

# MAO'S RED BOOK: THE SEED OF LIBERATION IN CAPITALIST AMERICA AND THE FRUIT OF OPPRESSION IN COMMUNIST CHINA

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Quotations from Chairman Mao: 50th Anniversary Exhibition, 1964-2014 at the Grolier Club

Were a person to stumble into the late 1960s and early 1970s America or China, that individual would inevitably encounter the same swarm of red books in either society. For within two starkly different systems, one book, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, gained significant popularity amongst political activists in both countries. In recent years, there has been a burst in studies aimed at understanding the influence and major celebration of the *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (otherwise unofficially known as Mao's Red Book). Historians such as Cook focus on the general impact the ideological atom bomb, Mao's Red Book had on the West.<sup>1</sup> Other historians instead center their arguments on why politically active ethnic minorities in America, such as Asian Americans and African Americans, were attracted to Mao's Red Book.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, historiography concerning the Red Book in China primarily focuses on themes regarding the loyalty of the Red Guards to the Red Book<sup>3</sup> or the logistics behind the book's creation.<sup>4</sup> What is apparent is that there exists a lack of research concerning the symbolism of Mao's Red Book, particularly the differences between the symbolism the book acquired in America as opposed to China.

This paper aims to address this gap, arguing that *Quotations from Chairman Mao* became a symbol of liberation and freedom for political activists in 1966 - 71 Capitalist America while simultaneously becoming a symbol of conformity for Chinese political activists and a symbol of oppression for many within Communist China. The work explores whether the difference in symbolism was due to Mao's active effort in propagating separate meanings associated with the book in either country and whether

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander C. Cook, eds., *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1 – 22.

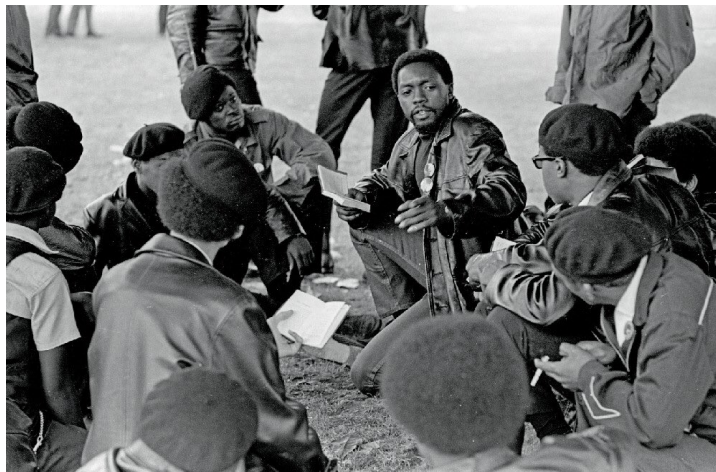
<sup>2</sup> Bill V. Mullen and Alexander C. Cook, eds., *Quotations from Chairman Mao and the making of Afro-Asian Radicalism, Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 245 – 265.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy J. Holland, *Narrative Fidelity to the Little Red Book in the framing efforts of the Red Guard Movement: A Theoretical Model for Foundational Documents* (Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 383 – 401.

<sup>4</sup> Cook, eds., *Mao's Little Red Book*, 1 – 22.

individuals within the movements attached their own meaning. To achieve this, this paper is divided into three themes: 1. Revolution and political activism and their meaning within Capitalist America versus Communist China, 2. Mao's aim in releasing the book at home and abroad, 3. Race, anti-imperialism and their influence on the interpretation of the Red Book in America vs China.

In the US, the late sixties were shaped by the death of leading Civil Rights leaders. The response to this was the formation of more militant black activist groups, an example being the Black Panther Party (BPP). The BPP advocated for black nationalism and international revolution while questioning the US system. The anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist values which existed at the heart of the party stemmed from Mao's Red Book.



**Black Panther Party, Group Study of 'Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung' 1968 by Bob Fitch**

Indubitably, Mao's Red Book and the ideology it gifted provided the party with life, pumping ideas, values and philosophy into each party member. The BPP, being a significant part of the black liberation movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s America, inspired the formation of many other American liberation groups. The Red Guard Party (RGP) is an example of this.<sup>5</sup>

The RGP was formed in February 1969, three years after Huey founded the BPP. Members of the BPP aided in creating the structure of the RGP. As a result, the RGP's style, language and politics mirrored that of their black revolutionary counterparts.<sup>6</sup> The RGP also adopted the militant tactics encouraged by Mao's Red Book, supported by the BPP. Additionally, the BPP's influence on the RGP remains

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<sup>5</sup> Daryl J. Maeda, *Black Panthers, Red Guards and Chinamen: Constructing Asian American Identity through Performing Blackness, 1962 - 1972*. (John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 1079 – 1103.

