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# MAOISM

## A GLOBAL HISTORY



**JULIA LOVELL**

VINTAGE

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‘Lovell’s descriptions of ... global strands of Maoism are well-researched and colourful’

*Economist*

‘Lovell has produced a work which may well be the most harrowing, fascinating and occasionally hilarious book on the subject thus far’

Stuart Kelly, *Scotland on Sunday*

## JULIA LOVELL

Julia Lovell is Professor of Modern China at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her two most recent books are *The Great Wall* and *The Opium War* (which won the 2012 Jan Michalski Prize). Her many translations of modern Chinese fiction into English include Lu Xun's *The Real Story of Ah Q, and other Tales of China* (2009). She is currently completing a new translation of *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en. She writes about China for several newspapers, including the *Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*.

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JULIA LOVELL

# Maoism

A Global History

VINTAGE

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To my father, William (Bill) Lovell,  
1946–2014



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## INTRODUCTION

Beijing, autumn 1936. A spacious courtyard house, the residence of the American journalists Helen and Edgar Snow. Helen – in her late twenties, boyishly slim, Hollywood good looks – settles down to a morning's writing. The front door opens; Edgar enters. She has not seen her husband for four months. Since June, he has been almost incommunicado on a trip to the Chinese Communist state in the north-west. He is, in Helen's characteristically sharp description, 'grinning foolishly behind a grizzled beard and looking like the cat that had swallowed the canary'. Dancing jubilantly around the room in a 'grey cap with a red star on its faded front', he orders from their Chinese cook a hearty American breakfast – eggs, coffee, milk.<sup>1</sup> His bag is laden with notebooks, photographic films, and the text of 20,000 of Mao's transcribed words. Over the coming months, he will write up this material into a book he calls *Red Star Over China*. It will become a world bestseller. *Red Star* will not only determine Snow's career as a chronicler of the Chinese Communist revolution and as a mediator between the Chinese Communists and international audiences, but will also turn Mao into a political celebrity. The book will translate Mao and his revolution to Indian nationalists, Chinese intellectuals, Soviet partisans, American presidents, Malayan insurgents, anti-apartheid fighters, Western radicals, Nepali rebels and many others. *Red Star* is the beginning of global Maoism.

The jungle in Perak, Malaya, late 1940s. Soldiers in the British colonial army (British, Malay, Australian, Gurkhas) pick over the remnants of abandoned Malayan Communist Party (MCP) camps. They find dozens of copies of Edgar Snow's *Red Star* in its Chinese translation. In 1948, the MCP – dominated by ethnic Chinese – has launched an

anti-British insurgency that Malaya's colonial rulers have dubbed the 'Emergency'. It is one of the earliest decolonising rebellions against the old European empires in the wake of the Second World War. Mao and his revolution are inspirational to these rebels: for his devotion to protracted, guerrilla warfare; for his creation of a tightly indoctrinated party and army; and for his defiance of European, American and Japanese imperialism.

Washington, November 1950. Cold War jitters in the State Department building. News of Chinese Communist intervention in the Korean War is confirmed; fears of global Maoist insurrection breed. Senator Joe McCarthy – 'the great national intimidator'<sup>2</sup> – rides high on popular panic about Communist infiltration of the United States, ousting two liberal senators through accusations of 'red' associations. For America's leaders, the Malayan Emergency is part of the Cold War, not an anti-colonial struggle; its root cause is declared to be transnational Chinese subversion and it must be defeated to prevent the global victory of Communism. The 'domino theory' – the idea that, without US intervention, the territories of South East Asia will one by one fall to Chinese Communism – is born. As the Korean War turns for the worse that winter and some 7,000 GIs are captured when human waves of Chinese soldiers push through their lines and on to Seoul, America is gripped by stories of a new-style Maoist psy-war trialled on its POWs in Korea. An American journalist (and perhaps sometime CIA agent) called Edward Hunter publishes allegations of Mao's terrifying new weapon against humanity: 'brainwashing'. CIA officers, journalists, behavioural scientists, novelists and film-makers will collude through the 1950s to imagine a powerful machinery of Maoist thought control. This dread of Chinese 'brainwashing' – building on pre-existing terror of Soviet mind manipulations – will balloon America's 'covert sphere', justifying the existence of a secret state within the state and the CIA's vast psychological operations programme. Through a series of code-named initiatives in the 1950s and 60s – Bluebird, Artichoke, MK-Ultra – the CIA will seek to reverse-engineer the Soviet and Chinese techniques of mind control it has deemed so dangerous. Eventually, this project will morph into the 'enhanced interrogations' of the present War on Terror, undermining the foundations of US democracy.

\*

The Bronx, New York, 1969. A young American radical called Dennis O'Neil has a contretemps with a friend. Like many of his generation, O'Neil is a passionate admirer of Mao Zedong and of his Cultural Revolution. His friend favours Trotsky. They devise a scientific trial to settle whose political strategy is superior. For a set period of time every day, they will each read from their idol's selected works to different marijuana plants on the balcony of their fourteenth-floor apartment. 'My plant flourished and his withered,' O'Neil later remembers. 'Proof positive.' Meanwhile, in a San Francisco bookstore called China Books and Periodicals – the West Coast's main outlet for Mao's words – further eccentricity plays out. Amid the stacks of Little Red Books, a group of self-styled 'ultra-democrats' called the Seven Diggers sit in the lotus position, their energies sustained by cannabis-infused brownies, reading Mao on the Chinese revolution and guerrilla warfare. A pair of trench-coated FBI officers browse Chinese postage stamps to one side of the store as they monitor the situation.<sup>3</sup>

The CIA's experiments with LSD in devising their own mind-control programme play a key part in the drug-fuelled youth rebellions of the 1960s and 70s. By 1969, the quantities of LSD in CIA-funded research labs in universities have leaked into recreational use by students. The burgeoning drug scene helps unleash a noisy protest culture, which identifies with the Cultural Revolution. Mao-ish hippydom – instanced on Dennis O'Neil's balcony and in Seven Diggers seances – results. Mao fever spreads across the West: 'big character posters' are pasted over French campuses, Mao badges are pinned on West German student lapels, Little Red Book quotations are daubed on walls of Italian lecture halls. Maoist-anarchists scramble to the top of a church in West Berlin and bombard passers-by with hundreds of Little Red Books. But there are toughs as well as flakes. Aspiring revolutionaries travel to China or Albania, for political and military training designed and funded by the People's Republic of China (PRC). After 1968, the militancy of Cultural Revolution Maoism inspires the urban terrorism of West Germany's Red Army Faction and the Red Brigades in Italy that attacks these fragile European democracies struggling for legitimacy in the wake of fascism.

Nanjing, 1965. As enthusiasm for Mao's revolution sweeps global left-wing politics, a Peruvian professor of philosophy attends a military

training school in Nanjing. It is later speculated that here he met Saloth Sar – subsequently Pol Pot, architect of Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia – who also attends classes that year at Beijing's *Yafeila peixun zhongxin* (the Asian, African and Latin American training centre just outside the marble precincts of the imperial Summer Palace) for revolutionaries from those regions. 'We picked up a pen,' Abimael Guzmán says later, remembering an explosives training class, 'and it blew up, and when we took a seat it blew up, too. It was a kind of general fireworks display ... perfectly calculated to show us that anything could be blown up if you figure out how to do it ... That school contributed greatly to my development and helped me begin to gain an appreciation for Chairman Mao Zedong.'<sup>4</sup> In 1979, as leader of the Communist Party of Peru – Shining Path, Guzmán embarks on his Maoist People's War – a brutal campaign that over the next two decades will claim some 70,000 lives and cost Peru some 10 billion pounds' worth of economic damage. After twelve years of protracted guerrilla war, Guzmán – as a final Maoist flourish – sets as the date for his ultimate, power-seizing offensive the ninety-ninth anniversary of Mao's birthday: 26 December 1992.<sup>5</sup> The revolution, he forecasts, will cost 'a million deaths'.<sup>6</sup> Some predict that if the Shining Path's revolution succeeds – a realistic prospect in early 1990s Peru – its aftermath will generate bloodshed dwarfing that perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge.

In addition to Pol Pot, Guzmán may have encountered another aspiring revolutionary while in Nanjing: a towering, intense Southern Rhodesian, with close-cropped hair, and green eyes deep-set in a light brown, pockmarked face, called Josiah Tongogara. He is usually sunk in thought about the liberation of Southern Rhodesia from white rule; if pushed to make small talk, he discourses only on his willingness to die 'through the barrel of a gun' (in fact, he will die in an ill-judged overtaking manoeuvre on a highway). As with Guzmán, Tongogara's time in China makes a dedicated Maoist of him. At the Nanjing military academy, he comes to worship the Chinese as 'mentors in morality as well as in military skills and strategies'.<sup>7</sup> In the late 1960s, Tongogara returns to the Southern Rhodesian border where the Zimbabwean African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African

National Union (ZANU), is preparing for its guerrilla war against Southern Rhodesia. He abandons ZANLA's old, failing, hit-and-run tactics, and remakes the army's struggle along patient, protracted Maoist lines. He translates Mao into Shona: his guerrilla troops must depend on the people as *simba rehove riri mumvura* – as a fish has its strength in water. Meanwhile, Chinese instructors train ZANLA recruits in nearby Tanzania; in the late 1970s, 5,000 cadets are schooled for an offensive dubbed *Sasa tunamaliza* (Now We Are Finishing).<sup>8</sup> Exhausted by ZANU's resistance, the white rulers of Southern Rhodesia are forced to negotiate. As a child, Tongogara odd-jobbed by retrieving tennis balls dropped by a young white boy called Ian Smith. In 1979, as ZANLA's representative at the peace talks, he shares coffee breaks with Smith – now prime minister of the white-majority Southern Rhodesian government – at Lancaster House in London.<sup>9</sup>

Deep in central India's jungles today, Naxalite guerrillas in olive fatigues and bright saris dance in lines before a photograph of Chairman Mao and declare war on the government's 'uniformed goons' who have confiscated local land for its precious bauxite reserves. In these beautiful, brutal jungles, the still-militant Indian Maoist movement traces its origins back to its Cultural Revolution-inspired incarnation in 1967, when its leaders were also in Beijing, alongside men like Guzmán and Tongogara. In 2006, India's rulers consider this Maoist insurgency the 'biggest internal security threat to the Indian state'.<sup>10</sup> While intellectuals in New Delhi argue about whether the insurgents are tribal terrorists led by high-caste manipulators or desperate rebels with a cause, Maoists and police engage in reciprocal murdering sprees: one week, a dozen police are slaughtered by Maoist landmines; the next, the police rape and kill civilians with alleged Maoist connections. Unlike the Maoist rebels in Nepal, who in 2006 abandoned their insurgency to participate in parliamentary democracy, the Indian comrades are stalwarts of purist Maoist doctrine and refuse to take part in elections. The Naxalites give Arundhati Roy – one of India's most famous writers and public intellectuals – exclusive access to their story, escorting her around their secret camps. On her return to literary Delhi, she publishes articles praising their simple, vibrant and comradely culture.<sup>11</sup> Is Roy

a romantic intellectual in love with a ferocious revolutionary ideal that would (to paraphrase Nabokov on earlier foreign admirers of Soviet Russia) destroy her 'as naturally as rabbits are by ferrets and farmers', if it were to win control of India? Or has she acutely highlighted the appeal of anarchic Maoist liberation to a persecuted underclass left no alternative by a brutal, corrupt government?

