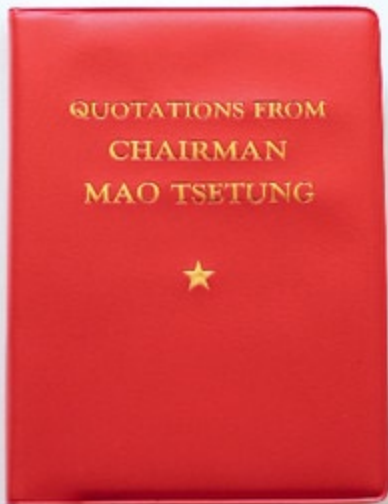


# MAO'S LITTLE RED BOOK

A GLOBAL HISTORY



EDITED BY ALEXANDER C. COOK

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## 14 By the book

### *Quotations from Chairman Mao* and the making of Afro-Asian radicalism, 1966–1975

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*Bill V. Mullen*

We must give active support to the national independence and liberation movement in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as to the peace movement and to just struggles in all the countries of the world.

War and Peace

A defining moment in the history of US radicalism's Maoist turn remains Black Panther Party (BPP) founder Bobby Seale's recollection of the role of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* in building the Panthers' organization and ideology. As Seale recalls it, in early 1967 he and Huey Newton came up with the idea of purchasing sixty copies of the Little Red Book from China Book Store in San Francisco in order to sell them for \$1 apiece on the University of California Berkeley campus. The money was to be used to purchase weapons to arm BPP members against police brutality on the streets of Oakland. Ideologically, Seale writes, the book also became the Panthers' urtext for internationalizing black struggle in the USA:

Me and Huey and the brothers in the core organization used the Red Books and spread them throughout the organization, because Huey made it a point that the revolutionary principles so concisely cited in the Red Book should be applied whenever they could ... Huey would say, "Well, this principle here is not applicable to our situation at this time." Where the book said "Chinese people of the Communist Party," Huey would say "Change that to the Black Panther Party. Change the Chinese people to black people." When he saw a particular principle told in the Chinese terms, he would change it to apply to us.<sup>1</sup>

The facility of Seale's account belies a deeper truth. Newton was well read in Mao's writing before 1966, and like many African American radicals had been paying close attention to China, especially after Mao released his August 8, 1963 "Statement Supporting the Afro-American in their Just Struggle Against Racial Discrimination by US Imperialism."

<sup>1</sup> Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 82.

Yet most of the new BPP members were young, inexperienced, and not yet politically fluent (few of them also spoke or wrote Chinese). Mao's *Quotations* provided a recruitment tool and shorthand distillation of twentieth-century Chinese and revolutionary history even *formatted* so as to appear ready-made to the innumerable challenges facing new cadre: building a party, party discipline, fomenting national liberation struggle, advancing the class struggle, fighting sexism. As such, the Little Red Book was literally *sui generis*: a provisional textbook for building a revolutionary organization that challenged both the form and formalism of earlier historical models. *Quotations* was especially appealing for young African American and Asian American radicals seeking an alternative to what they perceived as a largely Eurocentric body of revolutionary theory. Other writers included in Panther study circles were Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, and Che Guevara. Yet precisely because Maoism insisted on the tactical application of ideas emerging directly from struggle, *Quotations* seemed to offer a blueprint for translating events such as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution onto African American battles being waged miles away. Revolutions could be made, it seemed, by the book.

This chapter will examine the historical conditions and political objectives that contributed to the popularization of Maoism and the Little Red Book in the 1960s and 1970s US left. It will argue that Maoism entered the ideological current of the US left most forcefully as a tool for building a Third World anti-imperialist internationalism created by African American and Asian American activists who saw in the Little Red Book a syncretic device for conceptualizing and advancing their own national self-determination struggles. It will also argue that the Little Red Book's emphasis on revolutionary culture had a lasting impact on Afro-Asian artists and activists especially in the university, who used its edicts in part to help build successful campaigns for ethnic studies and the inclusion of non-white students. At the same time, the chapter will argue that *Quotations from Chairman Mao* contributed through its mash-up form and content to an epistemic horizontalism that took multiple forms: proliferating political sectarianism; irresolution about the relationship of ethnic national movements to proletarian internationalism; and a template for what became multiculturalism in both liberal public and academic spheres. These tendencies, especially immanent in US assimilation of Maoism, also served to displace class struggle and key Marxist political conceptions (such as the importance of building a mass working-class organization). Finally, the gap in objective conditions between revolutionary China and the world's most advanced imperialist superpower made the practical application of Maoist thought a constant,

and in the end insurmountable, challenge. As a result, the intellectual and political usages of the Little Red Book in the USA also came to symbolize the difficulty of building a sustained socialist alternative to capitalism.

Maoism and Maoist thought emerged at the forefront of 1960s Afro-Asian political struggles through two dialectically related events. On June 1, 1962, a gathering of approximately fifty ex-Communist Party (CPUSA) members met in the Hotel Diplomat in New York to found the Progressive Labor Movement (PL). The members conceived PL as an anti-revisionist organization siding with China and Maoism in its recent split with the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> In 1964, PL sponsored a trip to Cuba and recruited several radical black students from the East Bay to attend.<sup>3</sup> By 1965, PL had become the Progressive Labor Party with a membership of more than 600. As Robin D. G. Kelley and Betsy Esch demonstrate, the PLP began dedicated to the idea that black workers were the “key revolutionary force” in building revolution, and had some initial success in recruiting in black communities such as Harlem. Yet by 1968 PLP was attacking all forms of revolutionary nationalism as “reactionary” including the Vietnamese liberation struggle, the Black Panther Party, and even affirmative action.<sup>4</sup> The latter positions especially alienated many younger radicals in a widening movement – especially radicals of color – who began to build their own organizations using Maoist ideas. The second event was the solidarity established between China and African Americans between the time of W. E. B. Du Bois’s well-publicized visits to China in 1959 and 1961, Mao’s statement of support of “Afro-American” liberation released to the USA in 1963, and China’s backing of anti-colonial movements in Africa, especially Nkrumah’s Ghana, a touchstone for many black leftists such as Amiri Baraka, Malcolm X, and Du Bois himself. In combination, these events seemed to affirm Mao’s exhortation that the “spirit of internationalism” could be defined by “a foreigner selflessly adopt(ing) the cause of the Chinese people’s liberation as his own.”<sup>5</sup> Mao’s declaration from *Quotations* that China “must give active support to the national independence and liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America as

