the thermal energy released will have really tremendous power. We shall be able to do things which we could not do before.[13]

Mao was talking here about a fundamental split: the struggle of self against self. For Mao, the real object of revolutionary struggle was the revolutionary's own consciousness. The Chinese communists' preferred technique for spiritual revolution was a dialectical process of "struggle–criticism–transformation," which they employed extensively for ideological indoctrination, party discipline, and social control. Ban

[12] Mao Zedong, "Talk on Questions of Philosophy" (August 18, 1964), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_27.htm, accessed September 14, 2012. Žižek (*On Practice and On Contradiction*, p. 11) likens Mao's view to Adorno's theory of negative dialectics.

[13] Mao Zedong, Speech at the Supreme State Conference (January 28, 1958), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_03.htm.

Wang in his chapter also considers the liberating potential of such a quasi-religious transformation. At the heart of struggle–criticism–transformation was intensive *self*-criticism, which came to be practiced constantly during the Cultural Revolution. This is why Lin Biao described the Cultural Revolution as a self-revolution, "a revolution against those of us who have been engaged in the former revolutions."[14] Here in this excerpt from *People's Daily*, Lin Biao explicitly reiterates that each person is to wage a continuing revolution against oneself:

> To look at oneself according to the law of "one divides into two" means that one must make revolution against one's own subjective world as well as the objective world. Comrade Lin Biao instructs us: "We must regard ourselves as an integral part of the revolutionary force and, at the same time, constantly regard ourselves as a target of the revolution. In making revolution, we must also revolutionize ourselves. Without revolutionizing ourselves, we cannot make this revolution."[15]

So, the most basic fissile material of the revolution is the subjective consciousness of the apparently atomistic individual, though as the story of "The Foolish Old Man" says, the process of transformation cannot be limited to the cadres. For fission to become self-sustaining, it must be concentrated on and applied to a critical mass. Thus, Lin Biao says, Mao Zedong Thought becomes a spiritual atom bomb only "once it is grasped by the masses."

It is the "grasping" of Mao Zedong Thought that allows it to be used as a weapon, says Lin Biao, and his meaning is fairly literal. Here Lin's argument invokes Engels' remarkable thesis that humans became differentiated from other animals by the dialectical co-evolution of the brain and the hand through labor.[16] According to Engels, all tools and technologies – the flint axe, the iron hoe, the spinning wheel, the steam engine, the paintbrush – are extensions of this hand–brain dyad, designed to carry out human purposes. The same principle applies to that class of tools we call weapons, from the most primitive stone to the atom bomb. Without a human being to use it, the tool (which is after all merely an extension of the person) is useless. Therefore, the power of the weapon as

[14] Lin Biao, "Directive on the Cultural Revolution" (September 13, 1967) in China Problems Research Center, ed., *Selected Works of Lin Piao* (Hong Kong: Chih Luen Press, 1970), p. 152.

[15] "Look at One's Self in the Light of Dividing One into Two," *People's Daily* (July 19, 1968), reproduced in David Milton, Nancy Milton, and Franz Schurmann, eds., *People's China: Social Experimentation, Politics, Entry onto the World Scene, 1966–1972* (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 202–05.

[16] Frederick Engels, "The Part Played by Labour in the Transformation of Ape to Man" (1876), www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/index.htm, accessed October 2, 2012.

a material object is inseparable from the subjective spiritual or ideological power of the person who wields it. In Mao's own words, "Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale. People necessarily wield military and economic power."[17]

This supposition is the basis for Mao's doctrine of "people's war," which became influential among Third World revolutionaries, including the Naxalites of India (see Sreemati Chakrabarti's chapter) and the Shining Path of Peru (see David Scott Palmer's chapter). Mao's faith in the people derived in part from his belief in the historical teleology of Marxism, but it was also grounded in practical experience. In his conflicts against the vastly superior material forces of the Chinese Nationalist regime and Imperial Japan, Mao knew his rag-tag armies could not succeed, at least initially, by using standard positional warfare. Victory required the mobile tactics of guerrilla warfare, but also a long-term strategy of protracted conflict in which the enemy could be weakened through attrition and his own forces strengthened through accumulation. But the rebels could survive long enough for this to happen only at the sufferance of the local populace. Therefore, the military doctrine of people's war rests on a social proposition: the "people's army" must provide benefits that outweigh the costs of provisioning them. More than that, even, the army must be embraced by the people as a necessary part *of* the people. In the present-day parlance of insurgency and counter-insurgency, you win the war by winning hearts and minds. In the language of Mao, if the soldiers are at home like fish in the water, then the people are the sustaining medium that will eventually overwhelm and drown the enemy. People's war proved successful in the war of resistance against Japan and in the subsequent civil war against the Nationalists, so it is no surprise that Mao should return to it in his confrontation with the nuclear superpowers.