In Chongqing, a metropolis on the banks of the Yangtze River that is officially 'China's happiest city', thousands of identically scarlet-shirted civilians gather in a public square to sing and dance Maoist hymns: 'Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China', 'Heaven and Earth Are Small Compared with the Party's Benevolence', 'The Communist Party is Wonderful, the Communist Party is Wonderful, the Communist Party is Wonderful'.<sup>12</sup> Stories abound in the press about the miraculously therapeutic properties of these anthems: about a woman who has recovered from crippling depression through listening; about the psychiatric patients whose symptoms 'suddenly disappeared' after they joined revolutionary choirs; of the prisoners cured of their criminality by singing 'red songs'.<sup>13</sup> Students are sent down to the countryside to learn from the peasants. Solemn-looking party cadres don shapeless blue Maoist uniforms and travel to a mountainous, isolated corner of south-east China 'to deepen their understanding and experience' of the revolution, and generally improve their 'red morals'.<sup>14</sup> 'There are some abominably sour and smelly literati around at the moment,' a People's Liberation Army elder observes, as critics of the regime disappear without trace into Communist prisons. 'They attack Chairman Mao and practise de-Maoification. We must fight to repel this reactionary counter-current.'<sup>15</sup> A young man petitions the government to prosecute writers who voice criticism of the Great Helmsman, and demands that neighbourhoods report to the police anyone suspected of disloyalty to the chairman.<sup>16</sup>

This is not 1966 – the year in which Mao started his Cultural Revolution, the high point of his utopian fever that unleashed bands of Red Guards onto the streets of China's cities, that dislocated millions of educated urbanites to remote rural areas, and that left at least 1.5 million dead (following on from the 30 million death toll of the man-made famine of the early 1960s). This is 2011, and that is why these

songs can also be heard in karaoke bars, why Chinese mobile phones – 13 million at a time – are being bombarded by Mao-quotation texts, why Mao's message can target audiences through TV schedules dominated by classic revolutionary films and why the government has launched 'Red Twitter' – delivering gobbits of laconic 1960s wisdom via a very twenty-first-century micro-medium.<sup>17</sup> Bo Xilai – architect of this neo-Maoist revival – is purged in spring 2012, for corruption and for his wife's poisoning of an Old Harrovian called Neil Heywood. Yet Xi Jinping, who becomes party secretary in November 2012, inherits and implements Bo's neo-Maoism on a national stage. In the first few months after he comes to power, Xi launches a 'mass line' (one of Mao's favourite catchphrases) website, to crack down on corruption and boost links between the Communist Party and the grass roots, and reintroduces Mao-style 'criticism and self-criticism' throughout the state bureaucracy. For the first time since the death of Mao in 1976, Xi Jinping has rehabilitated Maoist strategies into China's national, public culture.

These eight scenarios – ranging from the 1930s to the present, and across Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas – suggest the chronological and geographic scope of Maoism, one of the most significant and complicated political forces of the modern world. A potent mix of party-building discipline, anti-colonial rebellion and 'continuous revolution', grafted onto the secular religion of Soviet Marxism, Maoism not only unlocks the contemporary history of China, but is also a key influence on global insurgency, insubordination and intolerance across the last eighty years. But beyond China, and especially in the West, the global spread and importance of Mao and his ideas in the contemporary history of radicalism are only dimly sensed, if at all. They have been effaced by the end of the Cold War, the apparent global victory of neo-liberal capitalism, and the resurgence of religious extremism. This book aims to bring Mao and his ideas out of the shadows, and recast Maoism as one of the major stories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In 1935, Mao manoeuvred his way into a position of leadership in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). At the time, the authority was arguably not worth having. That year, around 8,000 exhausted

revolutionaries on the run from encirclement and annihilation campaigns directed by the ruling Nationalist Party tramped into Yan'an, a small, impoverished town dug out of the hillsides of north-west China. But within ten years – a decade that saw the country scourged variously by floods, famine and Japanese invasion – Communist Party membership had surged to 1.2 million and its armies increased to more than 900,000.<sup>18</sup> After another four years, the Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong had expelled their rivals for China, the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek, from the mainland and onto Taiwan. Since its founding in 1949, the PRC has somehow managed to survive longer than any of the revolutionary regimes that preceded it in China – despite the convulsions of a vast man-made famine, and a civil war (the Cultural Revolution) that cost and disrupted the lives of tens of millions of Chinese people.

Today's PRC is held together by the legacies of Maoism. Although the Chinese Communist Party has long abandoned the utopian turmoil of Maoism in favour of an authoritarian capitalism that prizes prosperity and stability, the Great Helmsman has left a heavy mark on politics and society. His portrait – six by four and a half metres – still hangs in Tiananmen Square, the heartland of Chinese political power, in the centre of the capital. In the middle of the square, his waxen, embalmed body still lies in state, like a sleeping beauty awaiting the kiss of history to bring him back to life. 'Mao's invisible hand' (as one recent book puts it) remains omnipresent in China's polity: in the deep politicisation of its judiciary; the supremacy of the one-party state over all other interests; the fundamental intolerance of dissident voices.<sup>19</sup>

Maoism is a body of contradictory ideas that has distinguished itself from earlier guises of Marxism in several important ways. Giving centre stage to a non-Western, anti-colonial agenda, Mao declared to radicals in developing countries that Russian-style Communism should be adapted to local, national conditions; that the Soviet Union could go wrong. Diverging from Stalin, he told revolutionaries to take their struggle out of the cities and deep into the countryside. Although, like Lenin and Stalin, Mao was determined to build a one-party state with military discipline, he also (especially in his last decade) championed an anarchic democracy, telling the Chinese people that 'rebellion is justified': that when 'there is great chaos under Heaven, the

situation is excellent'. He preached the doctrine of voluntarism: that by sheer audacity of belief the Chinese – and any other people with the necessary strength of will – could transform their country; revolutionary zeal, not weaponry, was the decisive factor. Perhaps most innovatively of all, Mao declared that 'women can hold up half the sky'. Although his own womanising practice fell far short of his rhetoric, none of his global peers voiced such an egalitarian agenda.

Born of an era in which China was held in contempt by the international system, Mao assembled a practical and theoretical toolkit for turning a fractious, failing empire into a defiant global power. He created a language that intellectuals and peasants, men and women could understand; a system of propaganda and thought control that has been described as 'one of the most ambitious attempts at human manipulation in history'; a disciplined army; and he gathered around him a company of unusually talented, ruthless comrades. His ideas elicited extraordinary levels of fervour. Millions entered into marriages of political convenience and abandoned their children to devote themselves to a utopian experiment. These children, in turn, denounced, humiliated and – in extreme cases – killed their parents in the 1960s and 70s, in the name of their Great Helmsman.

My first chapter will explore definitions of Maoism, a term that has been used both admiringly and pejoratively for several decades to signify a spectrum of political behaviour: ranging from anarchic mass democracy to Machiavellian brutality against political enemies. The English terms 'Maoist' and 'Maoism' gained currency in US Cold War analyses of China, intended to categorise and stereotype a 'Red China' that was the essence of alien threat. After Mao's death, they became catch-all words for dismissing what was perceived as the unitary repressive madness of China from 1949 to 1976. Here the term is not understood in this petrified form. 'Maoism' in this book is an umbrella word for the wide range of theory and practice attributed to Mao and his influence over the past eighty years. In other words, this term is useful only if we accept that the ideas and experiences it describes are living and changing, have been translated and mistranslated, both during and after Mao's lifetime, and on their journeys within and without China.

As the People's Republic of China is reasserting its global ambitions for the first time since the Mao era, the imperative to understand the

political legacy that unifies the country becomes ever more urgent. But there is also a pressing need to evaluate the power and appeal of Maoism beyond China, where it has enjoyed a long afterlife in revolutionary movements based on Mao's theories of class struggle and guerrilla warfare. Maoism contains within it ideas that have exerted an extraordinary tenacity and ability to travel, that have put down roots in terrains culturally and geographically far removed from that of China: the tea plantations of northern India, the sierras of the Andes, Paris's fifth arrondissement, the fields of Tanzania, the rice paddies of Cambodia and the terraces of Brixton. My book is a history both of this Chinese movement, and of its global legacies: it analyses Maoism's ambivalent history and enduring appeal to power-hungry dreamers and to dispossessed rebels all over the world.

Yet global Maoism remains one of the missed – or misunderstood – stories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One has only to compare the quantities of books about Hitler and Stalin and their international consequences with the lack of studies that synthesise and explain the legacies of Maoism throughout the world. Why do we tend not to see Maoism globally? Why does this book not already exist?<sup>20</sup>

Since the 1980s, readers in the European languages (and especially English) that dominate international publishing have been able to access dozens of eyewitness accounts of Mao-era China, in the form of memoirs written by victims of the Cultural Revolution. These present a compelling narrative of horror: of violence and persecution stemming from Mao's abuse of his personality cult, and of mindless xenophobia. The dramatic contrast between our picture of a dysfunctional, disastrous Mao's China drawn from these works, on the one hand, and of contemporary China – a land of functional state-building and pragmatic consumerism – on the other, seems to signal that Maoism has been relegated to the dustbin of history. Kitsch enhances the sense of detachment. Even while a broad swathe of Western readers now equate Mao with Stalin or Hitler for the destructiveness of his policies, tourists to China snap up red vinyl-covered copies of the Little Red Book or Mao-emblazoned lighters playing the Maoist anthem 'The East is Red'. Visitors to contemporary Germany would not dream of buying copies of *Mein Kampf* or novelty alarm clocks

depicting Hitler Youth performing the Nazi salute. Joke books for British children blithely crack lame puns: Q: Who was the most powerful cat in China? A: Chairman Miaow. Again, an analogous joke built around Stalin or Hitler is unthinkable.

All this suggests that, to Western eyes, Mao has been safely consigned to 'the past', with no risk that his ideas or heirs will make a comeback. So much about Communism, and especially about Communism during the era of high Maoism in the 1960s and 70s, now seems alien and superannuated, not least its doctrinal dialects and acronyms (to cite just a handful of West German Maoist group-uscles from this epoch: the MLPD, KBW, KPD/ML, KABD . . .). But the truth is that many of the ongoing tragedies of underdevelopment and conflict that trouble Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East today are hangovers from conflicts in which the Cold War super-powers – the US, the USSR *and* Mao's China – were once enmeshed. And Maoist ideology helped shape the Cold War in these regions.

Yet the sidelining of global Maoism is not only down to our own inattention. It is also a consequence of post-Mao China's success in communicating a particular narrative of its past. In 1978, Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping told the world that China would 'never seek hegemony' and almost every foreign policy PR campaign since then has been devoted to arguing China's status as victim, not activist or aggressor, in international politics. For the past ten years, as China has ascended to superpower status, its rulers have advanced the theory of China's 'peaceful rise', insisting that its new strength and influence will be a force for international harmony rather than militant nationalism. The writing of history is an important corroborating part of this narrative: government publicity repeats that China has never interfered in the sovereign affairs of other countries. The idea of a virtuously neutral China thus contrasts with the actions of the hawkish West. Modern China's own history of victimisation by imperialist nations between 1839 and 1945 encourages sympathy with this view.

