

Little Red Book

'Little Red Book' refers to an anthology of quotations attributed to Mao Zedong.

The compilation of Mao's sayings, which drew upon earlier publications, was most influential during the late 1960s and early 1970s. After the Bible, the Little Red Book still is the second most printed text in the world. More than 1 billion copies have been published – mainly in Chinese but also in more than 30 additional languages. The book functioned as the core text for the Cultural Revolution and many transnationally oriented Maoist movements in developing and industrialized societies.

In the English language, the title 'Little Red Book' is taken from the vinyl plastic cover, in which most versions appeared. Alternative connotations are 'Chinese Bible', 'Mao Bible', and especially 'Quotations From Chairman Mao' – a direct translation of the official Chinese title ('Mao zhuxi yulu'). Most probably defence minister Lin Biao initiated the original compilation of the Little Red Book, which was first published as an army handbook in 1964. Two years later, from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution onwards, the book became a study guide for the masses. By 1968 at least 720 million Chinese copies had been printed, and ownership became mandatory for Chinese citizens.

The most common editions of the Little Red Book contain – depending on the specific edition – about 427 aphorisms that are typically five to 15 lines in length. The work is loosely structured into 33 chapters, which were supposed to provide a comprehensive overview of Mao Zedong's thought. Among the Little Red Book's most influential parts were modifications of established socialist doctrines. Very important for the Red Guards and their international sympathizers was the idea that changes in human nature do not merely result from changing material conditions but have to be achieved in addition to socioeconomic revolutions. Other central passages define positive nationalism as the struggle against the foreign and domestic enemies of socialism. According to the Little Red Book, national liberation movements conducted by socialists are inseparably connected with proletarian internationalism, which is why they differ from 'tribal' kinds of nationalism propounded by imperialist or reactionary forces. Reflecting the fallout with the Soviet Union, the book tends to depict

China as the new leader of a transnational socialist revolution.

In line with this agenda, the Little Red Book not only came to be envisioned as a political guidebook for Chinese citizens but also as the textual fundament of a worldwide movement. Between 1966 and 1972, the Chinese government's Foreign Language Press published bilingual editions or translations into 33 languages of Communist, Western and Third World societies. For example, editions in Russian, Hungarian, Serbian, Spanish, French, English, German, Arabic, Thai, Arabic, Persian and Hindi were printed in China and then disseminated. In many countries independent reprints of the Little Red Book appeared in addition to these publications. In the United States, for instance, the first edition of the Little Red Book was published as a Bantam paperback in 1967.

The international influence of the Little Red Book paralleled the national and transnational topographies of Maoism. For example, around the time of 1968 the book was very prominent among transnational student groups in Western societies. Also the Albanian government under Enver Hoxha promoted the Little Red Book until the end of the Mao era. Furthermore, the work was – and partly continues to be – influential among rebel groups such as the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the Shining Path in Peru, or the Maoist guerrillas in Northeast India as well as Nepal.

During the mid-1970s the Little Red Book was no longer an international bestseller – its transnational rise and decline paralleled the work's evolution in China. In the People's Republic the iconic status of the Little Red Book started to wane during the political consolidation period after 1971 and dropped sharply after the death of Mao Zedong five years later. Starting from the late 1970s, the Chinese government under Deng Xiaoping discouraged its further circulation, even though replicas were published during the centenary of Mao's birth in 1993.

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Bibliography

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Bible; China; Communist Manifesto; Koran; Maoism; socialism; *The Wretched of the Earth*; translation; workers' movements