<sup>2</sup> A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Autonomedia, 1988), p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution,” in Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, eds., *Afro-Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections Between African Americans and Asian Americans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), p. 177.

well as to the peace movement and to just struggle in all the countries of the world” also helped Asian American and African American radicals relate their own positions as racial minorities in the USA to anti-colonial struggles outside the country.<sup>6</sup> Maoism thus became a primary tool to combat what they perceived as both domestic and international colonialism. It joined their First World experiences of racism to Third World national liberation struggles while simultaneously becoming a tool for building interracial, inter-ethnic solidarities.

*Quotations from Chairman Mao* quickly became the most available, accessible, and *fastest* way for young radicals to imagine themselves undertaking these tasks. At the same time, because the book was never intended for young *American* radicals, it lent itself to exceptionally fluid application and adaptation, becoming simultaneously a blueprint and a blank check for African American and Asian American activists. Its low cost and portability also made the book a mobilizing model for a wide range of political tactics and ideas unified by its broad emphasis on the widely interpreted slogan “Serving the People.” “Our point of departure is to serve the people whole-heartedly and never for a moment divorce ourselves from the masses, to proceed in all cases from the interests of the people and not from one’s self-interest or from the interests of a small group, and to identify our responsibility to the people with our responsibility to the leading organs of the Party.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus after 1966 a mushrooming of study circles, affiliate groups, and new parties began to use the Little Red Book as the basis for political activity. The leadership and notoriety of the new Oakland Black Panther Party as well as the sizable presence of Asian American activists there made the Bay Area a focal point for much of this work. For example, in 1967, a group of young Asian Americans in San Francisco’s Chinatown formed Leway, a contraction of the words “Legitimate Ways.” According to historian Fred Ho, Leway wanted to unite and politicize street youth and gangs and to fill a vacuum for social services and community youth programs particularly in the Chinatown area of San Francisco. Leway organizers used a pool hall on Jackson Street in Chinatown to “hold sessions reading Mao Zedong’s Red Book” and screen films on Third World liberation struggles.<sup>8</sup> Organizer Alex Hing recalls that he came to Leway after working with Black Panthers on the Peace and Freedom Party campaign which petitioned in California to run Eldridge Cleaver

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.      <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Ho, “Introduction,” in Fred Ho with Carolyn Antonio, Diane Fujino and Steve Yip, eds., *Legacy to Liberation: Politics and Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America* (San Francisco: AK Press and Big Red Media, 2000), p. 5.



for president.<sup>9</sup> Hing recalls that a “core group” within Leway, encouraged by Panthers Bobby Seal and David Hilliard, began building a “revolutionary organization” similar to the Panthers. Hing and other Leway members began attending study sessions on Marxism and Leninism at Cleaver’s house. “It started with the Red Book, which we had already been reading,” recalls Hing, “and then we went from the Red Book to longer tracts of Mao like ‘On the State,’ ‘On Contradiction’ and ‘On Practice’ and we were basically studying the same thing the Panthers were studying.”<sup>10</sup> Out of the study group, Leway and Panther members hit upon the idea of forming the “Red Guard Party,” a paramilitary-style organization named in tribute to its Chinese counterpart. In 1969, the Red Guard released “Red Guard Program and Rules” modeled closely on the Panthers’ ten-point program and patterned on sections of the Little Red Book. “Program and Rules” called for decent housing, education, exemption from state military service, an end to police brutality, full employment, and for US government recognition of the People’s Republic of China. The document referred to “Our leader Mao Tse-Tung” and cited this material from Chapter III of the *Quotations*, “Socialism and Communism”: “The Socialist system will eventually replace the Capitalist system; this is an objective law independent of Man’s will.”<sup>11</sup> The document also laid out a twelve-point “Rules of the Red Guard” and reprinted verbatim “Points of Attention” and “3 Main Rules of Discipline” from section XXVI on “Discipline” from *Quotations*.<sup>12</sup> The latter were drafted originally as instruction to the People’s Liberation Army in 1947 and first published in *Selected Military Writings*.

In 1971, the Red Guard merged with the New York City-based I Wor Kuen (IWK). I Wor Kuen is Cantonese for “Society of the Harmonious Righteous Fist,” a moniker taken from the Boxer Rebellion in China at the turn of the century. IWK was formed as a revolutionary collective mainly of radical students and working-class youth in November, 1969. Like the Red Guard Party, it organized “Serve the People” programs based on the Black Panther Party Survival Programs.<sup>13</sup> In March 1970, IWK began a door-to-door tuberculosis testing campaign in New York’s Chinatown at a time when Chinatown had no hospital facilities or Chinese-speaking staff.<sup>14</sup> It also organized childcare school programs.