The CCP's latest campaign for global influence is the 'China Dream', designed to market internationally the idea of a strong, successful China. Its book-length manifesto argues that 'China has a tradition of cherishing peace and harmony and it never seeks to pillage others or establish spheres of influence'.<sup>21</sup> When I was researching my first book, tracing post-Mao China's obsession with winning a Nobel Prize in

Literature, I encountered over and over – in documents and interviews – a Great Wall of Denial that China had had any kind of contact with the outside world between 1949 and 1976. In the received wisdom of the 1990s and 2000s, the People's Republic of China made its first, grand entrance to the international world in 1978, when Deng Xiaoping took supreme power. Mao-era China therefore had no foreign policy, this version of history upholds: it was isolated by and from the international community.

Under these circumstances, China does not want to illuminate its desire for leadership of the world revolution during the Maoist period, a time when it exported not only ideology, in the form of hundreds of millions of copies of the Little Red Book, but also harder currencies of revolution – money, weapons and training for global insurgencies, especially in the developing world. Naturally, the story of CIA or KGB interference abroad is no more edifying, but at least the history is better known. A senior Chinese diplomatic historian has expressed the embarrassment that this stretch of the past causes China's contemporary rulers. 'The CCP today doesn't want people to talk about this history . . . Their interference in foreign countries back then was truly excessive.'<sup>22</sup> Given the intensity with which the contemporary PRC yearns for global influence, it is an irony that memory of the period during which China enjoyed arguably its greatest global soft power in its entire recorded history has to be 'disappeared' for political reasons. The party's treatment of this issue exemplifies the inconsistencies of Chinese politics today. The contemporary party state, which owes its legitimacy and political stability to Mao, yearns for international 'face'. Yet because the history and legacy of the Mao era, and especially the Cultural Revolution (the principal motor of global Maoism), were so unstable, and the contemporary CCP fetishises political and economic stability above any other governmental goal, this same party state refuses ownership of the global influence that this era seeded (including contemporary Maoist movements in India and Nepal).

Due to the delicacy of these questions in contemporary China, many historical materials remain out of reach. In an archival release unprecedented in Communist history, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) began opening its 1949–65 archives to researchers in 2003 (never before had a Communist state declassified the papers of a

government department while still in power). But this partial opening stopped short of the crucial Cultural Revolution years and most of the MFA materials were reclassified in 2012–13 during an IT ‘systems upgrade’. In any case, the two most important organisations handling the export of Chinese revolutionary theory and practice were the International Liaison Department (ILD, Zhonglianbu) and military intelligence. The former handled party-to-party relations, and therefore dealt with ambitious Communist groups (posing varying levels of threat to their governments) in, say, Burma, Cambodia, Malaysia, France, West Germany, Peru and elsewhere. Within China the organisation was, and remains, so secretive that knowledge of its exact location from the 1950s to the 1970s is, apparently, still not in the public domain. Needless to say, there is no prospect of either organisation opening its archives, unless the CCP itself falls from power. As a result, global Maoism is not an easy subject to research: there is no unified archive for the topic, and primary sources are scattered across speeches, telegrams and minutes of meetings (many of which remain classified), as well as memoirs and oral histories in a wide variety of languages. The sensitivity of the topic within China has further intensified with the accession to power of Xi Jinping, son of a first-generation revolutionary leader, Xi Zhongxun. Since Xi owes much of his own political prestige to the sanctity of the revolution’s image, it has become more important than ever to bury any embarrassing historical details from the Mao era, and particularly those that contradict the doctrine of Chinese non-interference in foreign affairs.

The perception of Maoism as a system of ideas and practices relevant only to China has also kept it on the edges of global history. General histories of the Cold War have often underestimated the importance of Maoist China as offering a genuine alternative to Soviet Communism, providing intellectual and practical support to rebels throughout the world. Recent scholarship has increasingly acknowledged the Asian and specifically Chinese influence. Odd Arne Westad’s two important histories of the Cold War since 2005 have globalised study of this conflict. A cohort of excellent historians inside and outside China – Westad, Chen Jian, Li Danhui, Lorenz Lüthi, Sergey Radchenko, Shen Zhihua, Yang Kuisong, Yafeng Xia – took advantage of widening PRC declassification through the 2000s, before the claw-back began in 2011.<sup>23</sup> But it is still the case that, perhaps stemming

from a more general neglect (beyond specialists) of the global role of China in the twentieth century, Maoist China's influence on the radical political upsurge during the 1960s and 70s remains curiously sidelined in anglophone histories of the period. There is, for example, no English-language book on the spread and impact of Maoist ideas in either post-war Italy or West Germany. There is certainly no synoptic, detailed history of China's involvement in a wide range of conflict and unrest erupting since the Second World War in Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Middle East.

The pentagonal Moscow–Berlin–Prague–London–Washington plots in John le Carré's novels urged anglophone readers to think of the great crises of the Cold War as overwhelmingly American, Soviet and European stories. But this is not how it looked in the 1960s and 1970s, when territories across Asia seemed set to topple before Chinese Communism's messages of militant rebellion; and when European, American and Australian politicians accused China of a 'programme for Maoist world domination' reminiscent 'of *Mein Kampf*', of leading 'a worldwide subversive movement . . . in Latin America, in Africa, in Asia'. 'Should Australia fall,' one Antipodean commentator phlegmatically remarked, 'historians will not pause to reflect too deeply on the fate of this handful of white men who thought they could live under the shadow of the Chinese phallus.'<sup>24</sup> The stilted international voice of China – the Beijing-published magazine *Peking Review* – encouraged this sense of alarm in editions across dozens of languages: 'Chairman Mao . . . is the great leader of the revolutionary people of the world . . . lighting the hearts of the revolutionary people of the world and indicating the road to victory in the revolution.'<sup>25</sup> Internal documents reported Mao proclaiming that 'China is not only the political centre of world revolution, it must also be the centre of world revolution militarily and technically'.<sup>26</sup> Westerners and Soviets alike quailed at Mao's breezy arithmetic concerning the possible outcome of a nuclear war: 'If the worst came to the worst and half of mankind died, the other half would remain while imperialism would be razed to the ground and the whole world would become socialist.'<sup>27</sup>

Without taking China into account, it is impossible to understand US actions during the Cold War in Asia, where American presidents created and propped up states to stymie Mao. The publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 revealed that America's war in Vietnam was

not 'to help [a] friend' (South Vietnam) but to 'contain China'. Looking afresh at the global role of Mao's China also helps us reconsider one of the defining analyses of the Cold War in Asia: Washington's 'domino theory', the logic of which dictated US political and military intervention in South East Asia. For good reasons, analysts since at least the 1970s have been intensely critical of this set of assumptions, for it led to the enormities committed by the US Army in Vietnam between 1965 and 1973, and to overt and covert operations that destabilised newly independent nations, and facilitated or propped up dictatorships (for example, in Indonesia, Burma and Cambodia). Intellectually, also, the idea of the domino theory is unsatisfying because it suggests that the diverse states of South East Asia were helplessly passive actors before the subversion of Mao's China. But understandable moral revulsion at and rejection of the US foreign policy results of the domino theory have helped foster a neglect (particularly since the 1980s) of Mao-era China's influence on Cold War South East Asia. This book suggests revisiting and reworking these ideas. It argues that the domino theory did have some purchase on reality: that Mao and his lieutenants *did* want to spread their blueprint for revolution through South East Asia and beyond. Almost every country in the region – Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaya/Malaysia, Cambodia and Burma – had strong, capable Communist movements (often predating the founding of the PRC), influenced and for the most part materially supported by Mao's China after 1949. For these countries had long suffered at the hands of colonial, extractive regimes – little surprise that first Lenin's and then Mao's militant attacks on imperialism appealed to some of South East Asia's brightest minds. Without a huge influx of British and then American materiel and boots on the ground, it is far from clear that the local opponents of Communism in South East Asia would have been able to withstand these insurgencies in the ways that they did, if at all.

Studying the global travels of Maoism requires us not only to reconsider this set of ideas from the perspective of a recent, ideological past when the doctrines of Communism governed, and mattered to, vast swathes of humanity, but also to think our way into very different geographical vantage points. For many growing up in the developing world between the 1950s and 1970s, Mao-era China did

not (and still does not) represent a basket case, but rather an admirable, independent alternative to the political models of the US and USSR.<sup>28</sup> It provided an example of a poor, agrarian country persecuted by Western or Japanese expansionism standing up for itself in the world. In Nepal today, many ordinary consumers idealise China as an economic paradise, and believe it is so prosperous because, not in spite, of Mao. From Paris to Phnom Penh, from Beijing to Berlin, from Lima to London, from Dar es Salaam to Derby, Mao offered not only rhetorical defiance, but also practical strategies for empowering impoverished states marginalised or dominated by global powers; for training low-tech peasant insurgencies against state-funded, colonial militaries.

During and after the Cold War, Maoism exercised a particular attraction for underdeveloped, colonised or recently decolonised states such as Tanzania, Nepal, India, Cambodia and Indonesia, which at least superficially seemed to resemble pre-1949 China. It exercised this appeal often without much material aid from the PRC, certainly in comparison with the budget dispensed by the Soviet-sponsored Comintern through the 1920s and 30s. In true guerrilla style, Mao's ideas and sayings have captivated the developed world too, percolating through the best French arrondissements and elite US campuses – 'Dig deep tunnels, store grain everywhere,' declaimed radical Harvard students in the 1970s. Maoism has also taken root in parts of the developing world that bear no solid resemblance to pre-revolutionary China – such as Peru. Without a proper understanding of Maoism's global appeal and travels, it is hard to make sense of events as geographically and chronologically disparate as the Malayan Emergency, the 1965 massacres in Indonesia, the cultural revolutions of Western Europe and the US of 1968, the Vietnam War and the Khmer Rouge genocide, the end of white rule in Southern Rhodesia and the rise of Robert Mugabe's ZANU, Shining Path's insurgency in Peru, the civil war in Nepal that ended centuries of monarchy, and contemporary insurrection in India's jungles. Conflicts and crises influenced by Mao are not only major historical events; several are still with us, in India, Peru, Nepal and Zimbabwe.

Mao's own internationalism is worth a book in itself, for what it tells us about the variousness – *not* homogeneity – of PRC foreign policy. Mao combined dreams of world revolution with nationalist

ambition and a Chinese imperialism of much older vintage. He veered between imperious acquisitiveness – reasserting imperial China’s claims over parts of the Soviet Union – and free-handed generosity to ‘fraternal’ parties whom he saw as part of a Sino-/Mao-centric civilisation. He carelessly gifted strips of the Sino-Korean border to his ‘fraternal ally’ Kim Il-sung, and promised, when meeting members of the radical pro-China Indian Communist Party, to make over to a future Communist Indian government *all* the border territory that India and China bloodily disputed through the 1960s.<sup>29</sup> Mao’s lofty socialist solidarity – and massive financial aid – to Vietnam was tinged with domineering imperialism; two years after his death, Sino-Vietnamese tensions escalated into a vile border war. Mao was steeped in an older Middle Kingdom mentality: in attempting leadership of the global revolution, he also wanted to reassert China’s claims to occupy the centre of the world.<sup>30</sup> Emphasis on China’s global mission had an important role to play at home, too. As the headquarters of revolution, Mao argued, China was peculiarly vulnerable to attack by the ‘reactionary world. He harked constantly on China’s international insecurity to mobilise domestic campaigns against potential opponents who were attacked as ‘spies’ and ‘enemies of the revolutionary masses’.