<sup>6</sup> Maeda, *Black Panthers, Red Guards and Chinamen*, 1079.

evident in other domains. For example, BPP slogans such as “All Power to the People,” were used by the RGP.<sup>7</sup>

The supply of mutual support between the BPP and the RGP was natural when considering the theory of social identity. The theory suggests that human beings, due to the cognitive process of categorizing people into groups developed through evolutionary means of survival, form in-groups and out-groups. In-groups refer to those whom an individual deems similar to them, while the out-group is defined by those who lack commonalities with that individual.<sup>8</sup> According to Henri Tajfel, the producer of the theory, such groups form due to the human desire to build and maintain identity and self-esteem. The shared experience of racial and class inequality within the US, therefore, cultivated the perfect conditions for the BPP and RGP to find similarities within their experiences of discrimination. Beyond this, Mao’s Red Book reinforced the ability of the two groups to relate to one another, with the book acting as a shared symbol of freedom from racial and class inequality in the US.

At the core of the RGP was the BPP; at the center of the BPP was Mao’s Red Book. Consequently, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* was also an intrinsic part of the RGP.



Alex Hing (pictured right), one of the founders of the Red Guard Party, at a protest.

In mid twentieth-century China, the Red Book manifested extremely different meanings. The Cultural Revolution is one reason for this phenomenon.

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<sup>7</sup> Maeda, *Black Panthers, Red Guards and Chinamen*, 1079.

<sup>8</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour* (Social Science Information, Sage Journals, 1974), 65 – 93.



Criticize the old world and build a new world with Mao Zedong Thought as a weapon,  
Cultural Revolution Campaign, 1966

This paper focuses on the period 1966 to 1971. The time frame falls within the Cultural Revolution period<sup>9</sup> and not only coincides with the height of the popularity enjoyed by Mao's Red Book in China and America<sup>10</sup> but also aligns with the demise of Lin Biao, the creator of the Red Book.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, an array of narratives exists regarding the definition of the Cultural Revolution. In this paper, the Cultural Revolution is defined as a socio-political revolutionary movement within China between the late 1960s and 1970s. It was launched by Mao Zedong, the founder of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in 1966 to rid the CCP and society of "revisionists" and remnants of the previous traditional and capitalist order.

During this period, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* was a propaganda piece engineered by Lin Biao, leader of the People's Land Army. Lin believed in centring Mao Zedong Thought in all aspects of society, initially creating the book to arm soldiers with Maoist belief.<sup>12</sup> The book was made public in 1966, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution to equip political activists and revolutionaries with the necessary ammunition.<sup>13</sup>

The Red Book contains a collection of quotations from Mao's writings and speeches, with relevant sections collated and organized thematically. A broad range of topics are covered, primarily all rooted in the Chinese context and aimed at

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth G. Lieberthal, "Cultural Revolution," Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed November 21, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cultural-Revolution/Rise-and-fall-of-Lin-Biao-1969-71>.

<sup>10</sup> Cook, eds., *Mao's Little Red Book*.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick C. Teiwess and Warren Sun, *Riding The Tiger During The Cultural Revolution: The Tragedy of Lin Biao* (University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 1 – 9.

<sup>12</sup> Cook, eds, *Mao's Little Red Book*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Cook, eds, *Mao's Little Red Book*, 10.



revolutionaries. The significant symbolic difference of the Red Book between American and Chinese political activists calls for looking at the root cause of its popularity and acquired meaning.



**Chairman Mao teaches us: It is up to us to organize the people. As for the reactionaries in China, it is up to us to organize the people to overthrow them. Revolutionary rebel factions unite to wage the Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the end, 1967.**

This paper classifies the Red Guards as political activists and revolutionaries within China during the Cultural Revolution period. For these revolutionaries, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* was a central ally.

The Red Guards were student protesters in their teens and twenties. The government paid for activists to travel the country to exchange revolutionary ideas, allowing them to ensure the destruction of the Four Olds and the establishment of the Four News.<sup>14</sup>

Seemingly, this system encouraged activists to destroy old feudal and bourgeois influences on society, specifically old ideas, old culture, old customs and habits, to replace them with more 'Communist ideals,' producing a new way of life. Yet, the reality of this policy was the destruction of contemporary society to build a new one centering Mao's philosophy. Violence was often unjustifiably used by young people to achieve this aim. As is evident from the public burning of books deemed anti-Mao and anti-Communist,<sup>15</sup> the forced removal and attack on intellectuals and

<sup>14</sup>"The Red Guards 1966 – 1967," China's Cultural Revolution, Accessed Sep 20, 2022, <https://laurenream.github.io/culturalrevolution/redguards.html>.

<sup>15</sup>"In The Cultural Revolution, Ai Weiwei's Father Burned the Family's Books," New York Times, December 31, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/31/books/review/ai-weiwei-by-the-book-interview.html>.

those within positions of authority,<sup>16</sup> and the erasure and destruction of street names, shop signs, parks<sup>17</sup> and so on.

The Red Guards forcefully established their chosen new way of life, following the perceived removal of the previous one, in various locations across China. Specifically, political activists established a New Order through violent destruction, attacking authority figures, and conducting propaganda work while studying and spreading the works of Chairman Mao and his ideology. The New Order would be the by-product of a society violently moulded around Mao Zedong Thought.

The primary focus of this essay will be on what political activism and revolution meant to the Red Guards. That is not to condone the violence enacted by the young or trivialize the experiences of the victims of the Cultural Revolution.