<sup>9</sup> Alex Hing, former minister of information for the Red Guard Party and founding member of I Wor Kuen, interviewed by Fred Ho and Steve Yip in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, p. 283.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285. <sup>11</sup> Mao, *Quotations*, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Ho, “Introduction,” p. 404; Mao, *Quotations*, pp. 256–57.

<sup>13</sup> Ho, “Introduction,” p. 6. <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

When IWK and the Red Guard Party began discussions about a merger in 1970, a “two-line struggle emerged between day-to-day grassroots organizing for revolution versus a terrorist or ultra-militarist position that advocated armed urban guerilla actions to ‘incite’ the people to revolution.”<sup>15</sup> Debates about paramilitarism led to discussions of male chauvinist practices – recalling the Little Red Book’s Chapter XXXI on “Women,” and resulted in the development of collective childcare to allow female cadres to participate in political work.<sup>16</sup> In July, 1971, when they merged, the groups retained the name I Wor Kuen and released a twelve-point program inspired by the Black Panther Party and Young Lords Party, a New York-based Puerto Rican organization that had also in part been inspired by Maoist ideas. The twelve-point program broadly paraphrased major principles from *Quotations*, calling for self-determination for all colonized and oppressed peoples, an end to male chauvinism, an end to US imperialism (including the “Amerikan military” and an end to “immigration and emigration harassment”), and finally an open call for a socialist society.<sup>17</sup>

Before its demise, the Red Guard Party carried out public marches to commemorate China’s May Fourth movement, supported the Third World Student Strike at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley, collaborated with San Francisco Newsreel (later Third World Newsreel) on weekly film screenings, attempted a Breakfast for Children Program under the Panthers’ direction, and worked in coalition with organizer Alice Barkley to fight the gentrification of Chinatown.<sup>18</sup> Testimonials from contemporary activists demonstrate the symbiotic nature of those activities in radicalizing Bay Area activists and the role of the Little Red Book in that process. For example, Steve Yip recalls entering Berkeley in the fall of 1969 specifically to hook up with the new Asian American Political Alliance formed through the Third World Student Strike. One result was new Ethnic Studies programs at San Francisco State and Berkeley. As a freshman in the fall of 1969, Yip recalls being introduced to Mao’s *Quotations* in the newly founded Asian Studies course. “As radical intellectuals,” he writes, “many of us were particularly struck by Mao’s comment that ‘If you want knowledge, you must take part in the practice of changing society. If you want to know the taste of a pear, you must change the pear by eating it yourself . . . If you want to know the theory and methods of revolution, you must take

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> I Wor Kuen, “12 Point Program and Platform” in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, p. 407.

<sup>18</sup> Hing, interview, in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, p. 288.

part in revolution.”<sup>19</sup> Inspired specifically by the Cultural Revolution’s call to Chinese students to “serve the people,” Yip and other activists left Berkeley in December 1969, and opened the Asian Community Center (ACC) in one of the basements of the International Hotel on Kearny Street in Chinatown. The I-Hotel, as it was known, famous as a low-cost haven for Chinese immigrants and Chinatown residents, would become something like an unofficial headquarters for the Asian American Bay Area left, and the site of a long campaign against the eviction of tenants and destruction of the hotel. Yip and comrades contributed by opening Everybody’s Bookstore to disseminate news and information about China and other Third World liberation struggles. “All literature from China were priced cheaply as part of socialist China’s policy to assist revolutionary forces internationally,” recalls Yip, “whether it was Mao’s little Red Book and collected works, pamphlets by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, or periodicals from China.”<sup>20</sup> The ACC also published a political platform in its newsletter modeled closely on the Black Panther Party ten-point program, the Red Guard Program, and the Little Red Book’s taxonomic structure of political themes: “What we See”; “What we Want”; “What we Believe.”<sup>21</sup> (Indeed, the publication of programmatic lists of principles and demands by many US left organizations should best be understood as a generic convention modeled on both the Black Panther Party ten-point program and on the Little Red Book itself.) The list included demands for adequate housing, medical care, employment, and education, and called for Asian unity built by cadre-style discipline reminiscent again of the Red Book: “Our people must be educated to move collectively for direct action.”<sup>22</sup>

The ACC and Everybody’s Bookstore laid the groundwork for the formation one year later of Wei Min Shu (WMS), a Maoist, anti-imperialist group formed in partial response to the 1968 “Statement by Mao Tse-Tung, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, in Support of the Afro-American Struggle Against Violent Repression,” published in the wake of urban rebellions in the USA triggered by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Yip became active in WMS, as did Dolly Veale. Veale, whose family had left China in 1955, transferred to Berkeley in early 1970 and became active in the campus anti-war movement when the USA invaded Cambodia in April that year. Veale was arrested and banned from campus for taking part in student protests after the May 1970 shootings of students at Kent

<sup>19</sup> Steve Yip, “Serve the People – Yesterday and Today: The Legacy of Wei Min She,” in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, p. 17; Mao, *Quotations*, p. 209.

<sup>20</sup> Yip, “Serve the People,” p. 18. <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29. <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

State and Jackson State. She also rode buses to Vancouver, Canada to meet women from North and South Vietnam to discuss the war. "Though we didn't fully comprehend all that was involved at the time," she recalls, "many of us were greatly attracted to the revolutionary and internationalist stance emanating from then-Maoist China."<sup>23</sup> The turning-point in her political education came when she heard a member of the Red Guards quoting from Mao's Little Red Book at a mass meeting at the I-Hotel. Veale recalls her mother's warnings never to "listen to reds," but "the whole youth upsurge of that time forced me to be open minded. So I read it and found that it actually made sense!"<sup>24</sup> Inspired especially by Mao's "Serve the People" edict, Veale, like Yip, dropped out of college and joined Wei Min Shu, helping to launch an alternative health clinic in Chinatown. According to Yip, WMS had "been working to make a class analysis of the community, investigating the class structures among Chinese people" including the role played by Chinese immigrant workers in US labor. In 1974, WMS published a book titled *Chinese Working People in America*. In the same year, WMS members joined workers in Lee Mah, an electronics sweatshop whose workers had been locked out by the company. WMS helped to mobilize white, black, and Latino strikers to join the Lee Mah picket line, and encouraged Lee Mah workers to step outside of Chinatown to take part in police shootings of African Americans in San Francisco.