Many of global Maoism’s actual consequences were unintended. For example, Mao-era China threw money, time and expertise at Africa in the hope of winning sympathy for and converts to its political cause, but not one lookalike Maoist regime took power. There was only piecemeal uptake of Mao’s strategy and symbols in Tanzania and Southern Rhodesia, home to his most fervent African admirers. In Nepal, India and Peru, by contrast, the PRC’s investment was more muted: glossy magazines, translations and radio in local languages, the occasional invitation to China – little more. Yet in those countries, Mao’s ideas found passionate adherents who deployed his strategies in wars that transformed their countries’ contemporary history. The story of global Maoism exemplifies the unpredictable course of Communist China’s ongoing quest for soft power. However closely the party state has tried to mould and direct its global image, its initiatives forever spin off in unexpected, uncontrollable directions. For Maoism is an unstable political creed that simultaneously reveres centralised party and mass leadership, collective obedience and anti-state rebellion. In its global journeys, Maoism has served causes that

questioned or attacked existing governments; in its country of origin, it has created an omnipotent party state. It has lionised peasant revolution, while winning many of its followers or sympathisers from educated elites (Louis Althusser, Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Baburam Bhattarai, Abimael Guzmán) – it has been a revolution spread through books. Cerebral global Maoists have often turned the idealised ‘masses’ into cannon fodder for their doctrinal revolutions, combining sympathy with brutality towards those suffering at the bottom of society.

The close of the Cold War – with its disintegration of old US and Soviet alliances, and the rise of ever more fluid global cultures of travel and transmission – has, if anything, only strengthened the validity of Mao’s guerrilla tactics and strategies. Analysts of Daesh claim that the group came to power by deploying Mao’s ideas about asymmetric warfare against an established state; there is certainly a paper trail of influence from Cultural Revolution doctrines of ‘People’s War’ to insurgencies in the Middle East. China gave the PLO, in the words of one satisfied Palestinian visitor, ‘everything that we asked for’, and several Palestinian militants made the transition from Maoism to jihadism in the 1980s.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, once you write Maoism back into the global history of the twentieth century, you start to get a very different narrative from the standard one in which the Soviet Union loses the Cold War to neo-liberalism. A quarter of a century since Communism collapsed in Europe and then in the USSR, China’s Communist Party continues – seemingly – to flourish. Under its direction, China has become a world economic and political force. The CCP – its practice and legitimacy still dominated by Mao – has, with quite extraordinary success, recast itself as a champion of the market economy, while remaining an essentially secretive, Leninist organisation. If the CCP is still in charge in 2024, the Chinese Communist revolution will have exceeded the 74-year lifespan of its Soviet older brother. China’s leaders feel a nervous pride at this prospect: the causes of the Soviet collapse in 1991 fascinate past and present members of the politburo. If the CCP survives much beyond this point, historians may come to see October 1949, rather than October 1917, as the game-changing revolution of the last century.

Study of the history and fallout of global Maoism holds lessons highly relevant to contemporary challenges across the world. This

book argues that exploring global Maoism is vital to comprehending not only Chinese history, but also radical politics in many parts of the globe – the politics of disenfranchisement, discontent and impoverishment. In India today, the Maoist Naxalite movement recruits most strongly from the least privileged members of society. Maoism became an international force in the era of decolonisation. In the developing world, its message of anti-imperialist confrontation appealed to peoples who had been repressed economically, politically and culturally; who aspired to the living standards of the industrialised West and to international dignity. Although the Cold War has ended, problems of poverty and inequality persist. As Europe contends with a migration crisis that results from impoverishment and political turmoil, the past and present of global Maoism are important reminders of the radicalism that can spring from material and political desperation, and of its consequences.

Over the last two years, the election of Donald Trump and the rise of European populist politics have brought questions of sovereignty under new scrutiny. In the UK, for example, does it reside with ‘the people’ (as a demagogue like Nigel Farage argues), or with Parliament? What is the relationship between the ‘will of the people’ and the specialist elite who legislate in the capital? These are questions with which Maoism has grappled – often with violent results – in its oscillations between ‘democratic centralism’ (Lenin’s veneration of an all-powerful, secretive party core), the ‘mass line’ (Mao’s proposition that grass-roots ideas should shape party policy) and the ‘mass democracy’ (manipulated, in reality, by the party-authored cult of Mao) of the Cultural Revolution. In theory, Mao and Maoism agitated to give voice to the marginalised, and to prevent the inevitable flow of power to technocratic metropolitan elites (though the reality has been very different). Intriguingly, the rebellious repertoires of Leninism and Maoism seem to appeal to the architects of Trump politics. Steve Bannon sees himself as a ‘tsar of agitation’, as (in his own words) a Leninist plotting to bring the political system crashing down.<sup>32</sup> The Australian sinologist Geremie Barmé has compared Trump (‘the Great Disrupter’) with Mao: for his erratic populism, his scorn for the bureaucratic establishment, his predilection for brief, earthy statements (albeit in early-morning tweets, rather than compendia of quotations), his rhetorical obsession with national autarky.<sup>33</sup> In a development

emblematic of the US alt-right's political confusion (and the ductility of Maoism), Trump's administration was roiled by yet more turmoil in August 2017 when a paranoid memo circulating around Trump supporters in the National Security Council was leaked to the press: it described a 'deep-state' conspiracy against the president conducted according to the strategies and tactics of the 'Maoist insurgency model'.<sup>34</sup>

The history of global Maoism also offers important but neglected case studies of radicalisation – one of the preoccupations of contemporary sociology. The analytical literature on this subject currently focuses almost exclusively on religion (especially Islam), overlooking examples of Maoist-inspired political violence and indoctrination in South East Asia, Western Europe and Latin America. The recent jailing in the UK of Aravindan Balakrishnan, leader of a Brixton Maoist party of the 1970s, for 'brainwashing' and holding captive for decades several women reminds us forcefully (and close to home) of the potency of such indoctrination. Veteran radicals on the FBI's watch list during the War on Terror were, back in the 1960s and 70s, adherents of Maoist-inflected groups; their opposition to the American government was forged through engagement with Maoism. International rebels still with us today learned their subversion from Maoist texts.<sup>35</sup> At the other end of the political spectrum, the US Army remains hung up on Maoist military strategy, which is still the textbook model of insurgency to be tackled in their counter-insurgency manuals. Although radicalisation by political ideology, especially Communist ideology, has come to seem old hat in the post-Cold War world, it is similar in process to radicalisation by religion – in its deployment of close-tie relationships to gain recruits, its use of simple, confident explanations and its exploitation of socio-economic crises. Indeed, the global history of Maoism – inside and outside China – is notable for the religious overtones of its leadership cults. In China, Mao was depicted as the sun illuminating his people, who performed their veneration through loyalty dances. Peru's Mao, Abimael Guzmán (aka Gonzalo, his *nom de guerre*), was also outlined in golden effulgence on Shining Path posters, and cadres compelled peasants under their rule to exclaim 'Ay, Gonzalo', instead of 'Ay, Jesús'. The past and ongoing stories of global Maoism pose questions about radicalisation that resonate

loudly today. What kind of socio-economic circumstances, belief systems and social structures incubate political violence? What happens to such programmes as they struggle for and capture power? How can societies battered by insurgency and counter-insurgency mend themselves?

Finally, a note about coverage. This book aims to recount a global history of Maoism, but it is impossible to tell every story. Other examples abound: the Caribbean, Icelandic, Mexican, Swiss Maoists; the Maoism of the Philippine and Burmese Communist parties; the members of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation euphemistically hosted in Mao's China on scholarships to study modern Chinese literature. Nor can every episode relevant to this history be told in the detail that it demands: the Southern Rhodesian War, Peruvian land reform, Indonesian independence, second-wave feminism, the West German Green movement will only be sketched in outline. I have tried to select episodes that evoked the trajectory, the variety and (what seemed to me) the most significant afterlives of global Maoism. As I researched and wrote, I was unable to find a book that juxtaposes these histories to give a unified sense of their diversity and significance. This is an attempt to fill that space.

My story of international Maoism begins, like so many extraordinary stories of modern Asia, in 1930s Shanghai, an interlocking world of gangsters, revolutionaries, intellectuals and society hostesses. In 1936, Song Qingling, the beautiful widow of the first president of the republic, Sun Yat-sen, sister-in-law of Chiang Kai-shek (the scourge of China's left wing) and pre-eminent fellow traveller to Mao's Communists, introduced Edgar Snow, an ambitious journalist from the American Midwest on the hunt for an international scoop, to an underground network that would escort him to Mao's new headquarters in dusty north-west China. Over the weeks that the American spent in the Communist base, Mao and his closest lieutenants gave Snow a world exclusive, immersing him in a doctored account of their past and present that photoshopped the violence and purges, and portrayed them as persecuted patriots and democrats. At the end of his stay in the north-west, Snow had 20,000 words of transcribed interviews, all checked and corrected by Mao.

Mao and his comrades had chosen their man well. Snow – a non-Communist foreigner with impeccable media connections – was the ideal mouthpiece for taking their story to the international world. *Red Star* turned Mao into a political leader with global name recognition. Its Chinese edition won educated young urbanites over to Mao's revolution at a time when Chinese Communism was on the point of annihilation. Since 1937, the book has created rebels and guerrillas: from the jungles of Malaysia to the freezing fields of west Russia, from the alternative lifestyles of West Germany's 1960s counterculture to the training camps of high-caste Nepali Maoists.

I move chronologically through the political, diplomatic and cultural history of international Maoism: through the lives, texts and material objects – *Red Star Over China*, the Little Red Book (in its dozens of languages and translations), rubbery pink 45s of 'The East is Red' – that communicated the Maoist credo across China and the globe. Ranging between the 1930s and the present day, the pages of this book are peopled by politicians, professors, poets, revolutionaries, translators, misfits, Machiavels, fanatics and flakes – some of whom ended up ruling one of the largest, most powerful countries in the world. Communism presents itself as an impersonal political science, demanding that the individual submits to abstract ideological authority. Yet the story of Mao's global travels is full of human drama. It is challenging to find anyone less socially conformist than Mao himself: a rebel who hated his father, who aged thirty-four declared war on the Chinese state, who serially philandered, who wore patched pyjamas to state functions and regularly dragged both Chinese and foreign leaders to audiences with him in the earliest hours of the morning, who purged (often to death) most of his closest comrades; who refused to brush his teeth, ever. The ranks of Mao's acolytes and imitators are filled with similar eccentrics and misfits: the brother of a Mumbai ice-cream magnate who trained as an accountant before declaring war on the Indian state; a Colombian armchair guerrilla who chose whisky over the revolution; a Peruvian philosophy prof who adored Beethoven alongside Mao; a future president of that renowned bureaucracy the European Union. Maoism, with its preaching of 'protracted warfare', seems particularly suited to oddballs, to those determined both to set themselves in conflict with society, and to control it.