### **Revolution and political activism and their meaning within Communist China**



A group of Red Guards, 1967

In China, the Red Book was used to show loyalty to Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution. For example, Red Guards examined whether individuals carried it and could quote from it, as well as wielding the book themselves. *Quotations from Chairman Mao* provided them with the vocabulary and the criteria with which to judge the loyalty of others to Maoist ideology. Additionally, the Red Book provided a tool for the individual to sink further into Mao Zedong Thought (Maoist beliefs refer to the philosophy Mao produced within his speeches and works that built upon Marxist-Leninism), as expressed in the foreword of its second edition.<sup>18</sup> The Red Book, therefore, became an intrinsic part of the Cultural Revolution and life within China between 1966 - 1971.

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<sup>16</sup>Barbara Demick, “Uncovering The Cultural Revolution’s Awful Truths,” *Atlantic*, Accessed November 21, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/01/chinas-rebel-historians/617265/>.

<sup>17</sup> “Guided by Mao Zedong Thought, Red Guards Destroy the Old and Establish the New,” *Peking Review*, Sep 2, 1966, 17 – 18, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/peking-review/1966/PR1966-36m.htm>.

<sup>18</sup>Cook, eds., *Mao’s Little Red Book*, 10

Undoubtedly, the Red Book's influence in China and the US was noteworthy.

To understand the Red Guards, we must first understand the school system in which students received their education. In a report requested by the Central Committee on policy implementation in 1959, the necessity of providing political education to the people is outlined.<sup>19</sup> The report notes that developing the proletariat's political service was fundamental to the government's education policy. It also reveals the extent to which politics was made an intrinsic part of daily life within Communist China. The education system, viewed as a tool, was used by the government to produce the "perfect citizens." The fact that education aimed to serve political development suggests that the perceived ideal society would be one in which each individual was politically active, serving as a pawn to feed the machine that is the state. Education was, therefore, considered an appliance employed to produce political citizens. Mao aimed to infuse politics and ideology at the core of thinking. The goal was to produce an inherently political population by nature, manufactured within an education system centered around Maoist belief and Marxist ideology. Evidently, Mao succeeded with his production of the Red Guard generation.



A group of Red Guards reading Mao's Red Book aloud, 1966

To this generation, political activism was defined by support for Mao and loyalty to the state. This support was represented in the format of the Red Book, as proven by the diary of the Red Guard, Yu Luoke.<sup>20</sup> In the diary, Yu notes his thoughts and daily activities during the Red Summer of 1966. On May 7th, he stated: "Today everything must be guided by Mao Zedong Thought." His statement shows that political activism was compulsory in daily life and was expected for becoming efficient

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<sup>19</sup> "Zhonggong zhongyang pi zhuan wenhua bu dangzu "guanyu jinhou wenhua yishu gongzuo fangzhen he renwu wenti de baogao [The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China approves and forwards the report of the Party Group of the Ministry of Culture on the policy and tasks of the future cultural and art work]," 1960.02.22, Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

<sup>20</sup> Yu, Luoke, "Yu Luoke riji [Yu Luoke's diary]", 1966.01-08, Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

citizens in Communist China. As reflected by Yu's diary, students centred their lives around mastering Mao Zedong Thought and participating in daily activities regarding political activism to fulfil the duties of a good citizen. Anita Chan reiterates this point: "Party educators enforced Mao's teachings, and the subsequent system of normalised political activism led to competitiveness to prove personal devotion, exaggerated needs to conform to political orthodoxy and encouraged prejudice against outcaste groups."<sup>21</sup> In this regard, in addition to showing loyalty to the state and Chairman Mao, political activism was an activity in which young people participated not only to fit in with their peers but also to maintain their position as part of the in-group to sustain their sense of identity.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, for many, political activism was considered an act of conformity and devotion in China during the Cultural Revolution.



School children holding up Mao's Red Book, 1968

Schools embedded Mao Zedong Thought into the curriculum. However, the eruption of the Cultural Revolution disrupted the formal education system. Instead, students began questioning those in positions of authority, including teachers. Within these circumstances, Mao's Red Book replaced the more formal education system that was now deemed unreliable and tainted with "revisionists." Revisionists referred to all those considered to uphold bourgeois ideology.<sup>23</sup>

Additionally, the Red Book further enhanced the culture of politics present in China. A speech delivered by the First Secretary of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee is one example of this.<sup>24</sup> In the speech, the secretary summarizes his trips

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<sup>21</sup> Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour* (Social Science Information, Sage Journals, 1974), 65 – 93.

<sup>23</sup> "Chairman Mao on Mao Zedong Thought," *Peking Review*, January 14, 1980, 23 - 26. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/peking-review/1980/PR1980-02b.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Yan Hongyan, "Zai yunnan zhaotong de, zhuan jiguan ganbu hui shang de jianghua yunnan sheng wei di yi shuji yanhongyan [Speech at the cadres meeting of local and specialised agencies in



to various counties declaring that many spoke of the works of Chairman Mao throughout his travels. Furthermore, within his short speech, the secretary repeats the phrase, 'Mao Zedong Thought' over thirty times. The Red Book succeeded in centering Mao, with his ideology at the core of daily life. The book exhibited loyalty to the state, Mao Zedong and his ideology. To possess the Red Book signified the conformity of the individual. Moreover, the book effectively performed its role being a reminder of oppression to those who quietly disagreed with the Cultural Revolution while wielding it as a means of survival.