WMS's legacy helps to illuminate political tendencies that proliferated in Maoist-inspired political work of the post-1966 period. The free health clinic Veale helped to start – like the Black Panther and Red Guard breakfast programs – was short lived, undone by restricted funding and limitations on quality of care. As Veale recalls, student volunteers who had effectively "gone to the countryside" had limited effect and capacities operating in an advanced capitalist society. "While dressing the wounds," she recalls volunteers wondering, "how do we get rid of the great wound maker – the profit system?"<sup>25</sup> Veale attempted to solve this problem by becoming a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party, to this day the US revolutionary left party most identified with anti-revisionist Maoism. The party remains small and marginal, in part because it struggled – like its precursor the Revolutionary Union – to engage wide bodies of the working class beyond its student membership, something that similarly limited WMS's impact and duration – it ended in 1974. At the ideological level, WMS also struggled to resolve the relationship between nationalism and proletarian internationalism.

<sup>23</sup> Dolly Veale, "Mao More Than Ever!" in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, p. 184.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185. <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Yip recounts the difficulty of translating the highly localized experience of mainly Chinese immigrants and Chinese American students in San Francisco into a workable theory of working-class internationalism. WMS's fairly selective appropriation and application of ideas from Mao's *Quotations* is telling here. Sections from *Quotations* on party-building, class and class struggle, and socialism and communism appear from activist accounts to be less essential to political work than sections on militarism and combating imperialism, lightning rods for recruitment during US wars in Vietnam and Cambodia. As was the case with the Panthers and Red Guard Party, who tended to focus on strategies of direct action rather than party building, *Quotations* became for WMS members a book whose selective use anticipated limits to its application, particularly up against the massive weight of American capitalism and capitalist class structures.

Maoism's important role in Asian and Asian American ethnic self-determination struggles is also evident in its adoption by Hawaii Pacific Islander and Japanese American activists during the period 1966–75. Ray Tasaki, for example, a third-generation Sansei Japanese American interned at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, during World War II, was living in the Bay Area in 1971 when Japanese American cadres within the Red Guard Party began organizing a study group in the Japanese community in Japan Town San Francisco. According to Tasaki, the group read Mao's writings such as "On Practice" and paid special attention to discussion and debate about Mao's "serve the people" edict. From the discussion group came a "core" known as the Japan Town Collective (JTC). The Collective sought strategies to redress "the root causes of people's oppression, alienation and internalized racism and psychological self-effacement particular to Japanese Americans from being interned during World War II."<sup>26</sup> The JTC worked in the Asian Women's Health Team and, following the example of the Panther's "survival programs," offered legal services, health care, and a prison program. The JTC also held anti-war marches, film screenings about Third World struggles, and forums about the role of Japanese American Nisei farmers in struggles of the United Farm Workers.<sup>27</sup> After two years in the JTC, Tasaki left to join I Wor Kuen, which later became the League of Revolutionary Struggle, a merger of African American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Asian American national liberation struggle organizations.

<sup>26</sup> Ray Tasaki, "New Dawn Rising: History and Summation of the Japan Town Collective," in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

In April, 1971, the organization Third Arm was set up in downtown Honolulu's Chinatown. Third Arm, a mainly student organization whose name was taken from William Hinton's popular and sympathetic study of Chinese village life, *Fanshen*, began an anti-eviction campaign to protect Chinatown residents, screened films from China such as *Red Detachment of Women*, sponsored a free health clinic, and released a "12-point program" in July, 1971 modeled on both the Panther program and the epigrammatic polemical model of the Little Red Book, especially Chapter IV, "The Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People":

What is a universal contradiction that all or most of the interest groups face having to exist or work or hang out in Chinatown? What problem or contradiction will rally the most support in the community? If such a contradiction is found and usually through investigation a contradiction of this nature will emerge, organizing of the various elements within the community must begin to happen. But it doesn't happen without any effort, energy or struggle being expended.<sup>28</sup>

The primary means of resolving contradiction for Third Arm was self-determination: "In order for people to have self-respect they must have direct control over their daily lives . . . Only in this way – community control – can our needs be met."<sup>29</sup> Third Arm, which described its politics as Marxist–Leninist–Maoist, consisted in part of former members of Kaimuki House, or the "Pacific Rim Collective," begun in 1970, a study group whose readings ranged from Fanon to Che Guevara and whose study focused in part on the relationship of Hawaii's colonial history, anti-colonial struggles, and the Vietnam War. As Peggy Myo-Young Choy summarizes the transition from Kaimuki House to Third Arm, "For the activists, the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Mao point to the need to 'serve the people, serve the workers, and to meet the people's needs'."<sup>30</sup>

China's role in supporting anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa, its standing as the leading non-white revolutionary country in the world, and Mao's oft-repeated declarations of support for black liberation

