

The Cultural Revolution and its International Legacies

Modern Chinese History



Questions

- ❑ Was the CR solely a Chinese phenomenon or did it impact on developments in Europe and North America?
- ❑ What was the impact?



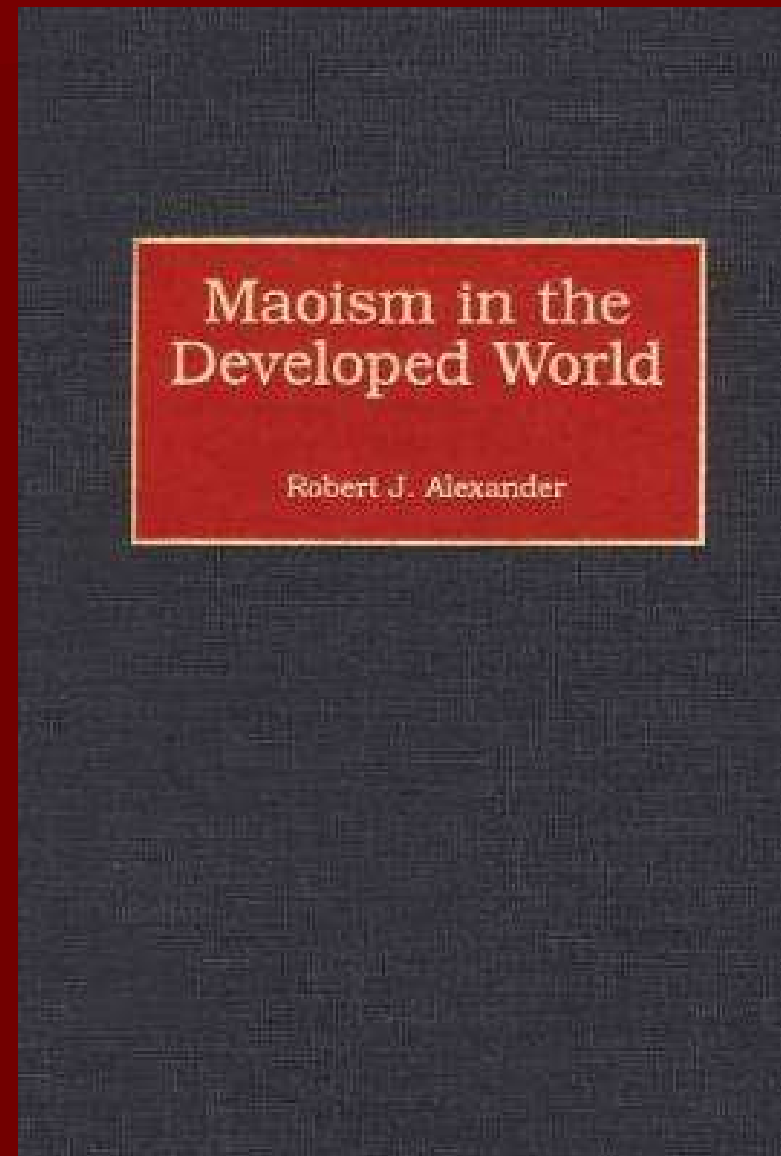
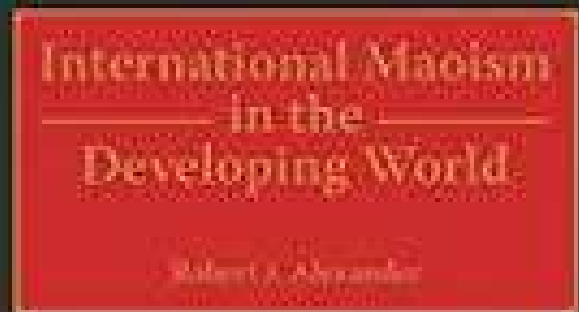
International hopes of revolution