Similarly, the role of revolution in society became normalized; revolution was judged an ongoing process, an essential continuous revision of society, stopped only when a Communist utopia had materialized. Mao presents ideas around revolution being vital in building new societies in his essay, "Combat Liberalism," where he states: "A Communist should look upon revolution as his very life."<sup>25</sup> Revolution was, therefore, a skill the individual devoted themselves to, as was political activism. Correspondingly, the work of Mao Zedong often emphasized the need for conformity, announcing that "the supreme test... of a Communist is whether they conform...and enjoy the support of... the majority."<sup>26</sup> As suggested by Mao, to be a good communist was to conform. Ideas surrounding identity were therefore based on conformity. Conformity in the context of late sixties and early seventies China meant participating in political activism, revolutionary campaigns and arming oneself with Mao Zedong Thought, a criterion sculpted by the desire to perfect the Communist society created in 1949.

The introduction of Mao's Red Book provided political activists with a means to rely on their knowledge and self-revolutionize. One could now educate themselves instead of trusting third parties to transmit Mao's ideology. Within this context, the Red Book, the guidebook to Maoist Ideology, became a symbol of conformity to Mao's philosophy and the state. Many victims of the Cultural Revolution described having possession and knowledge of the book as essential for survival.<sup>27</sup> Such statements provide evidence of the oppression those forced to remain in silence faced during the tumultuous period of the Cultural Revolution. People who lacked possession of the Red Book were stereotyped as being anti-Mao; its possession helped Red Guards determine who was a member of the in-group that supported Mao. The book often determined life or death in China, and thus it adopted its symbolism as a weapon for oppression.

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Zhaotong, Yunan, Yan Hongyan, first secretary of the Yunan Provincial Party Committee],” 1966.03.04, *Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku*, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

<sup>25</sup> Mao Zedong, "Fandui ziyou zhuyi [Against Liberalism]," 1937.09.07, *Zhongwen makesi zhuyi wenku*.

<sup>26</sup> Mao Zedong, "Lun lianhe zhengfu [On Coalition Government]," 1945.04.24, *Zhongwen makesi zhuyi wenku*.

<sup>27</sup> "Who, What, Why: What is the Little Red Book?" BBC News, Accessed Sep 20, 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34932800>.

### **Revolution and political activism and their meaning within Capitalist America**

This paper will now focus on political activism in America. In this section, this author will analyze the reasons behind the revolutionary spirit in the US in the 1960s, while defining revolution and political activism within the American context. These two aspects will act as pillars in exploring the role of Mao's Red Book in the late sixties and early seventies America.



**The Black Panther Party, 1967**

The grave inequalities and racism in America, and the purge of leading Civil Rights leaders powered the revolutionary spirit of the BPP and the RGP. Although the BPP instigated the creation of the RGP, Asian American radicals already existed before the panthers' influence because of racism against Chinese Americans. State-sanctioned violence and discrimination against minority groups motivated many to become political activists.

Political activism in the US during this period was defined as an anti-establishment counterculture, with the Civil Rights Movement comprising the largest movement. Being a political activist in America in the late sixties and early seventies indicated an individual's opposition to the existing systems. Thus, the American context is in direct contrast with the reasons for political activism in China.



**1960s Boston Civil Rights Movement**

To be a political activist in 1960s America implied opposition to the imperialist and capitalist ideology that existed within and dominated the American government. In this way, the aim of revolution in the US was different to that of China. In America, revolution aimed to overthrow the existing unjust systems. Consequently, ideas associated with revolution were labeled dangerous by the American government. Conversely, as previously defined, revolution in China in the late sixties meant an essential revision of society needed to perfect Communism. The attitudes of the two governments toward the concept of revolution were opposite.

The two countries allocated different definitions, and subsequently separate connotations, to the concepts of political activism and revolution, due to differences in political ideology; and the subsequent impact the differences in political ideology had on either country's culture. Maoist beliefs emphasize the shared thought and conformity of the collective<sup>28</sup> and the necessity of continued revolution.<sup>29</sup> Within such a cultural context, political activism became an act of conformity. On the other hand, imperialist, Capitalist America emphasized individual free thought<sup>30</sup> and based ideas around survival and growth on exploiting other nations and peoples. Within such a cultural context, it is logical that political activism would grow to symbolize the want to unite ideology among and within minority groups to stop exploitation. Furthermore, the unity between minority groups in the US corresponds with the findings from Social Identity Theory experiments.<sup>31</sup> The experiments discovered that when arranged into groups, individuals develop in-group favoritism, preferring to support and help those within their in-group. As the BPP and RGP shared the experience of discrimination, their cooperation is unsurprising.



Asian American Labor Protest near Chinatown, 1960s

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<sup>28</sup> Mao, Zedong, "Lun lianhe zhengfu [On Coalition Government]", 1945.04.24, Zhongwen makesi zhuyi wenku.