<sup>28</sup> Peggy Myo-Young Choy, "Return the Islands Back to the People: A Legacy of Struggle and Resistance in the Ka Pae' aina," in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, p. 127.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113. Struggles around anti-colonial national sovereignty also motivated the formation of Maoist-oriented Asian American organizations such as the KDP (Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino, or Union of Democratic Filipinos) formed in 1973. The KDP was a largely West Coast-based group that traced its roots to the Katipunan in the Philippines founded in 1892 by the working-class leader Andres Bonifacio. The KDP was also the US liaison to the CPP (Communist Party of the Philippines) whose New People's Army used Maoist tactics in its guerrilla warfare against the Marcos regime. For more see Helen C. Toribio, "Dare to Struggle: The KDP and Filipino American Politics," in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, pp. 31–46.

struggle in the USA were also essential to inspiring Asian American activists to unite with African and black liberation struggles in tandem with Asian American struggles. As we have seen, African American revolutionary leaders such as Bobby Seale and Huey Newton took inspiration from China's lead to build solidarity with Asian American political struggles. The Little Red Book was key to advancing this conception of conjoined Afro-Asian national self-determination struggle, and to providing what might be called a racialized analysis of traditional Marxist ideas. Chapter II on "Classes and Class Struggle" included an excerpt from Mao's August 8 1963 "Statement Supporting the Afro-American in their Just Struggle Against Discrimination by US Imperialism" written in the wake of the March on Washington Movement. The statement declared that, "in the final analysis, national struggle is a matter of class struggle," and centered black and non-white struggle in its analysis of capitalism and imperialism, effectively calling for a non-white united front to defeat both:

The speedy development of the struggle of the Afro-Americans is a manifestation of sharpening class struggle and sharpening national struggle within the United States . . .

I call on the workers, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals, enlightened elements of the bourgeoisie and other enlightened persons of all colors in the world, whether white, black, yellow, or brown, to unite to oppose the radical discrimination practiced by US imperialism and support the black people in their struggle against racial discrimination.<sup>31</sup>

Combined with their personal experiences of anti-Asian racism, exposure to the Black Civil Rights Movement and Black Panther Party – "in particular their emphasis on the Little Red Book and the teachings of Chairman Mao and his serve the people line" – activists such as Moritsugu "Mo" Nishida found themselves turning from Mao to Amílcar Cabral, founder of the Party of Revolution of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands in order to combine anti-colonial struggle and interracial activism.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Maoism enabled African American radicals to develop a more expansive, inclusive definition and application of "black" liberation struggle. Inspired in part by the Little Red Book's call for an internationalism that "opposes both narrow nationalism and narrow patriotism,"<sup>33</sup> black revolutionaries sought to define what leaders of the Revolutionary Action Movement described as a "World Black

<sup>31</sup> Mao, *Quotations*, pp. 10, 92–93.

<sup>32</sup> Moritsugu "Mo" Nishida, "Personal Liberation/People's Revolution," in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, p. 214.

<sup>33</sup> Mao, *Quotations*, p. 177.

Revolution” or “Black Internationalism” as opposed to simply “black nationalism.” The distinction between these sometimes turned in internal debates over both the meaning of Maoism and the place of texts such as the Little Red Book in building political movements.

The most important US location for advancing these debates was Detroit. The city might be considered the triangulated point of an axis—Beijing—San Francisco/Oakland—Detroit—around which turned much of the proliferation and advance of Maoist thought and ideas in the 1960s and early 1970s USA. In general, much of the Maoist-influenced activism among Detroit radical leadership served as both a dialectical counterpoint to and even critique of activism which it perceived as narrow, superficial, and inadequately historicized. In some ways, this critique centered on the exaggerated role of the Little Red Book itself in building what we have seen were sometimes itinerant and contradictory radical movements centered on the West Coast. For example, Grace Lee Boggs, along with her husband James Boggs, the pioneer of many currents of Detroit radicalism, criticized the Black Panther Party for a shortsighted and ahistorical approach to Maoist thought:

Like everyone else, the founders of the Black Panther Party were not prepared for the flood of aspiring revolutionaries. Even if they had wanted to, they had not had the time to create a revolutionary philosophy and ideology and a structure and programs to develop the thousands who were knocking at their door. So they borrowed virtually intact Mao’s Little Red Book, without distinguishing between what is appropriate to China or a postrevolutionary situation, and what is appropriate to the United States, or a potentially revolutionary situation.<sup>34</sup>

Boggs’s assessment, written years after the 1960s, refers both to the Panthers’ own testimonials about selective use of Mao’s writing, largely confined for some members to strategies for armed struggles, and to their allies such as the Red Guard Party whose tactics at times replicated what Boggs calls the “militarism and adventurism” in the Chinese Communist Party during the period of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>35</sup> The Boggses thus challenged what they perceived as a short-sighted application of Mao Zedong by replacing questions of tactics and strategies with questions of revolutionary philosophy and ideology: “We are not faced with the task of applying the ideas of Marx or Mao to the United States,” they wrote,

<sup>34</sup> Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 145.

<sup>35</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley and Betsy Esch note that Eldridge Cleaver represented a wing of the Black Panther Party more interested in guerrilla warfare than long-term planning for revolution, and that many Panthers limited their reading of Mao (and others such as Che) to their writings on “revolutionary violence and people’s war.” See Kelley and Esch, “Black Like Mao,” p. 126.