I will describe the apocalyptic fears of the early Cold War, when China's 1950 treaty with the Soviet Union sent shivers up the spines of Western governments. The alliance was, Odd Arne Westad has written, 'the greatest power to challenge the political supremacy of the Western capitals since the final expansion of the Ottoman empire in the sixteenth century'.<sup>36</sup> Yet a decade later, China's potentially world-dominating friendship with the USSR unravelled at speed. Denouncing the Soviets as 'revisionists' anxious to appease the Americans, Mao and his lieutenants seized every opportunity to sledge the USSR in public and to assert themselves as the true leaders of the world revolution. Maoism's travels through the 1960s and 70s – the decades in which Mao bid for supremacy in global Communism – are the centrepiece of the book. I will track the conflagration of Mao fever: the Mao badges that seeped through China's borders to Nepal, India and Cambodia, becoming radical chic among Kathmandu, Calcutta and Phnom Penh youth; the well-thumbed issues of *Peking Review* declaring Mao 'the great helmsman of the world revolution' and 'the never-setting sun'; the crackling, nasal broadcasts of Peking Radio beamed into the African savannah; the Americans and Europeans who worshipped Mao's China from afar (hippies, civil rights campaigners, philosophers, terrorists and Shirley MacLaine).<sup>37</sup>

Maoism had an important place in the hot conflicts of the Cold War, mixed up in Communist movements in Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam – movements that transformed the destinies of these countries. To the Vietnamese Communists, Maoist China supplied moral and material support. It schooled Pol Pot and gave him over \$1 billion in aid, free military assistance and medical check-ups. On the brink of committing genocide, Pol lounged by Mao's swimming pool as the moribund chairman lauded the Cambodian's emptying of the country's cities into forced labour projects and killing fields: 'Your experience is better than ours ... You are basically right.'<sup>38</sup>

The final chapters will describe Maoism's long, bloody afterlives in Peru, Nepal and India, with their confused mix of empathy for, and ruthlessness towards, those who suffer at the bottom of their societies. In 1996, only four years after Abimael Guzmán was captured directing his revolution from a respectable barrio of Lima, Nepalese Maoists

declared a 'People's War' – trained by the resurgent Indian Naxalites – on the government's long-term, systematic neglect of the country's rural majority. By the close of the conflict in 2006, some 17,000 Nepalis had died. In an ironic twist, the Nepalese borrowing of Mao's tactics of guerrilla warfare has been not only a security threat but also a source of intense embarrassment to China's contemporary rulers, who claim that Mao's ideas have been grossly misinterpreted. Far more than a Cold War aftershock, Indian and Nepali Maoism are part of the current inflammation of global radicalisation. The conflagration of Maoism across South Asia raises fundamental questions about development, social justice, environmentalism and international exploitation.

The story concludes, as it begins, in China. Even as it strives to suppress memory of Mao's chaotic Cultural Revolution, the government revives Mao-era songs, films and language in an attempt to generate nostalgic affection for a regime that has long become more capitalist than Communist. Angry young men denounce the profiteering compradors of the current Communist Party and call for a return to Mao's radical egalitarianism. Laid-off workers, waving Little Red Books, demonstrate against their fat-cat bosses. In villages up and down the country, farmers battle – with knives, bricks and sticks – their corrupt local officials. They are all heirs to Mao's strange legacy of party discipline, political puritanism and People's War. To understand the volatile legacy that is still shaping political practice today, we need to track the history of Maoism in China, but also its uses and reinterpretations far beyond China's borders.

# I

## WHAT IS MAOISM?

In the first week of January 2016, a vast golden statue of Mao was unveiled in the middle of the Henan countryside in central China, looming out of frozen brown fields under grey skies. Over thirty-six metres high, it cost £312,000 to build, and was paid for by local people and businessmen. For forty-eight hours tourists gathered to take selfies with this curious effigy (apart from the swept-back, receding hairline, the statue's head barely resembled Mao). The statue was, word had it, the brainchild of one Mr Sun Qingxin, a local food-processing entrepreneur crazy for the Helmsman. 'His factory is full of Maos,' testified a local potato farmer.<sup>1</sup> Commentators in the Chinese cybersphere had divergent responses. 'Eternal life to Mao Zedong!', 'He is our legend, our god – we should worship him!', 'Crazy', 'Pull it down', 'It doesn't look like him ... he should have been sitting on a sofa.' Use the money to build roads or clinics instead, others argued.<sup>2</sup> Then, on 7 January, a black cloth was draped over Mao's head and the statue was destroyed by Public Security officials, leaving behind only rubble and rumours that it had violated planning regulations. Even the usually authoritative *People's Daily* was puzzled by the whole business, confessing that 'the reasons for the demolition are not clear'.<sup>3</sup> Several locals wept as the statue came down, among them probably descendants of the multitudes – one analyst puts the figure at 7.8 million – who died in Henan during the 1960s famine caused by Mao's policies.<sup>4</sup>

The mysterious rise and fall of the golden Mao colossus of Henan evokes the elusive quality of Mao and Maoism, both in and beyond China. The term 'Maoism' became popular in the 1950s to denote Anglo-American summaries of the system of political thought and practice instituted across the new People's Republic of China. Since then, it has had a fractious history. Its Chinese translation, *Mao zhuyi*,

has never been endorsed by CCP ideologues. It is a dismissive term used by liberals to describe adulation for Mao among contemporary China's alt-left, or by government analysts to describe and disavow 'Maoist' politics in India or Nepal today. 'This group,' sniffed the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs when protesting the use of the tag by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), '[has] nothing to do with China, and we [feel] indignant that they usurped the name of Mao Zedong, the great leader of the Chinese people.'<sup>5</sup> Orthodox Chinese analysts use the more cerebral term 'Mao Zedong Thought'.

Yet for all its imperfections it will be used here because it has become the most commonly used term for a successful Chinese Communist programme from the 1930s to the present day. It has validity only on the understanding that the Maoist programme – despite possessing a solid symbolic core, in the shape of Mao himself – has taken various (and often contradictory) forms over decades and continents, according to context. It comes into formal existence in the early 1940s, though builds on antecedents from earlier in Mao's life and thought. This chapter sets out the core features of this programme, as Mao and his later disciples (in China and beyond) saw them, organising them – in the style of that ubiquitous badge of high, 1960s Maoism, the Little Red Book – by a series of key quotations. It sorts between the derivative and the original in Mao's ideas: where they overlap with, and differ from, Mao's Soviet predecessors.<sup>6</sup> Some of these differences are in kind, others in degree. In the former category there is Mao's veneration of the peasantry as a revolutionary force and his lifelong tenderness for anarchic rebellion against authority. In the latter category belong central elements of the Leninist–Stalinist project, with its veneration of political violence, its championing of anti-colonial resistance, and its use of thought-control techniques to forge a disciplined, increasingly repressive party and society.<sup>7</sup>

1. *'Power comes out of the barrel of a gun.'*

Shanghai, 12 April 1927, 4 a.m. A bugle call from the headquarters of the Nationalist Party on Route Ghisi, in the far south of the French concession, was answered by the siren from a gunboat moored on the city's east side. Members of Shanghai's most powerful triad, the

Green Gang – disguised in blue factory workers' uniforms, with white armbands – converged on Communist strongholds scattered through the low-rise Chinese quarters of the city. Sunrise was still an hour and a half away when machine-gun fire rattled through the darkness. Every worker who resisted was shot down. Others were lashed together and marched away for execution. A general strike was called for the following day but those who turned out for a protest demonstration were brought down by Nationalist machine-gun fire, rifle butts and bayonets. The protesters had put women and children at the front of the march, assuming that Nationalist troops would not open fire. More than three hundred were killed that day, witnesses reckoned, and a far larger number wounded, some of whom were buried alive with the dead.

Three weeks earlier, Communist prospects in the city had looked very different. In the last ten days of March, Shanghai's warlord ruler had surrendered the metropolis to a coalition of armed pickets organised by the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Strikers had first shut down the city and then – initially armed with only 100 rifles, 250 pistols and 200 hand grenades, plus propaganda leaflets, posters and newspapers – had fought for shipyards, police stations and the railway.<sup>8</sup> The taking of the city was crucial to the uprising launched in 1926 – the so-called Northern Expedition, China's second revolution in fifteen years – against army strongmen who had carved the country into regional kingdoms.

The 1911 Revolution had brought to an end some 2,000 years of dynastic rule. Within five years, central authority had disintegrated with the rise of 'warlords', provincial commanders. The young republic still had a president in the capital Beijing, but his authority over the localities was nominal. Nonetheless, faith in the idea of a unified China persisted. Urban China in particular periodically erupted with discontent at the new status quo, for political paralysis under fragmented military rule made China domestically and internationally vulnerable. On 4 May 1919, patriotic protests in Beijing and Shanghai broke out after China's warlord rulers agreed at the Versailles Conference to sign away a large slice of north-east China to Japan. By 1923, Sun Yat-sen – the republic's first, briefly incumbent president (in early 1912) and a man obsessed with the idea of reunifying China – forged an alliance between his Nationalist Party (the Guomindang or GMD) and the

Communist Party, all funded, trained and armed by the Soviet Union and its Communist International (Comintern). Sun's death in 1925 notwithstanding, his successor as Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek, launched the Northern Expedition, a military campaign to reunite the country, the following year. Soviet-trained Chinese troops pushed up from the south, fighting or bribing warlords into submission. The forces were a united front of the conservative GMD and more radical CCP: the GMD controlled the formal, standing army, but everywhere they fought, their task was made easier by striking workers and peasant activists (organised by Communists), who disrupted the communications, materiel and authority of the old regime.

This was an uneasy alliance, however. The aims and power base of the two parties were fundamentally at odds: the GMD had always relied on the moneyed classes for funds, while the Communists were devoted to organising rebellion by China's urban workers and poor farmers. Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Nationalists, marched into Shanghai at the end of March 1927 and – behind public reassurances to the labour unions and to Shanghai's foreigners – made a secret deal with Shanghai's Green Gang leader-in-chief, Du Yuesheng, to break the city's Communists. Then, on 11 April, Du invited Wang Shouhua, the Communist leader of the General Labour Union, to a quiet dinner in his French-style villa, where one of Du's Green Gang underlings strangled him. A few hours later, early on 12 April, Du's thugs – paid and armed by Chinese and foreign businessmen – eliminated unsuspecting, unprepared Communist strongholds throughout the city.

The massacre of red Shanghai heralded months and years of horrific violence in China against those of proven or suspected Communist sympathies. Some estimate that millions died: disembowelled, decapitated, soaked in petrol and set alight, branded to death with hot irons, tied to trees with grit rubbed into their mutilations. Special efforts were made to brutalise female comrades. Nationalist troops suppressing peasant associations in one province 'cut open the breasts of the women comrades, pierced their bodies perpendicularly with iron wires and paraded them naked through the streets'.<sup>9</sup>

Of all the lessons learned by the Chinese Communist Party in its history, the one taught by the bloody spring of 1927 left arguably the deepest impression. To stand a chance of survival, the party needed

an army. In 1927, Mao Zedong – one of several party leaders who began to endorse violence at the time – turned the moral of the tale into his best-known aphorism, one that subsequently migrated from Chinese propaganda posters to Black Panther flyers, from hand-copied Parisian student rags to Indian jungle-rallies: ‘Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun.’ Eleven years later, he added the crucial refinement: ‘The Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party.’<sup>10</sup> This affection for political violence underpinned the cult that Mao would create over the next half-century. In the context of modern political movements, respect for the power of the gun was not remotely exceptional – indeed, fascism celebrated violence more avidly than Communism. But within Chinese Communism, Mao’s rhetorical intervention was decisive.