<sup>29</sup> Mao, Zedong, "Fandui ziyou zhuyi [Against Liberalism]", 1937.09.07, Zhongwen makesi zhuyi wenku.

<sup>30</sup> Janan Ganesh, "The 1960s were about Capitalism, not Radicalism," *The Financial Times*, April 13, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/1a9cca34-3e2f-11e8-b7e0-52972418fec4>.

<sup>31</sup> Travis Dixon, "Key Studies Minimal Group Paradigm (SIT - Tajfel et al)," *Social and Cultural Psychology*, IB Psychology, Accessed November 21, 2022, <https://www.themantic-education.com/ibpsych/2016/10/25/key-studies-minimal-group-paradigm-sit-tajfel-et-al/>.

As established, revolution and political activism possessed separate meanings within China and the US in the late sixties. Revolution in America aimed to displace existing cultures and systems, while revolution in China aimed to achieve the perfect communist state by enhancing conformity and continuing the revolutionary spirit.

The revolutionary speeches and writings included in Mao's Red Book countered the culture, philosophy and ideology produced by the American government. As a result, the Red Book became a symbol of liberation and freedom for many political activists within the American context. Indeed, the book provided the vocabulary and framework to understand grievances with the imperialist and capitalist American system. Accordingly, it applied to the counterculture that defined political activism and revolution in the late sixties and early seventies America. The book being of portable size and stylistically written to be "accessible even to peasants"<sup>32</sup> enhanced its symbolism of liberation because many perceived the book as inherently promoting education and liberty for all. Within a collectivist society like China, such a concept was not revolutionary. However, within the sixties capitalist America, it was rebellious.

*Quotations from Chairman Mao* provided the blueprint for the party's structure and ideology, becoming an integral part of the BPP's compulsory reading list.<sup>33</sup> The book even played a crucial role in providing BPP members with their distinct militant aesthetic.<sup>34</sup> Party leaders, Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton, and by extension members as well, were heavily influenced by the words contained within the Red Book. It is evident when reading Seale's account that the book was used in all aspects of the party: "Me and Huey... used the Red Books and spread them throughout the organization... Huey made it a point that the revolutionary principles... cited in the Red Book should be applied wherever they could... Where the book said 'Chinese people of the Communist Party,' Huey would say 'Change that to the BPP. Change the Chinese people to black people. When he saw a particular principle told in Chinese terms, he would change it to apply to us."<sup>35</sup> The RGP also adopted the Panthers' ten-point program, replicating the actions of Huey with the Red Book, instead substituting the word "yellow" for "black."<sup>36</sup>

The respect the Panthers possessed for Mao and his Red Book culminated in a visit to China by leader Huey P. Newton in 1971, a year before Nixon received an invitation.

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<sup>32</sup> Cook, eds., *Mao's Little Red Book*, 2.

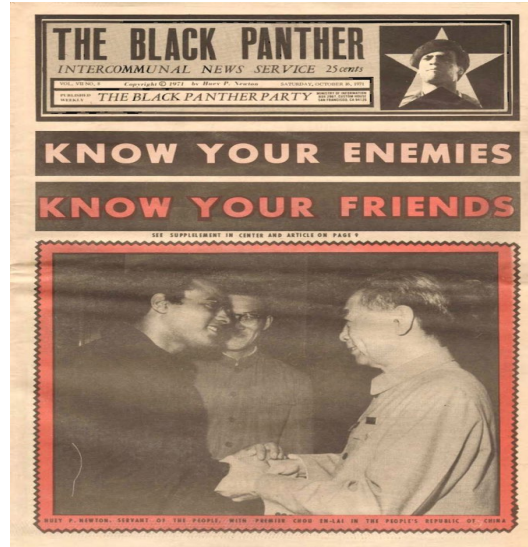
<sup>33</sup> Mullen, Cook, eds., *Mao's Little Red Book*, 246.

<sup>34</sup> Mullen, Cook, eds., *Mao's Little Red Book*, 245.

<sup>35</sup> Bobby Seale, *Seize The Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (New York Vintage Books, 1970), 82.

<sup>36</sup> Seale, *Seize The Time*, 1090.





**BPP Official Newspaper, Huey P. Newton with Premier Zhou Enlai in the People's Republic of China, 1971**

The Red Book's promotion of liberation, freedom, and rebelliousness is apparent in the Free Huey Campaign.

The Free Huey Campaign was the response to the imprisonment of BPP co-founder Huey P. Newton. In May 1969, the party held a rally to demand his release. It received support from the RGP and the Asian American Political Alliance (APPA).<sup>37</sup>

At the rally, BPP members distributed copies of Mao's Red Book. The speaker at the rally held up the book and announced: "I want everybody to show the United States government this Red Book...you hear that by chairman Mao, Red China, that's what they got in their hands."<sup>38</sup> Such a statement at a political rally against the institutions and systems that deemed revolutionaries criminals proves the defiance associated with possession of knowledge from Mao's Red Book in late sixties America. Moreover, this event also demonstrates that minority groups viewed political activism and revolution as a means to achieve liberation and freedom. The pro-revolutionary content of Mao's Red Book that actively opposed the imperialist and capitalist systems in America was attractive to political activists such as the BPP.