“but with that of developing a new concept of human identity as the basis for the revolution in America, a concept which must extend the dialectical development of humanity itself.”<sup>36</sup> Maoism’s emphasis on ethical conduct, self-criticism, and the concept of *fanshen* or “self-overturning” became the basis of what the Boggses called “dialectical humanism,” a political practice “built on unselfishness, on serving the people, the country and oppressed peoples all over the world.”<sup>37</sup> The cornerstone of dialectical humanism was their argument that black liberation struggle in the USA was central to developing what they called, after Mao, a “New Man” and “New Woman”: “the Negro revolt is . . . not just a narrow struggle over goods and for the development of the productive forces . . . The burning question is how to create the kind of human responsibility in the distribution of material abundance that will allow everyone to enjoy and create the values of humanity.”<sup>38</sup>

The Boggses’ expansive analysis of the meaning of black liberation effectively altered the canon, political assimilation, and application of Maoism and Maoist thought by the US left. It both decentered and contextualized its fetishization best symbolized by the sometimes contradictory and inconsistent use of its “primer,” the Little Red Book. They forced new and young activists in particular coming into the movement to consider their political work and struggles in a broader philosophical (and international) framework similar to the way Fanon had challenged black nationalists to think about the epistemology of anti-colonial struggles. Towards this end, the Boggses established revolutionary study groups in Detroit in which large sections of Mao’s *Selected Writings* were paired with work by Lenin, James, and Cabral in order to work out conceptions of “dialectical humanism.” Following a Maoist ethos, this theoretical work was perceived as the basis for revolutionary practice. Most important in this regard was James Boggs, a leader of the Boggses’ study circle as well as a Detroit auto worker. Boggs served as liaison, mentor, and intermediary to both a generation of young black radicals inspired by the general upturn of black nationalism and anti-colonialism, and to workers in Detroit auto plants where shopfloor struggles became a testing-ground for Maoist ideas.

For example, according to founding member Max Stanford, James Boggs served as “ideological chairman” for the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), a loosely affiliated nation-wide organization headquartered in Philadelphia but with chapters in northern California,

<sup>36</sup> James Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Worker’s Noteboook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 126.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80. <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Cleveland, Detroit, and other cities. RAM's early years included work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and leadership from, among others, students at Central State University in Ohio. In 1963, the party formed a provisional government and elected Robert Williams premier-in-exile from Cuba.<sup>39</sup> RAM's "Code of Cadres," as Robin Kelley and Betsy Esch note, was modeled closely on the "Three Main Rules of Discipline" section of *Quotations* and even borrowed verbatim the edict to "not take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses."<sup>40</sup> Yet in large part because of James Boggs's advisement, RAM's relationship to Maoism well exceeded the maxims of the Little Red Book. In 1965, RAM published the essay "The Relationship of Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution." The essay referenced the 1955 meeting of decolonizing African and Asian countries in Indonesia as the birth of a new era dubbed "Bandung humanism," a clear recasting and retitling of the Boggses' conception of dialectical humanism. It defined Bandung humanism as a "revolutionary revision of Western or traditional Marxism to relate revolutionary ideology adequately to the unprecedented political, socio-economic, technological, psycho-cultural developments occurring in the post World War II era."<sup>41</sup> The essay was a companion to a second published in 1965, "The World Black Revolution," which featured a cover photograph of Mao and Robert Williams, citing China's 1949 revolution as the starting-point of the Bandung era. The essay synthesized citation of Malcolm X, Robert Williams, James Boggs, and Mao's "Statement in Support of Afro-America" into a call for an international revolutionary action movement which would "in order to be

<sup>39</sup> Williams was a North Carolina NAACP organizer who in 1960 fled the US to Cuba after he was falsely accused by the FBI of kidnapping. He became an ardent supporter of Castro's revolution until a falling out forced him to move to China in 1966. From China he published and distributed his newspaper *The Crusader* which was widely read by RAM members. RAM frequently published or republished articles by Williams in its own newspaper, *Black America*. Upon his return to the USA in 1969, Williams remained an important touchstone and totem for Afro-Asian activists. Yuri Kochiyama, close friend and associate to Malcolm X and a pioneer of Asian American and Afro-Asian liberation struggles in the USA, recalls that Williams gave her her first copy of the Little Red Book. For more on Williams see Timothy Tyson's *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). For more on Kochiyama see Diane Fujino's *Heartbeat of Struggle: The Revolutionary Practice of Yuri Kochiyama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). For more on Afro-Asian collaboration generally see Diane Fujino, *Samurai Among Panthers: Richard Aoki on Race, Resistance and a Paradoxical Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Kelley and Esch, "Black Like Mao," p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> Revolutionary Action Movement, "The Relationship of Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution," *Black America* (Summer-Fall 1965), pp. 11-12.

successful . . . have to organize a People's liberation army on a world scale."<sup>42</sup> RAM's manifesto might be considered the theoretical apex of efforts by black radicals to weld Maoist notions of dialectical transformation to Third World internationalism. It offered budding black and Asian activists a theory and practice that seemed the apotheosis of Maoism's promise to develop an anti-colonial Third World united front.

Finally, Detroit-variety Maoism found a home on the shopfloor of the city's massive auto industry where, uniquely on the American left in this period, the Little Red Book's maxims on "Class and Class Struggle" became the centerpoint of both theory and practice. Key organizations here were the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement). Both groups were spear-headed by black workers from Detroit with Maoist roots and training. These included Luke Tripp, Charles "Mao" Johnson, Charles Simmons, and General Baker. All four had participated in a 1964 trip to Cuba sponsored by the then still Maoist Progressive Labor Movement. Under their leadership, the League and DRUM carried forward the early 1960s Maoist/PL emphasis on the black worker as the vanguard of revolution while using Little Red Book slogans such as "Dare to Fight! Dare to Win!" to organize black workers on the shop floor. Because the factory rather than the university was the primary site of their political work, the League and DRUM were critical of what they called "bourgeois" or "porkchop" nationalism, and used Cultural Revolution-style slogans to proclaim their difference from other (mainly West Coast) Maoist and black nationalist organizing efforts: "One Class-Conscious Worker is Worth 100 Students."<sup>43</sup> By 1972, both the League and DRUM had morphed again in two directions that sustained its Maoist legacy: one group split to form the Black Workers' Congress (BWC), while other members joined the Maoist Communist League.<sup>44</sup> The Black Workers' Congress in particular instantiated ideas from Chapter V, "War and Peace," from the Little Red Book cited earlier: "We must give active support to the national independence and liberation movements in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as to the peace movement and to just struggle in all the countries of the world."<sup>45</sup> In its self-published manifesto, the BWC called for the right of self-determination for Africans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians, and