Ditu Publishing House map of the world (1966):
“The socialist system will eventually replace the capitalistsystem; this is an objective law independent of man’s will. However much the reactionaries try to hold back the wheel of history, eventually revolution will take place and will inevitably triumph.” (Lovell, “The Cultural Revolution and its Legacies”, p. 632)

Impact on Counterculture movements in Europe/North America

- ❑ CR galvanised Dadaist student protest
- ❑ Nurtured feminist and gay rights activism
- ❑ Legitimised urban guerrilla terrorism
- ❑ Bolstered anti-racist civil rights campaigns and Marxist-Leninist party building (US)
- Did CR/Maoism strengthen the political left over the long term? Or did it contribute to the splintering of the left and the resurgence of the political right since the 1980s? (e.g. Slavoj Žižek sees connection between Maoism and neoliberalism)
- Can we identify positive legacies of far left-wing politics?

Recent books





Cultural Revolution Fever in Europe

- Admiration for China's anti-imperialist struggle (anti Vietnam War)
- Inspiration for West German student movement; fight against global capitalism; slogan's such as "It's right to rebel" or "Bombard the headquarters" justify violence;
- "You are old, we are young, Mao Tse-tung." (Slogan at anti Social Democratic Party demonstration, Berlin 1969)



A view from the US

Raymond Lotta, an early recruit to the Revolutionary Union (the largest pro-Maoist white American party of the 1970s):

“We were outraged by the brutal oppression of black people and the genocidal war in Vietnam ... and by the workings of capitalism and imperialism. We saw socialism in China and the Cultural Revolution as the model for the liberatory solution. This was a “total revolution” – creating an economy and social institutions to serve the people, and mobilizing people to uproot the oppression of women, revolutionize culture and values, and overcome the great chasm between mental and manual labor. Maoist China was inspiring and supporting revolution throughout the world. And for ten years, the Cultural Revolution prevented the restoration of capitalism and the return of all its horrors, what we see in capitalist China today. ” (quoted from Lovell 2016, p. 640)

MAO TSE-TUNG on GUERRILLA WARFARE

Translated and with an Introduction by
Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith USMC (Ret.)



Party building

- After 1968, activists decided to turn to tighter forms of organization → formation of so-called K-groups (Communist groups; between 100-150k persons)
- Andreas Kühn: “political sects using structures and techniques involving the destruction of individualism, unconditional obedience, isolation, and a vague, confused idea of personal redemption.”
- Links to the German Red Army Faction (RAF) and Red Brigades (Italy) assumed.



Post 1970s legacies

Western reception of Maoism had a direct influence

- ❑ on the women's and gay liberation movements,
- ❑ on educational reform and
- ❑ on aspirations to racial equality in public life
- ❑ Impact on postcolonial and subaltern studies



Maoism and Neoliberalism

- ❑ M. collectively dispirited the radical left wing after its euphoric successes of the 1960s, thereby facilitating the rise of right-wing, neoliberal governments during the 1980
- ❑ Reagan's “low intensity conflict” was modelled on Maoist guerrilla warfare
- ❑ Exhaustion and disillusionment of large parts of the political left → lack of energy to fight the upcoming right



Maoism and Neoliberalism

“The sectarianism leaves the scar. People who've lived through the sectarian wars react violently against suggestions of forming new parties ... They have memories of being lost in interminable debates and struggles that led nowhere. Some people's lives were torn apart; they were cast out of their groups. There were some suicides. And definitely a deep, deep demoralization, disillusionment and despair.” (Max Elbaum)

“The political impotence and disillusionment [the extra-parliamentary left] felt ... prompted many to actively reengage the political mainstream and, correspondingly, to express an explicit and unprecedented appreciation for nonviolent politics ... By making German patriotism palatable and traditional values commonsensical, Mogadishu ... helped mainstream conservatives pursue a course of moral and national rejuvenation.” (Karrin Hanshew, quoted in Lovell 2016, p. 649)