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<sup>37</sup> Maeda, *Black Panthers, Red Guards and Chinamen*, 1079 – 1103.

<sup>38</sup> Sfxvideos020. "May Day 1969 - Black Panthers Rally Free Huey." Youtube Video, 13:21. Sep 8, 2012. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rD8hKpFDIIo&list=PLhCKnoOs3t-sl3XO8cHw7YuQ\\_0-wcmmJ0&index=2&t=479s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rD8hKpFDIIo&list=PLhCKnoOs3t-sl3XO8cHw7YuQ_0-wcmmJ0&index=2&t=479s).



**BPP Members Holding Up Mao's Red Book at a Rally for the Free Huey Campaign, May 1969**

Cultural context and definitions prescribed to the concept of revolution and political activism played an essential role in influencing the symbolism that grew around *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. From this perspective, those within the movements influenced the symbolism attached to the book in either society. Within the Chinese context, the book became a compulsory part of society, facilitated by a culture of shared conformity. Individuals interpreted a lack of knowledge or possession of the book as a signal of an absence of loyalty to Mao, resulting in brutal persecution. In this regard, the symbolism of oppression and conformity that the book adopted was greatly influenced by political activists in China and other members of society.

On the other hand, within the American context, political activists viewed Mao's Red Book as a tool to produce a new, more equal society. The book completely opposed the American government and its unfair system. Thus, it is sensible that those displeased with the inequalities within American society would associate the book and its alternative system with freedom and liberation.

### **Mao's aims in releasing the book at home**



**Long Live the Proletarian Headquarters led by Chairman Mao and assisted by Vice-Chairman Lin, January 1969**

The Red Book was clearly influential in both Chinese and American society, but the core question remains as to how this text was disseminated abroad. Mao released and distributed the Red Book in both nations for different aims, which supported their respective constructions of symbolism.



The July 3rd and July 24th are Chairman Mao's great strategic plans! Unite with forces that can be united to strike surely, accurately and relentlessly, 1968

The policy of cleansing China's environment of revisionists and counterrevolutionaries inspired the persecution of those who did not possess the Red Book. Through the work of Lin Biao, Mao Zedong's thoughts became the foundation of society.

To explain, following the failures of the Great Leap Forward, Mao withdrew from the central leadership position of the party. Soviet revisionism and less radical leadership among the CCP during this time spurred Mao's fear of losing control of his communist dream and the legacy he wished to manufacture himself. Mao used the Cultural Revolution to remove opposition in the party and society and cement his control over the state.

Under these conditions, Lin Biao produced Mao's Red Book. The text was initially intended for the People's Liberation Army, proclaiming that the Red Book was to be "issued to every soldier in the...army, just as we issue weapons."<sup>39</sup> The desire to hone the loyalty to and power of Mao within the army is clear from this statement; significant influence within the army would translate into better control of society, which was Mao's desire post-1961.

It is clear that even in 1964, Mao and Lin Biao wished to strengthen Mao's influence within society. In 1966, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, a book created to arm

<sup>39</sup> Cook, eds., *Mao's Little Red Book*, 2.

soldiers, was officially released to the general public. Its release equipped everyday civilians with a weapon designed to increase loyalty to, and knowledge of, Mao Zedong's philosophy. This public release demonstrates how the revolution was aimed equally at dealing with opposition and increasing devotion to Mao.

The Red Book became the universal symbol of Mao Zedong Thought. In China, people treated it with respect and care; a culture was built around the daily study and detailed knowledge of the Red Book. Mao had succeeded in institutionalizing *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. Subsequently, it became a key discussion point at committee meetings across the country, as shown by the aforementioned Yunan meeting. Furthermore, the institutionalization of the book is also evident within official reports regarding the distribution and printing of the Red Book. A report issued in 1966 mentions that fifty-one million additional copies of the Red Book were to be printed and supplied to enterprises, institutions, schools and agencies.<sup>40</sup> The systematic distribution of the book to all of society and the popularity surrounding the book allowed the chairman to institutionalize devotion and loyalty to himself. In this way, the Red Book not only enhanced Mao's existing influence but also served as an institutionalized reminder to his opponents of his hold on Chinese society. *Quotations from Chairman Mao* was labeled the most trustworthy source of knowledge, and those who failed to demonstrate their devotion were victims of persecution. That the book took on the symbolism of conformity and oppression is unsurprising, as the aim of its creation stemmed from the desire to control and enhance the power enjoyed by Mao.

Additionally, within his works, Mao continuously expresses that political ideology is the greatest weapon an individual may possess. Lin Biao reiterates this point in the foreword to the second edition of the Red Book: "Mao Zedong Thought is a powerful ideological weapon against imperialism."<sup>41</sup> By equipping the people with the Red Book, an object Mao deemed the greatest weapon, Mao and Lin Biao were preparing and training the Chinese people for the prospect of nuclear war, a real threat within the Cold War environment. With such an aim, it is understandable that the Red Book would inherit the symbolism of conformity and oppression; as with any military regime, obedience and loyalty to the state were paramount.