In the recriminations that followed the disaster of 1927, Chinese Communists blamed the Comintern for insisting that they keep working with the Nationalists, for forcing upon them a deal that made them the subordinate partner in the united front and that forbade them from forming an independent army. In reality, though, it had not occurred to them that they might need to arm themselves seriously, beyond the local workers’ and farmers’ militias that supported the Nationalists’ standing army. The first seven years of Communism in China – Comintern representatives properly began work in China in 1920 – were dominated by intellectuals and bookworms, who consistently refused to acknowledge the violence inherent in the theory and practice of Communism. Mao too was a bookworm, albeit of peasant origin, but one who cherished violence; so were many of his later global followers.

Communism was just one of the political solutions to China’s ills – political chaos, chronic poverty, injustice and gender inequality – with which young radicals toyed in the late 1910s. They were little interested in the military ruthlessness of Lenin’s victory in Russia; they preferred the vague, romantic image of the October Revolution as a spontaneous national upsurge to its reality (a brutal, drawn-out civil war). Representatives of the Comintern sent to China drew these disparate rebels together into the first congress of the CCP in a Shanghai town house in 1921. However, the early CCP was not a tight, Leninist party structure, but rather a loose network of earnest if often dilettante-ish study cells.

Although present at the first congress, the 27-year-old Mao was at that point far from an iron man of the Communist Party, or a particular enthusiast of the Soviet Union. His view in December 1920 – when he took his first Communist turn – was that ‘a Russian-style revolution is a last resort when all other means have been exhausted’.<sup>11</sup> Mao had done his best to turn his back on his peasant origins through his teens and early twenties. He had spent years in Changsha, the provincial capital of his native Hunan, studying and reading widely, developing his capacity for philosophical abstraction, indulging in long, wordy musings with friends. One meeting of the New People’s Study Society – a radical cell co-organised by Mao in Hunan – spent much of its time deliberating whether the society’s aim ought to be ‘to transform the world’ or to ‘transform China and the world’. The associates then came up with the following list of hell-raising measures to achieve their goal: ‘Study; propaganda; a savings society; vegetable gardens.’ Once those key decisions had been taken, the society turned its attention to the all-important programme of ‘recreational activities’: river cruises, mountain excursions, spring outings to visit graves, dinner meetings, frolics in the snow (arrangements to be made whenever it snowed).<sup>12</sup> China’s early Communists had great difficulty committing themselves in practice to the sort of charismatic ‘military organisation of agents all lending their attention to the same cause’ that Lenin conceptualised in *What Is to be Done?*<sup>13</sup> Scattered through a network of cells and study societies in China and Europe, and taking in a good sprinkle of renegade anarchists, they were distinctly insubordinate. ‘Party members’, Chen Duxiu – the first leader of the CCP, between 1921 and 1927 – commented plaintively in 1923, ‘often do not have complete faith in the party.’<sup>14</sup>

It took the horror of the 1927 crackdown, and the subsequent rise within the party of men like Mao from outside the first generation of elite intellectual leaders, to assert the primacy of the military and of violence. Mao made his first intervention on this subject in 1927, and would fixate upon it for the rest of his life. ‘Only with guns’, he wrote in the 1930s, ‘can the whole world be transformed.’<sup>15</sup> In the 1940s, war carried him to absolute power. In the 1950s, he imposed military discipline on Chinese society and agriculture to achieve crash-industrialisation and finance his nuclear

programme. He led a revolution in which political violence against 'counter-revolutionaries' was perfectly normalised. In 1968, after the first two anarchic years of Cultural Revolution, he turned China into an army dictatorship. By this point, aspiring insurgents from California to Kolkata worshipped him as the military colossus of the revolution.

Mao's attachment to political violence was not in itself original within global Communism. Lenin and Stalin also venerated it: it is written into Marx's tumultuous visions of world revolution and in any case suited the two Soviet leaders' own ruthless temperaments. However, although Lenin and Stalin were appreciative of violence (the civil war, during which Stalin put in plenty of time as a front-line enforcer, was a formative experience for many Bolsheviks), the two Soviet leaders were ideologues and organisers by trade – not men of the army, as Mao fully became in the late 1920s. Mao was a winning strategist, on and off the battlefield; much of his power and prestige within the party derived from this. After his ideas began to go global, legitimisation of violence for political purposes was associated closely with Mao: partly thanks to Mao's talent for sound bites, and partly thanks to the CCP's PR manipulations in the 1960s and 70s. Through these decades, Mao and his lieutenants portrayed Khrushchev and the Soviet Union as bourgeois appeasers of capitalism, while painting themselves as heroic foot soldiers in a global People's War. This vision of Mao and Maoism crossed continents, turning him into the architect of defiant, protracted, guerrilla warfare against the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers and the professional armies of established states. An anti-apartheid militia in South Africa in the early 1960s, for example, called itself Yu Chin Chan, in a mis-romanisation of Mao's guerrilla warfare (*youji zhan* in Chinese).<sup>16</sup> Again, the style of warfare that Mao prioritised in his own writing was distinct from the Soviet model. In the Soviet Union, despite the contributions of partisans to anti-Nazi resistance in the Second World War, the Red Army – not guerrilla warfare – was the paradigmatic tool of war. (Though it is also worth pointing out that, in practice, Mao's recipe for guerrilla manoeuvres played a limited role in Chinese revolutionary wars during the 1930s and 40s. Nationalist armies carried most of the resistance to the Japanese during the Second World War, and Chinese Communist victory in the final years of the civil war up to 1949 was won through field battles that the Soviets taught the CCP how to fight.)<sup>17</sup>

2. *'In a very short time, several hundred million peasants in China's central, southern and northern provinces will rise like a fierce wind or tempest, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it . . . Revolution is not a dinner party.'*

The day-to-day intensity of organisational work in the CCP changed after May 1925. That summer, Shanghai saw spontaneous demonstrations and strikes against the foreign presence in the city, after Sikh constables opened fire on a crowd protesting the arrest of six Chinese students by the British. Eleven Chinese people were killed, and at least twenty wounded. Activists in the city organised solidarity strikes in Shanghai, in Canton and in Hong Kong. There was a steep hike in CCP membership: from 994 in 1925, to just under 60,000 in April 1927.<sup>18</sup> This wave of recruitment created the workers' militias that shut down the city on behalf of the Northern Expedition in March 1927.

Meanwhile, Mao was more interested in the countryside. During the radical upsurge of 1925–27, Communist-run peasant associations – initially tolerated by the Guomindang in its desire to become a party with a mass following – also increased in number. As the Northern Expedition moved up the country, Communist cadres seized the opportunity to remake rural society: they redistributed land, and humiliated and expelled rich landlords. In January 1927 Mao returned to Hunan where he completed a report registering, for his native province alone, an increase in membership of peasant associations from 300,000 to 10 million in just one year.<sup>19</sup> It is worth quoting at some length from the report – later, a text beloved by Italian factory workers and Indian undergraduates – because it gives a flavour of the rhetorical elan that would make Mao a global Communist celebrity.

[The peasants] will break through all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will, *in the end*, send all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local bullies, and bad gentry to their graves. All revolutionary parties and all revolutionary comrades will stand before them to be tested, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. To march at their head and lead them? To stand behind them, gesticulating and criticising them? Or to stand opposite them and oppose them? . . . those who submit to it survive, and those who resist perish . . . A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay,

or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle ... A revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows the power of another ... They, who used to rank below everyone else, now rank above everybody else.<sup>20</sup>

This was a watershed moment for Mao's Chinese version of Communism. Marx famously likened peasants to 'potatoes in a sack' – he believed that the urban, not the rural, proletariat would carry the revolution. Lenin and Stalin adapted this view only to turn the peasantry into the key source of 'primitive capital accumulation', the springboard for rapid industrialisation and modernisation to catch up with Europe. For over half a century, exploitation of the peasantry was the norm for Soviet Communism – from ruthless civil war requisitions, via Stalin's brutal collectivisation in the late 1920s, to Khrushchev's long-standing war on private plots. The gross inequalities inflicted on the countryside did not begin to come to an end until 1974, when peasants previously tied to their collectives were granted the internal passport, giving them in theory freedom of movement. Between the 1950s and 1970s, Mao proved capable of a similar, if not greater, cruelty towards the Chinese peasantry: his pursuit of industrialisation was principally responsible for a famine that cost some 30 million lives. But Soviet distrust towards the peasantry did not translate directly into Maoism: although in both states the Communist Party was determined to maintain iron control, the CCP under Mao stressed and attained a saturation of the rural grass roots that the Soviets never rivalled. Compare the power bases of the Bolshevik and Maoist parties on the eve of taking power, in 1917 and 1949 respectively: the fingers of one hand would not be required to count the number of villages that the Soviets controlled before seizing power in 1917, whereas peasant militias formed the logistical backbone to CCP victory in the civil war in 1949.

Mao was himself, of course, a peasant by origin, and he always spoke, dressed and ate like one. He regularly produced earthy, sometimes foul analogies – underscoring time and again his refusal to be planed into a smooth, establishment statesman. Long articles reminded him of 'the foot-bindings of a slattern, long and stinky'. Despite the cult of infallibility being built up around Mao through the 1950s and 60s, he was – with the

ingenuousness of an autodidact – unafraid of showing his ignorance. While once speaking with a Brazilian delegation, he revealed that he had no idea where Brazil was. He met world leaders in patched pyjamas and socks (and sometimes in a bathrobe) and favoured one dish above all others – Hunan-style fatty pork, with a bowl of whole chillies on the side, all washed down with a tin mug of tea (as a postprandial *digestif*, Mao would chew squeakily on the sodden tea leaves in the bottom of the cup). Maoism, from its beginnings in the 1930s through to today, has styled itself as a rural religion that represents and fights for toiling farmers.

In his ‘Report from Hunan’, Mao particularly celebrated the violent tyranny exercised by the rural lumpenproletariat against local landowners. ‘The only effective way of suppressing the reactionaries is to execute at least one or two in each county ... it is necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area ... to exceed the proper limits.’<sup>21</sup> Parts of the report seemed almost ecstatic at the violence witnessed. ‘It is wonderful! It is wonderful!’<sup>22</sup> By 1927, Mao – to the horror of his intellectual bosses such as Chen Duxiu, who was deeply unhappy about the levels of violence approved and encouraged by Mao in Hunan – had championed both the military and the rural turn in CCP history.