By the outset of the Cold War, Mao had established his view that people's war could overcome the atomic threat. Consider, for example, his comments to the American journalist Anna Louise Strong in August 1946, just a year after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: "The atom bomb is a paper tiger which the US reactionaries use to scare people. It looks terrible, but in fact it isn't. Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by the

[17] Mao Zedong, "On Protracted War" (May 1938), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm, accessed September 14, 2012. This passage appears in chapter 12 of the Little Red Book.

people, not by one or two new types of weapon."[18] Here we have one half of the "foolish" boast, the apparent underestimation of the atomic bomb. The second half, the apparent overestimation of ideology, was introduced by Lin Biao in his famous paean to Mao, "Long Live the Victory of People's War" (1965):

> Even if US imperialism brazenly uses nuclear weapons, it cannot conquer the people, who are indomitable. However highly developed modern weapons and technical equipment may be and however complicated the methods of modern warfare, in the final analysis the outcome of a war will be decided by the sustained fighting of the ground forces, by the fighting at close quarters on battlefields, by the political consciousness of the men, by their courage and spirit of sacrifice. Here the weak points of US imperialism will be completely laid bare, while the superiority of the revolutionary people will be brought into full play. The reactionary troops of US imperialism cannot possibly be endowed with the courage and the spirit of sacrifice possessed by the revolutionary people. The spiritual atom bomb which the revolutionary people possess is a far more powerful and useful weapon than the physical atom bomb.[19]

Mao had already stated that people matter more than weapons, and implied that ideological weapons could overcome physical weapons, but he left it to Lin Biao to state explicitly that the people were best armed with Mao Zedong Thought.

> "Military affairs are a constituent part of politics, while politics includes more things, encompasses a wider scope. What is the best weapon? It's not the airplane, not artillery, not the tank, not the atom bomb. The best weapon is Mao Zedong Thought. What is the greatest military force? The greatest military force is people, armed with Mao Zedong Thought; it's courage and fearlessness of death."[20]

The Little Red Book was a weapon to be grasped by the hands of the people, so that Mao Zedong Thought could be grasped by their minds. But how could a sheaf of paper bound in vinyl be elevated to the status of an atom bomb, while the actual atom bomb was dismissed as a flimsy "paper tiger"?

[18] Mao Zedong, "Talk with American Anna Louise Strong" (1946), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_13.htm, accessed September 24, 2012.

[19] Lin Biao, "Long Live the Victory of People's War! In Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of Victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japan" (September 3, 1965), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/ch08.htm, accessed September 24, 2012. The authorial attribution to Lin Biao is again questionable: see Teiwes and Sun, *The Tragedy of Lin Biao*, p. 27.

[20] Lin Biao, "Dui yijiuliuliu nian quanjun gongzuo tichu de wu xiang yuanze" [Five Principles Addressed to the All-Army Work Conference of 1966] (November 18, 1965), in *Lin Biao wenxuan* [Selected works of Lin Biao] (Hong Kong: Zhong-Gang chuanmei chubanshe, 2011), p. 413.

Paper tigers of the atomic age

Mao's supposedly cavalier attitude toward atomic weapons was a major point of contention with the Soviet Union, which withdrew its nuclear experts from China in 1960. However, Mao's negative assessment of the atom bomb was by no means based on a naïve underestimation of its capacity for physical destruction. In 1955, to the consternation of his Soviet allies, Mao asserted:

> The Chinese people are not to be cowed by US atomic blackmail. Our country has a population of 600 million and an area of 9,600,000 square kilometers. The United States cannot annihilate the Chinese nation with its small stack of atom bombs. Even if the US atom bombs were so powerful that, when dropped on China, they would make a hole right through the earth, or even blow it up, that would hardly mean anything to the universe as a whole, though it might be a major event for the solar system.[21]

We may be appalled at Mao's cosmic indifference toward human life, but we cannot say he thought the atom bomb powerless.[22] Nor did Mao's bravado arise from a confident belief that atomic bombs would never be used against China. In hindsight we know that not a single nuclear weapon was detonated in combat during the Cold War; but in Mao's time nuclear war seemed like a very real possibility, and China appeared to be one of the more likely targets. In the 1950s, China fought the US to a bloody stalemate on the Korean peninsula, and the Eisenhower administration pursued a New Look policy calling for heavy reliance on nuclear weaponry as a "virtually conventional" force.[23] Yet in 1958, as the confrontation over the Taiwan Strait teetered on the brink of open war, Mao spoke of the coming atomic holocaust as an eventuality, noting insolently that it was "not a bad thing":

> We have no experience in atomic war. So, how many will be killed cannot be known. The best outcome may be that only half of the population [of the world] is left and the second best may be only one-third. When 900 million are left out of 2.9 billion, several five-year plans can be developed for the total elimination of capitalism and for permanent peace. It is not a bad thing.[24]

[21] Mao Zedong, "The Chinese People Cannot be Cowed by the Atom Bomb" (January 28, 1955), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_40.htm, accessed September 14, 2012.

[22] See also Slavoj Žižek, "Mao Zedong: The Marxist Lord of Misrule," in *On Practice and On Contradiction*, pp. 9–10, 27–28.

[23] John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb*, Illustrated edn. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 16–19.