<sup>42</sup> Revolutionary Action Movement, "The World Black Revolution" (1965), Box 2, Robert Franklin Williams Papers, Bentley Historical Library, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> *South End* 21.104 (April 14, 1969).

<sup>44</sup> Max Elbaum, "Maoism in the United States," first published in *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 2nd edn., 1998. See [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org).

<sup>45</sup> Mao, *Quotations*, p. 66.

Indians living in the USA and for a “Black United Front and third World Alliances.”<sup>46</sup> In a final echo of *Quotations*, the BWC manifesto invoked a “unity of opposite which includes various classes” in calling for a Third World labor strike to help end the Vietnam War, restore a Palestinian homeland, and prompt US divestment from South Africa.<sup>47</sup>

Arguably, the Little Red Book’s greatest long-term impact was felt not in the politics but the left culture of the USA. Section XXXI, “Culture and Art,” became one of the sections most referenced by African American and Asian American artists and writers seeking to develop a theory of the role of the arts in social change. Particularly influential were passages from Mao’s May 1942 “Talks on the Yen’an Forum on Literature and Art,” his call for artists to conjoin their work to mass struggle, and this passage from *Quotations* from the 1940 essay “On New Democracy”:

Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is an important, indeed essential, fighting front in the general revolutionary front during the revolution.<sup>48</sup>

In 1967, RAM leader-in-exile Robert Williams spoke in Beijing to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mao’s Yan’an talk. Echoing Mao’s Yan’an address urging that “all our literature and art are for the masses of the people,” as well as the idea of revolutionary culture as part of a revolutionary “front,” Williams urged African American artists to develop a “new revolutionary approach to propaganda” and encouraged black writers in the USA to work with the newly formed international Afro-Asian writers’ association. The intent of Afro-Asian art, he wrote, was to “serve to stimulate revolutionary zeal” and become “a mechanism to detonate the explosion of rebellion.”<sup>49</sup> In the USA, black and Asian writers and artists began applying Mao’s theory of culture in a manner described in the Little Red Book as “Letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend.”<sup>50</sup> In Detroit, separate black arts conferences were held in 1966 and 1967 dedicated to the relationship of revolutionary art to revolutionary politics. James and Grace Boggs, who helped shape the agenda for the 1966 conference, described the urgency of the role of culture in creating revolutionary optimism:

<sup>46</sup> Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, “Third World People: Unite” (1971), Box 1, Detroit Revolutionary Movements Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>48</sup> Mao, *Quotations*, pp. 299–300.

<sup>49</sup> Robert F. Williams, “Speech, 25th Anniversary of Mao’s ‘Talks at the Yen’an Forum on Literature and Art’” (1967), Box 3, Robert Franklin Williams Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

<sup>50</sup> Mao, *Quotations*, p. 302.

“A people building a national movement needs the conviction that history is on their side and ultimate victory is certain because as a people they have an inherent dignity which no amount of brutalization and degradation can destroy.”<sup>51</sup> In California, Maulana (Ron) Karenga created the 1968 manifesto “Black Cultural Nationalism” which, as Robin D. G. Kelley and Betsy Esch have shown, derived many of its principles from Mao’s “Talks at Yen’an” including the idea that culture must be both artistic and social and of use to the broad masses of people.<sup>52</sup> In Newark, New Jersey, poet Amiri Baraka developed poetry and theater that tried to combine elements of Marxist–Leninist–Maoist thought with Black Arts Movement technique in order to challenge what it considered narrow forms of cultural nationalism. The Little Red Book even generated direct imitators. In 1970, Earl Ofari, a former member of SNCC and then graduate student in sociology at Cal State Los Angeles, published *The Black Book*. The thirty-two-page broadside is comprised of sayings by Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, and W. E. B. Du Bois, organized, like *Quotations*, around key political questions: Black Culture and Art; Black Unity; Africa; Imperialism; Socialism; The Third World. Even in its production the book echoed the Yan’an creed from *Quotations* that literature and arts are “created for the workers, peasants and soldiers and are for their use.”<sup>53</sup> The book was published by the Radical Education Project, a Students for Democratic Society project based in Detroit; its title page indicated that it was “printed by movement labor.”<sup>54</sup>

The Black Arts Movement influenced an entire generation of Black and Asian artists and writers, from the poet Sonia Sanchez, who visited China in the early 1970s, to the contemporary musician Fred Ho. Indeed in combination with “Culture and Art,” the ultimate section of the Little Red Book, the section titled “Study,” may represent at least symbolically how the Little Red Book helped to forward a truly *cultural* revolution in the USA. We have already noted the role the book played both inside and outside of university settings in generating political momentum for ethnic studies, Black Studies and Asian Pacific American Studies curricula on university campuses. Indeed Black Studies, Asian American Studies, and Ethnic Studies alive and well on university campuses today have expanded the canon of academic study to include non-Western histories and cultures in a manner similar to the way the Little Red Book

<sup>51</sup> Inner City Organizing Committee Papers, James and Grace Boggs Collection, Box 5, Folder 7 (1966), Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Kelley and Esch, “Black Like Mao,” p. 138.