Over the next seven years of fierce Nationalist suppression of the CCP, Mao dug into a poor, remote mountain range – Jinggangshan – on the border between Hunan and Jiangxi provinces. Here he honed his talent for guerrilla warfare, the principles of which he condensed to a sixteen-syllable jingle for his illiterate peasant troops: *Di jin, wo tui; di zhu, wo rao; Di pi, wo da; Di tui, wo zhui* (when the enemy advances, retreat; when the enemy rests, harass; when the enemy grows tired, attack; when the enemy retreats, pursue).<sup>23</sup> Strict rules for army discipline were laid down: ‘Obey orders’; ‘Don’t take as much as a sweet potato from the masses’; ‘Anything confiscated from landlords and local bullies to be handed in for public distribution’. Military victories would clear the way for setting up red bases in remote parts of the countryside. In advocating and conducting guerrilla warfare, Mao began, for the first time, to set policy, rather than simply follow it. Commanded in 1929 by the Central Committee in Shanghai to disperse the army, he robustly refused: the order was ‘unreal’ and ‘liquidationist’. The Central Committee responded by accusing him of ‘roving bandit ideology’. No matter: on 4 October 1930, Communist

forces under Mao took their first major city in Jiangxi – Ji'an, the province's third-largest settlement.<sup>24</sup>

3. *'Practice is the sole criterion of truth.'*

In the spring of 1930, Mao toured a county called Xunwu in deep southern Jiangxi. Everything interested him: its waterways, its postal services, the derelict state of the umbrella-manufacturing business, the seaweed trade, the eight different kinds of sugar sold and their relative popularity, the vogue for a hairstyle called the 'Thai pomelo'; and, of course, the different economic classes – landlords (large, middle and small), peasants (rich and poor), and the progress of land redistribution. This was a very different Mao from the one whose blood had been set racing by revolutionary carnage in Hunan. Here was the careful, methodical analyst and architect of revolution, fixated on empirical observation and putting 'practice' above political formulas. An intricately detailed report – hundreds of pages long – resulted.<sup>25</sup>

Almost as a companion piece to his 'Report from Xunwu', in May 1930 Mao also published an essay entitled 'Opposing Bookism'. 'Many of our comrades keep their eyes shut all day long and go around talking nonsense,' he claimed. 'This is disgraceful for a Communist ... You can't solve that problem? Well, go and investigate its present situation and its history!'<sup>26</sup> By the late 1930s, his rhetoric matched his message, when addressing those overfond of theories. 'Your dogma', he told them, 'is less use than dogshit ... Books cannot walk and you can open and close a book at will; this is the easiest thing in the world to do, a great deal easier than it is for the cook to prepare a meal, and much easier than it is for him to slaughter a pig. He has to catch the pig ... the pig can run ... he slaughters it ... the pig squeals. A book placed on a desk cannot run, nor can it squeal. You can dispose of it in any manner you wish. Is there anything easier to do?'<sup>27</sup>

Although, as he reached his dotage, Mao presented himself increasingly as the gnomic sage of the world revolution, it was an earlier Mao – Mao the common-sense Communist – who appealed to millions of non-Chinese acolytes. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, thousands of educated French Maoists devoted themselves to 'serving the people' (another of Mao's favourite slogans) as *établis*, working in factories or

in the countryside. Others undertook ‘long marches’ (in imitation of the Chinese Communists’ mythologised trek to the north-west between 1934 and 1935) through the countryside, in order to understand better the conditions of the French proletariat. They repeated Mao’s terse dictum ‘no investigation, no right to speak’ as a litany. ‘I’ve always kept in mind a quotation from President Mao, which I still like and say a lot,’ recalled Tiennot Grumbach, once a prominent Maoist from the elite *École Normale Supérieure*, in 2008. “‘There are those who cross the field without seeing the roses, there are those who stop their horse to look at the roses, and there are those who get off their horse to smell the roses.’ That was our idea: to smell the roses. And for us, the roses were the workers.’<sup>28</sup>

Mao’s insistence on the primacy of practice explains another aspect of his appeal: his call to mould Soviet Communism to Chinese reality. Beginning in the 1930s, Mao became a living advertisement for the flexible adaptation of Communism to national context. ‘China’s revolutionary war’, he wrote in 1936, ‘is waged in the specific environment of China and has its own specific circumstances and nature [and] specific laws of its own ... Some people ... say that it is enough merely to study the experience of revolutionary war in Russia [and the] laws by which the civil war in the Soviet Union was directed. [But] if we copy and apply them ... without allowing any changes, we shall ... be “cutting the feet to fit the shoes” and be defeated.’<sup>29</sup> Or as the peasant Mao also put it: ‘We must plant our backsides on the body of China.’<sup>30</sup> During Japan’s brutal occupation of China, he cleverly took the patriotic high ground, reminding all who would listen that ‘we want to form a national liberation front, and success for it will mean victory in the anti-Japanese struggle, and a victory, ultimately, for world peace ... Our most urgent problem is national liberation. At present, our objective cannot be Communism, nor even socialism; what we demand and hope for is the establishment of a national people’s democratic republic.’<sup>31</sup> Mao is often credited with creating – or at least nurturing – Communist nationalism, through his ‘sini-cising’ of Marxism. His self-confident split with the Soviet Union’s vision of global revolution (which became openly rancorous after the 1950s) inspired many other Communist nationalisms, in both Eastern Europe and South East Asia. These nationalisms would culminate in the toxic Indochinese triangle of China–Cambodia–Vietnam conflict.

## 4. 'Women can hold up half the sky.'

In February 1935, a slim, handsome Chinese woman with long black hair lay in a thatched hut in Guizhou, south-west China, amid steep, forested mountainsides. The shack was leaking water, for the rain outside was torrential. After hours of labour, she gave birth to a baby girl: her fourth child. She was attended by her sister-in-law, who showed her the baby and asked what she would be called. The woman shook her head. The following day, the army that had brought her here was to move on, and she must travel with them; the baby could not come with her. Her sister-in-law left the child, a few dollars and some opium with a local family. Though nearby, the mother's husband was absent; he had other things to attend to. Two months later, the mother was caught in an enemy air raid; shrapnel sliced into her skull and spine. A month after that, the baby died; the local woman who had taken her in had no milk.

The mother was He Zizhen, Mao's second wife. She would give him two more children; but only one – her fifth, a daughter – would survive into adulthood. The rest died of illness, or were given away after birth and became untraceable. 'Why are women so afraid of giving birth?' Mao used to joke to other women. 'Look at [Zizhen], giving birth for her is as easy as a hen dropping an egg.'<sup>32</sup> Mao's carelessness about procreation was not unique in the Communist Party. Back in the 1920s, when China's feminist movement was in its infancy, radical women had pushed for birth control to become a front-line party issue, to address at least some of the biologically determined inequality that hampered their participation in the revolution. Their male counterparts buried the question: women would be expected to bear children whenever their men made them pregnant *and* devote maximum energies to politics.<sup>33</sup>

He Zizhen's childbirth at Guizhou took place midway through the CCP's Long March. The previous autumn, Communist troops broke out of the south-west corner of Jiangxi, to escape Chiang Kai-shek's military campaign to destroy the CCP. The Long March traced a massive, reverse L-shape across some of the country's wildest terrain – the freezing peaks of Tibet, the boggy plains of the far north-west, finally ending in the bleak, crumbly landscapes of Shaanxi – all the while

fighting running battles with a pursuing Nationalist army. Of the 80,000 who began the trek, only 8,000 are said to have completed it, settling in a new base area around the town of Yan'an. But Mao – who, at the start of the Long March, was only the lowest-ranking member of the politburo – emerged resurgent from the ordeal. During the military crises of the Long March, Mao took over leadership of the army; this transition was a key staging post in Mao's rise to power in the CCP. In the course of the twelve years that Yan'an served as the capital of the CCP state in north-west China, Mao would attain supreme political as well as military authority; the CCP's experience of state-building during this period left a deep imprint on future Communist governance.

He Zizhen's physical and psychological traumas notwithstanding, in 1937 Mao would begin a semi-public dalliance with a beautiful actress, Wu Lili, the only Chinese woman in the vicinity with permed hair and lipstick, and a recent urban recruit to the Communist state in north-west China. After Zizhen caught Mao sneaking into Lili's cave one summer evening, she had a screaming fight with the two of them, and with the American left-wing journalist Agnes Smedley, who had organised the dance parties at which Mao and Lili flirted. That year, not long after Lili was sent away, Zizhen – pregnant again – opted to travel to the Soviet Union to have her shrapnel injuries treated. Mao quickly took up with another actress of far more dubious background: a former star of Shanghai B-movies called Lan Ping – Blue Apple – who restyled herself as Comrade Jiang Qing. (In 1966, she would become the chief, vindictive crusader of the Cultural Revolution, in her own words 'biting whomsoever Chairman Mao told me to bite' – as well as settling a number of her own scores.) In Moscow, Zizhen suffered a mental breakdown when her new baby died of pneumonia at six months; Mao seems to have sent no response to the news. She only learned that she had been summarily divorced and replaced by Jiang Qing two years later when she heard a translation of an article in the Soviet press referring to 'Mao and his wife'.<sup>34</sup>

Mao's treatment of Zizhen was not the only instance of his irresponsibility towards women. His first wife was Yang Kaihui, the daughter of his beloved teacher Yang Changji; Kaihui – an educated political activist – bore him three sons. In November 1930, she was arrested in Hunan by a Nationalist commander for her connection with Mao, and shot; she would have been spared, had she been willing

to denounce him. Mao rewarded her loyalty with infidelity. Almost two years before her execution, he had taken up with Zizhen in Jiangxi; he had not even bothered to tell Kaihui, who was tormented by rumours of his new romance.

And yet the young Mao of the 1910s was positively feminist in his rhetoric. He reviled old-style arranged marriages as 'indirect rape' and declared that its perpetrators – the parents – should be imprisoned for it.<sup>35</sup> He railed against women's lack of a public position in society: the way in which they could not enter shops, stay in hotels, work in business. 'Smash parental arrangements', 'smash matchmaking', he called.<sup>36</sup> Much later on, in 1968, he famously proclaimed that 'women can hold up half the sky': 'Men and women are the same. What men can do women can also do.'<sup>37</sup> The second law implemented by the new People's Republic in 1950 was a marriage law, enabling women to divorce their husbands and to hold land.

The imputation of feminism to Mao helped push his ideas across the world. 'The idea of women holding up half the sky was all part of the influence of Mao,' considered Dennis O'Neil, a radical student swept up in the US counterculture of the 1960s, who subsequently devoted his life to Maoist-infused politics. 'The Cuban revolution was very macho ... The Maoist revolution had a very different feel: of social relations being transformed, not by diktat but from the ground up, by the participants themselves. Women modeled a lot of consciousness-raising groups on [China's] "speak bitterness" meetings, with people denouncing the old ways, speaking out about the ways in which they're oppressed.'<sup>38</sup> By the late 1960s, however, Mao had for years also been indulging his taste for pretty young women, taking advantage of their hero-worship on his vast plank-bed in Zhongnanhai, an old imperial palace west of the Forbidden City and the cloistered residence of the Communist leadership after 1949. According to his doctor, he knowingly infected his paramours with venereal disease: 'I wash myself inside the bodies of my women,' he declared.<sup>39</sup> Mao's inconsistency towards women speaks of his hypocrisy, his split personality, the chasm between his speech and action – or, put more indulgently, his deep-seated capacity for pragmatism.