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<sup>40</sup> "Zhonggong zhongyang pi zhuan wenhua bu dangwei guanyu 'mao zhuxi yulu' yin zhi faxing gongzuo de qingshi baogao [The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party approves and forwards the request report of the Party Committee of the Ministry of Culture on the printing and distribution of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*," 1966.03.23, Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

<sup>41</sup> Lin Biao, "Mao zhuxi yulu zaiban qianyan [Foreword to the reprint of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* by Lin Biao]," 1996.12.6, Zhongwen makesi zhuyi wenku.





Heads can be cut, blood can flow, but Mao Zedong Thought cannot be lost, 1970

### Mao's aims in releasing the book abroad

Alternatively, the release of the Red Book abroad satisfied different aims.

The focal point of Mao's foreign policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s was encouraging Revolution abroad. International dissemination of the Red Book would allow for the conversion of individuals to Maoism, an ideology designed to liberate those suffering in capitalist systems. In this way, Mao intended to free those trapped within capitalist systems from the oppression they faced by providing an alternative ideology rooted in equality in the form of the Red Book. The desire to support and help those abroad obtain freedom is evident in statements of support for African Americans released by the Chairman.<sup>42</sup> In these statements, Mao spoke against the mistreatment of black Americans, clarifying his support for their freedom. Furthermore, in a world where war was a real threat and worldwide revolution a real possibility, supporting and encouraging revolutionaries abroad could increase ally communist states that would benefit China. Hence, the reason China viewed supporting Revolution abroad as attractive.

When we compare the Chinese version of the Red Book with its official second-edition English translation,<sup>43</sup> the different aims of releasing the book at home and abroad come to light. In the Chinese version, the fourth section of the Red Book titled: "The Correct Handling of Contradictions among People," is riddled with the phrase "我国."<sup>44</sup> For most of the text, this phrase enjoys the standard translation of "our country." However, when first translated, a strategic translation is chosen. When the phrase first appears in the expression: "在我国现在的条件下," it is cleverly translated to "China." Arguably, provided the linguistic context, the translation "our

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<sup>42</sup> Mao Zedong, "Zhichi meiguó heiren fandi zhongzu qishi douzheng de shengming [Statement in support of the struggle of black Americans against racial discrimination]," 1963.08.08, Zhongwen makesi zhuyi wenku.

<sup>43</sup> Mao Zedong and Lin Biao, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Peking Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 4.28

<sup>44</sup> Mao Zedong and Lin Biao, "Mao zhuxi yulu, si, zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun [*Quotations from Chairman Mao, the correct handling of contradictions among people*]," 45 – 58.

country” would be more likely in this scenario. For the remainder of the text, “our country” is chosen as the standard translation for the phrase: “我国.” This decision is made even in scenarios where a translation into “China” or “Chinese” would be effective. For example, “在我国人民的政治生活中” could be translated into “within the political life of the Chinese people.” Instead, the official translation for the clause is: “in the political life of our people.” Arguably, the reason the phrase: “我国,” is translated as “China” during its first appearance in the English edition is to remove the China-specific terminology of “our country.” Such a change in phrasing enabled activists such as the BPP to replace the initial “China” with the insertion of their own country, directly allowing them to apply the text to their context. It is as though China were a case study for other revolutionaries in countries such as America. The texts in the RB were translated to inspire revolution abroad, encouraging individuals to fight for liberation and freedom within their context. Considering these aims, it is logical that the book acquired its symbolism of liberty and freedom within America during the rise of the political counterculture in the late sixties and early seventies.



**Black Panthers holding up Quotations from Chairman Mao at Free Huey Rally, 1969**

Furthermore, Lin Biao’s foreword to the second edition clarifies the motive behind disseminating Mao’s Red Book abroad and at home. He states that Mao Zedong Thought is a powerful ideological weapon for opposing imperialism and revisionism.<sup>45</sup> The voice of Lin Biao and Mao are clear in this foreword, telling political activists in sixties and seventies America that the book was a gadget to be used to fight against the unjust imperialist and capitalist governments they opposed. Additionally, the foreword simultaneously associated revisionists with imperialism relating to America for audiences in China. In doing so, Lin Biao further cemented the idea that such individuals opposed Mao and the core state ideology for political activists in China. Moreover, Lin explains that Mao Zedong Thought is the guiding principle for

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<sup>45</sup> Lin, Biao, “Mao zhuxi yulu zaiban qianyan [Foreword to the reprint of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* by Lin Biao],” 1996.12.6, Zhongwen makesi zhuyi wenku.

the party, the army and the country, presenting the expectation of conformity within Cultural Revolution Chinese society. That the book would harbor the symbolism of liberation and freedom within the American context and pose the opposite representation of conformity and oppression within the Chinese context is no surprise.

**Race, Anti-imperialism and Anti-colonial sentiment and their influence on how the book was interpreted in the US vs China**



Members of the BPP, late 1960s

Civil Rights Leaders such as Robert F. Williams and W.E.B Dubois expressed support for communist China, with Williams visiting China in 1966. Huey P. Newton received inspiration equally from the Red book and Williams, a strong advocate of Mao and his philosophy. Due to the success of China in overcoming imperialism and colonialism, many black revolutionaries viewed the country as an inspiration and an ally to the Civil Rights Movement.