[24] Mao Zedong, "Speeches at the Second Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress: Second Speech" (May 17, 1958), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_10.htm, accessed October 1, 2012. See also Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 189–90.

Socialists do not want war, said Mao, but the destruction will only strengthen the socialist cause. Just as World War I gave birth to the Bolshevik revolution, and World War II to the Chinese revolution and anti-colonial movements worldwide, World War III might very well bring the global revolution to completion. Moreover, by the early 1960s the Sino-Soviet rift had become irreparable, with Mao accusing the Kremlin of practicing revisionism or "phoney" socialism. Sino-Soviet relations declined precipitously, and in 1969 border skirmishes even erupted into a brief shooting war. In the era of the Little Red Book, nuclear attack by either the United States or the Soviet Union seemed a very real possibility.

So, in Mao's entirely realistic assessment, atomic weapons could (and very possibly *would*) be used against China in the foreseeable future, and if so, the result would be massive death and destruction.[25] We need no further proof of Mao's appreciation of the atom bomb's military value than the fact that the People's Republic of China invested at great cost in a nuclear weapons program of its own. The PLA successfully tested its first atom bomb in 1964, without Soviet assistance, becoming just the fifth nation to do so, and in 1967 China became the fourth nation to successfully detonate a thermonuclear fission–fusion device. Nevertheless, the Chinese military still gave preference to the spiritual: "China's material atom bomb has had a tremendous effect, but we always maintain that the significant human factor and the policy of turning the whole people into fighting men constitute a powerful spiritual atom bomb which we have long had in our possession. Our enemies have never had such a spiritual atom bomb."[26] Chinese rhetoric caused the Soviets and Americans to fear a nuclear-armed loose cannon in the East – an inscrutable "Mr. China A-Bomb."[27] However, a more sober RAND report from 1963 proved prescient, insisting that "*the Chinese do understand the significance of nuclear warfare and are not inclined to be reckless*."[28] China

[25] For a discussion of how Mao's view evolved over time, see Shu Guang Zhang, "Between 'Paper' and 'Real Tigers': Mao's View of Nuclear Weapons," in John Lewis Gaddis, Philip Gordon, Ernest May, and Jonathan Rosenberg, eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 194–215.

[26] Xinhua report on a conference of the General Political Department of the PLA, quoted in "People's Militia: A Spiritual Atom Bomb" in *Radio Free Europe Research: Communist Area* (CHINA) (October 20, 1964).

[27] "Mr. China A-Bomb" epithet from "South of the Mountains to North of the Seas: Excerpts from American Journalist Edgar Snow's Interview with Mao Tse-tung" (January 9, 1965) in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. IX, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/appendix.htm, accessed October 2, 2012.

[28] Alice Langley Hsieh, *Chinese Nuclear Force* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1963), p. 15 (italics in original). On American nuclear Orientalism, see Hugh Gusterson, "Nuclear Weapons and the Other in the American Imagination," in *People of the Bomb:*

entered the age of the spiritual atom bomb with a first-hand knowledge of the physical atom bomb – there can be no question of foolishness on that count – yet Mao continued to denigrate the atom bomb as a paper tiger. Nuclear weapons could destroy the world, he argued, but still they could not *win* it.

This did not mean that China could ignore the atomic threat, of course, but Mao treated the atom bomb the same as any paper tiger: tactically it is dangerous, but strategically it is vulnerable. "Despise the enemy strategically," was his mantra, "but take full account of it tactically." Beginning with the Korean War in the 1950s and continuing through the realignment of the 1970s, China made definite preparations to weather a nuclear storm. To the tactical and logistical provisions, "Dig tunnels deep, store grain everywhere," Mao added a strategic imperative: "Never seek hegemony."[29] It was this word "hegemony" that best summarized the Cold War for Mao, and it was the world order of superpower hegemony that stood to be annihilated by the spiritual atom bomb. "Mao Tse-tung's thought is Marxism–Leninism of the era in which imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is advancing to world-wide victory," explained Lin Biao's foreword.[30] Less than three years later, speaking on the anniversary of Russia's October Revolution and at the height of China's Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao boasted that the blast radius of the spiritual atom bomb was global: "Once Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought is integrated with the revolutionary practice of the people of all countries, *the entire old world* will be shattered to smithereens."[31]

Three worlds apart

The dropping of the atom bomb at the conclusion of World War II left the globe divided into the First World of capitalism, the Second World of socialism, and a "developing" Third World, which served as the battleground of a Cold War between them. The leaders of the First and Second Worlds – the United States and the Soviet Union – were

Portraits of America's Nuclear Complex (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 21–47.

[29] See, for example, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_22.htm, accessed September 28, 2012. The USA and other Cold War belligerents made similar plans to weather an attack.

[30] The ordering of the phrases suggests a two-stage revolution, first anti-imperialist (anti-hegemonic), then socialist (anti-revisionist).

[31] Lin Biao, "Speech at Peking Rally Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the October Revolution" (November 7, 1967) in China Problems Research Center, ed., *Selected Works of Lin Piao*, p. 172.