<sup>53</sup> Mao, *Quotations*, p. 300.

<sup>54</sup> Earl Ofari, ed., *The Black Book* (Detroit: Radical Education Project, 1970), p. 1.

expanded the *genre* of political writing in the 1960s. An important primary source example of this development is the “Asian Studies Manifesto” created by the Asian Students’ Committee of City College, New York, in 1973. Authored by Boreysa Tep, Richard K. Wong, and Jean Yonemura, the Manifesto noted that the successful fight for the development of a department of Asian Studies at City College had emerged to serve the needs of Asian students after a successful struggle for open admissions. The Manifesto criticized previous university curricula offerings on Asia as Eurocentric and demanded, in ten-point program style, that Asian Studies function as a vehicle to “service” Asian students: to provide world perspective on Asia, to involve students in policy-making decisions, to present the history of Asians in America, to present an Asian perspective on Asian history, to provide employment for Asians, and to promote understanding of the common struggles of Third World peoples. The Manifesto also called for the hiring of more Asian faculty members, and for the admission of more non-white students.<sup>55</sup> In perhaps the most direct echo of the Red Book’s admonition that real political knowledge can only come “through practical work and close contact with the masses of workers and peasants,” the Manifesto insisted that “Asian Studies can play a role in bringing students back to the community by exposing them to the community’s problems and needs, by learning from the community people themselves, by helping students to find ways to solve the community’s problems.”<sup>56</sup>

The Asian Studies Manifesto, with its easy substitution of academic “service learning” for “serving the people,” in many ways symbolizes both the horizons and limits of Mao’s *Quotations* as a tool for building revolutionary movements across the time and space of the late 1960s/early 1970s US left. The Manifesto demonstrated the rapidity, ingenuity, and dedication with which movement activists sought to translate their political education into practice, and how ripe for change the objective conditions on the ground really were, especially for non-white radicals. Yet owing to concurrent events well beyond the scope of the American university – China’s alignment with reactionary Third World governments, political conflicts within China during the Cultural Revolution, and the ill timing of Mao hosting Nixon in 1972 when the USA was still waging war in Vietnam – Maoism soon lost significant traction as a basis for sustained political organizing. For African American and Asian American radicals, China and Maoism’s loosening hold was also related

<sup>55</sup> Boreysa Tep, Richard K. Wong, and Jean Yonemura, “Asian Studies Manifesto” (1973) in Ho et al., eds., *Legacy to Liberation*, pp. 408–11.

<sup>56</sup> Mao, *Quotations*, p. 312; Tep et al., “Manifesto,” p. 410.

to the splintering of at times parallel, at times intertwining movements into multiple sectarian streams as well as a refocusing onto numerous ethnically based movements (including academic ethnic studies) which have persisted to this day. At the same time, the US economic crisis of the 1970s, the emergence of neoliberal economic politics and policies globally, and the permanent repressive apparatus of the US state – which included the infiltration and assassination of movement leaders such as the Black Panther Party’s Fred Hampton – all helped to diminish the growth and impact of Afro-Asian solidarity struggles.<sup>57</sup> The Little Red Book should be understood in context as a metonymy for these processes. The book’s polyvalent usages and applications, disparate and at times self-contradictory messages, and incomplete relevance to social conditions in the USA made it as much a symbol for an oversized and itinerant dream – a successful Chinese-style revolution in America – as a prism onto that dream’s irreconcilability with US capitalist imperialism. At the same time, the book’s iconographic form and content made it something like a textual flag for a new world in the making – a People’s Republic stretching from Tiananmen Square to the San Francisco Bay – whose specter still haunts the dreams of US empire today. That specter, recognizable in the Maoist-influenced battle cries against neoliberalism reaching from rural India to Occupy Oakland, make it unlikely that the Little Red Book and its legacy will fade from the revolutionary imagination any time soon.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> In August 2012 American journalist Seth Rosenfeld published a book alleging that Richard Aoki, a Japanese American member of the Oakland chapter of the Black Panther Party, had been an FBI informant. Aoki is described as the “radical Japanese cat” in Bobby Seale’s *Seize the Time* who gave the Panthers their first guns in late 1966, which were to be used to defend against police brutality in Oakland. Diane Fujino’s *Samurai Among Panthers* details how Aoki encouraged the Panthers to take up Maoist ideas and helped to build the organization. While the evidence against Aoki is inconclusive, FBI infiltration of the Black Panthers and other left groups such as the Socialist Workers’ Party is well documented. See especially Jim Wanderwall and Ward Churchill, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI’s Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 2001) and *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 2001). For more on Aoki see Fujino, *Samurai Among Panthers* and Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI’s War on Radicals and Reagan’s Rise to Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012) and these redacted FBI files also made available by Rosenfeld: [www.documentcloud.org/documents/423064-fbi-files-richard-aoki.html](http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/423064-fbi-files-richard-aoki.html)

<sup>58</sup> For a popular account of the resurgence of Maoism (and Naxalism) in contemporary India see Arundhati Roy’s *Walking With the Comrades* (New York: Penguin, 2011). In February 2012, the international journal *Maoist Road* affiliated with the Maoist Communist Party of Italy expressed its solidarity with Occupy Oakland’s call for a nation-wide general strike on May 1, 2012. The strike did not materialize. See [maoistroad.blogspot.com/2012/02/maoist-road-supports-call-occupy.html](http://maoistroad.blogspot.com/2012/02/maoist-road-supports-call-occupy.html).

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