Mao, too, played to the image awarded to him as the leader of the liberation of China. As mentioned, the chairman produced multiple statements and speeches declaring support for the African American struggle while condemning racist American policies. When Mao delivered his second statement, in 1968, following the death of Martin Luther King Jr., he called for the “resistance and uprising of all Americans.”<sup>46</sup> In this statement, Mao positioned himself as someone who could provide leadership and guidance to political activists who felt disillusioned by the colonial and imperialist American system.

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<sup>46</sup> Mao Zedong, “Zhichi meiguo heiren kangbao douzheng de shengming [Statement of support for the struggle of black Americans’ fight against violent repression],” 1968.04.16, Zhongwen makesi zhuyi wenku.



**Robert F. Williams in China is presented with a Red Book by Mao, 1966**

Ideas surrounding racial solidarity were at the forefront in America in the late sixties. China was able to relate its experience of imperialism and colonialism to the racial oppression faced by black Americans, due to having successfully subverted imperialism and colonialism.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, it was an attractive ally for political activists during the Civil Rights Movement. As previously mentioned, Huey P. Newton exchanged the words “Chinese people” for “Black people” where applicable when using the Red Book. Such behaviors suggest black Americans saw their own experiences directly reflected in China. In this way, China acted as a case study in the Red Book, providing black Americans with the recipe to achieve liberation and freedom.

When discussing the role of racial identification, the RGP saw their experience reflected in China more so than the Panthers. Maeda notes that the RGP were pro-China, going as far as to forcefully dictate other Asian Americans also identify with the Communist country.<sup>48</sup> The BPP’s support for Mao also resulted in a similar forced identification with China upon Asian Americans. David Milliard, the chairman of the BPP at an RGP rally in 1969, declared: “If you can’t relate to China, then you can’t relate to the Panthers.”<sup>49</sup> This statement proves the extent to which Mao’s ideology had influenced the Panthers and the forced association of Asian American radicalism with support for Mao, Mao Zedong Thought and Mao’s Red Book.

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<sup>47</sup>Ruodi Duan, “Black Power in China: Mao’s Support for African American “Racial Struggle as Class Struggle,” Fairbank Blog Centre, Medium, May 19, 2018, <https://medium.com/fairbank-center/black-power-in-china-maos-support-for-african-american-racial-struggle-as-class-struggle-7673f2a6abb>.

<sup>48</sup> Maeda, *Black Panthers, Red Guards and Chinamen*, 1083 – 1084.

<sup>49</sup> Maeda, *Black Panthers, Red Guards and Chinamen*, 1083.





Asian American protest against racism, 1970s

Many pro-China Asian American activists longed for a homeland they felt had been liberated from class and racial inequalities.<sup>50</sup> Similar to the BPP, they viewed China as having succeeded in freeing itself from the West, imperialism and oppression. Existing within a society where racial discrimination was the norm, it is sensible that a proposed alternative that claimed liberation from such inequalities became romanticized in the minds of political activists in America. The book provided the blueprint for achieving the liberty and freedom enjoyed by China. Under these circumstances, the Red Book would acquire its symbolism as a tool for liberation and freedom in the American context.

Conversely, in the context of China, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* did not have the same racial associations. Ideas around the book providing liberation and freedom from racial inequalities, colonialism and imperialism, therefore, had a limited impact on its symbolism within the Chinese context.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, between 1966 - 1971, Mao's Red Book acquired two different symbolic meanings. It was a symbol of liberation and freedom in America and a symbol of conformity and oppression for many in China. The symbolism grew because of Mao's different aims in distributing the book at home and abroad and those within the movements attaching meaning. Mao reacted to the popularity and influence the book enjoyed. His subsequent behavior further solidified the symbolism the book received in either country. Overall, the book was successful in both societies. Regardless of the respective symbolism, Mao's Red Book became a weapon wielded to provide individuals with power. In the American context, it offered those suffering from oppression a sense of agency and equipped them with the knowledge needed to organize and seek power. The BPP and RGP are examples of this. Its possession became an act of defiance against a system in which minorities were powerless. Within the Chinese context, the book provided autonomy to political activists who used it to

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<sup>50</sup> Maeda, *Black Panthers, Red Guards and Chinamen*, 1079 – 1103.

enhance their knowledge, providing them with the power to persecute others and question authority figures disagreeing with Mao and his philosophy. Indeed, within either society, political activists partook in the questioning of authority backed by the Red Book. However, in the context of China, clashes with authority were fueled by the desire to spread conformity to Mao Zedong Thought, as opposed to the US, where activists used the weapon of Mao Zedong Thought to attack authority and explore alternative systems of governance. Yet, what was deemed authority, encompassed a greater scope within the Cultural Revolution period in China than the American context where political activists primarily targeted the government, its policies, and existing systems of oppression. Although starkly different, the symbolism adopted in either society demonstrates the power of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. Mao Zedong Thought, through the vehicle of the Red Book, fulfilled its fundamental role as a powerful ideological weapon in both America and China.

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