This pragmatism could manifest itself also in his economic policy. Despite his exhortations to the army against confiscations from ordinary people, in February 1929 he wrote the following 'fundraising

letter' to the merchants of south Jiangxi: 'we are writing to you now to request that you kindly collect on our behalf 5,000 big foreign dollars for the soldiers' pay, 7,000 pairs of straw sandals and 7,000 pairs of socks [and] 300 bolts of white cloth ... It is urgent that these be delivered ... before eight o'clock this evening ... If you ignore our requests, it will be proof that [you] merchants are collaborating with the reactionaries ... In that case we will be obliged to burn down all the reactionary shops ... Do not say that we have not forewarned you!'<sup>40</sup>

In the early 1940s, in north-west China, Mao's government found itself once more in dire economic need, this time in a province whose principal industry was opium. 'Since opium entered China,' a Communist editorial of 1941 sternly explained, 'it has become the greatest source of harm to the Chinese people, inseparable from imperialist invasion and from the process of China becoming a semi-colony. Imperialism has used opium to enslave and oppress the Chinese people. As the Chinese people have become ever weaker, ever poorer, opium has played a most detestable and poisonous destructive role.'<sup>41</sup> But the Communist state's account books for the period are scattered with references to a 'special product' that rescued the Communists from their trade deficit, and that by 1945 was generating more than 40 per cent of the state's budget. This was opium, processed in 'Special Factories' and transported south and west to generate export revenue for Communist armies. In 1945, as an American mission flew in to inspect Mao's kingdom, it found itself gazing over nothing more controversial than swaying fields of sorghum and wheat. The opium poppies had been uprooted just in time to maintain – for the next forty years at least – the propriety of the Chinese Communist wartime image.<sup>42</sup>

Brute force, patriotism, above all pragmatism – a powerful toolbox for any aspiring prince. But none of it would have held together without ideological control: the ability to assemble and assert a single authoritative party line (even if there was always a gap between high-flown rhetoric and reality). And this was forged by Mao (and his ghostwriters) in the north-west between 1936 and 1945.

5. *'Expose errors and criticise shortcomings.'*

In the Central Research Institute at Yan'an, in early summer 1942, the great and the good of the Chinese Communist Party gathered for a forum: 'Democracy and Discipline in the Party'. Somewhere between a rally and a show trial, it was convened not in a stuffy seminar room but at a sports ground, and would last for sixteen days. The assembled audience contemplated a pale man in his mid-thirties, a writer called Wang Shiwei. Too ill to stand – he was suffering from tuberculosis – he was sunk into a canvas reclining chair. Mao's secretary and ghostwriter Chen Boda – a bookish, bespectacled man with a squashy face and a noticeable stammer – overcame his speech impediment to deliver a ferocious oration. 'This kind of person ... is like a spineless leech! ... he is as minute as a mosquito; like the kind that sneak in silently to bite you.' He punned vulgarly on Wang's given name (literally, the smell of truth), changing one of the tones, so that it became instead 'the stench of shit'. Ai Qing – Ai Weiwei's father, and one of twentieth-century China's most renowned poets – weighed in too: Wang Shiwei's 'viewpoint is reactionary and his remedies are poisonous. This "individual" does not deserve to be described as "human" let alone as a "comrade".' On the final day of the conference, Ding Ling, one of Yan'an's brightest literary stars – a once feisty individualist who shot to fame in the 1920s for her tell-all fictions about the modern woman's sexual fantasies – turned on Wang too, denouncing him as an 'insult' to literature and art.<sup>43</sup> Wang would spend the rest of his life a prisoner. In the spring of 1947, he was dragged out of his cell and told to kneel on the yellow-brown soil of Shaanxi. A young Communist cadre took out a hatchet and hacked off his head.

Wang's trial has since become one of the most notorious events in the 'Rectification Campaign' of 1942–43. This was by no means Mao's first attempt at a purge. In early 1930, amid military disasters and likely infiltration by the GMD, Mao identified 'a severe crisis in the Party in western and southern Jiangxi ... the local leading organs of the Party at all levels are filled with landlords and rich peasants'. Six years before Stalin began his own great purges, Mao cracked down. 'The most merciless torture' was ordered to expose 'Anti-Bolshevik' conspirators: burning skin with incense sticks, bone-breaking beatings, nailing palms to a table and jabbing bamboo splints under fingernails. The wives of

suspects suffered more: their breasts were slashed open, their genitals burnt. In one week alone, 2,000 army members were shot. By 1931, the purge fanned out to include 'those who complained about the Party in their sleep, those who refused to help carry provisions ... those who stayed away from mass rallies, those who failed to show up for Party meetings'. At the end of it all, tens of thousands were dead. Even as the purge wound down between 1932 and 1934, perhaps a hundred people were still being shot every month.<sup>44</sup> 'Comrades,' some Jiangxi Communists pleaded, 'is our Party going to be forever so black and lightless?'<sup>45</sup>

But the Rectification of 1942 – Mao's first disciplining of the party since becoming pre-eminent leader in 1941 – was more considered, more thorough and more sophisticated. There are many different ways to characterise and explain this campaign, within and beyond the framework of Communist terror. As the treatment of Wang reveals, it united the classic ingredients of a Stalinist witch-hunt: the isolation of the target; the 'persuasion' of former allies to join the attack; the rally (or 'struggle meeting', in the militarised Chinese terminology), turning the purge into mass spectacle; the public humiliation of the 'enemy', warning others against similar behaviour; the audience's coercive, collective mockery of the target. Rectification marked the initiation of what has been named 'one of the most ambitious attempts at human manipulation in history'.<sup>46</sup> In 1950s America, this project would be named brainwashing; in China, it came to be known as 'thought reform', and was the organisational and disciplinary foundation on which the ideological legitimacy and authority of Mao's political project rested. As with other ingredients in the Maoist formula, thought reform was not original in itself – both the Soviets and the Nazis had made use of similar techniques – but its comprehensiveness arguably was. Its techniques were copied with varying degrees of intensity throughout Maoism's global travels. Peru's Shining Path and Japan's far-left United Red Army and Revolutionary Left Faction were particularly devoted to criticism/self-criticism. In the winter of 1971–72, these last two groups – while training in a mountain hideout in central Japan – lynched twelve of their comrades deemed insufficiently committed to revolutionary introspection.

What had Wang Shiwei done, to bring the full weight of Mao's censure down upon him? In February and March 1942, he had published

in the Yan'an press a brief series of essays criticising the way in which the Communist state was organised. He reported grumblings among Yan'an Communist youth about excessive hierarchy: about cadres who mouthed platitudes concerning 'class friendship', but only cared about how much chicken they got to eat. 'I am not an egalitarian,' Wang wrote, 'but the three classes of clothing and five grades of food are not necessarily reasonable and needed ... If, on the one hand, the ill can't get a bowl of noodles ... while, on the other hand, there are some ... healthy "big shots" who receive unnecessary and unreasonable perks ... this cannot but result in trouble.' He readily admitted that 'Yan'an is superior to the "outside world"', but Yan'an can and must become even better.<sup>47</sup> Wang was asserting something very simple: the right of the individual to independent criticism of Communist politics. On reading these essays, Mao is said to have immediately decided to purge him.

Mao's treatment of Wang Shiwei showcased the careful combination of manipulation and brute force that Mao and the party exercised to create uniformity of thought. By 1942, the Communist movement had grown substantially after the human disaster of the Long March – the ranks had been swollen, in particular, by idealistic educated urban youth intoxicated with Edgar Snow's loving 1937 portrait of the Communist north-west in *Red Star Over China*. These were emotional but mostly ill-disciplined recruits to Communism. They were children of the May Fourth era: educated in the liberal, questioning values of China's patriotic but cosmopolitan Enlightenment of the 1910s and early 1920s, disgusted by the arbitrary brutality of Nationalist or warlord China. Wang Shiwei was inspired to become a Communist by the fate of his first sweetheart, a fearless young Communist killed by the Nationalist army in 1928. Wang's future attacker Ding Ling had fled to Yan'an in 1936 after three years under Nationalist arrest – having secretly joined the Communist Party in 1932, she was suspect for her left-wing literary output and for her common-law marriage to a Communist activist executed by the Nationalists in 1931. But both Wang and Ding were unable instantly to switch off their critical faculties when they reached Yan'an. In essays and bitterly sad stories, Ding Ling pointed out the incompetence and prejudice prevalent in Yan'an: the way that talents were misused by underqualified cadres; the compound of traditional and revolutionary

sexism that sniped both at women who didn't marry, and at those who stayed at home to look after their babies.<sup>48</sup>

As Mao unleashed his onslaught on Wang Shiwei, he presented his own answer to his contrarian literary critics, spelling out the role of culture in revolutionary war. Writers and artists must keep to 'the stand of the Party', for 'our stand is that of the proletariat and of the masses'. 'Since the audience for our literature and art consists of workers, peasants and soldiers and of their cadres', writers must repair to villages and factories, to spend time with peasants and workers: 'even though their hands [are] soiled and their feet smeared with cow dung, they [are] really cleaner than the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois intellectuals ... Without such a change, without such remolding, [writers and artists] can do nothing well and will be misfits.' Yan'an did not need criticism or satire, he wrote. 'If you are a proletarian writer or artist, you will eulogize ... the proletariat and working people.' It was time for writers to 'go among the masses'; otherwise 'difficulties will arise for them'.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to defining a line on cultural and 'thought' work, Rectification implemented it through imposing study and 'discussion' – both in small groups and individual interrogations – of orthodox articles, speeches and ideas. Those suspected of deviation from Mao's line were arrested and 'screened': in fact, by July 1943, 70 per cent of new recruits had been deemed unreliable.<sup>50</sup> Torture and intimidation became commonplace; satire was outlawed. The success of the programme can be judged by the effects on some of its most conspicuous victims. Within a year of his public humiliation, Wang Shiwei was dramatically changed. In late summer 1943, Mao invited a gaggle of journalists, Chinese and foreign, to visit Yan'an. When they asked to see Wang Shiwei, one witness was struck by his 'grey deadly look. He said over and over: "I'm a Trotskyite. I attacked Mao. So I deserve to be executed. I should have been executed a thousand times. But Mao is so magnanimous. He doesn't want me to die. He allows me to work. I am working diligently and have realised the great principle that labour is holy. I am extremely grateful for his mercy."<sup>51</sup> A few days into the 'Forum on Democracy and Discipline in the Party' in summer 1942, Wang's former celebrity allies – most notably, Ding Ling and Ai Qing – had abandoned him, completed grovelling self-criticisms and launched vicious attacks on Wang's "Trotskyism". After the events

of May 1942, Ding Ling – the famous literary starlet, formerly prone to moody portraits, her shoulders draped in furs, her hair waved and set – cocooned herself in shapeless padded cotton clothes and banished herself to villages where she devoted her energies to staging folk plays newly infused with Communist propaganda.

Rectification left hundreds, perhaps thousands, incarcerated in yellow, dusty caves dug into the crumbly hillsides of Yan'an. It was the prototype for every subsequent movement of thought reform launched under Mao: the mass meetings designed to humiliate and isolate targets; the repeated writing of confessions; the discussion groups where silence was not an option; the honing of self-criticism. In China, it came to be widely seen as a rehearsal for the purges of the Cultural Revolution; not coincidentally, Mao brought his key mobiliser for Rectification – Kang Sheng, also known as 'Mao's pistol' – back to the political centre stage to galvanise the Cultural Revolution. Kang lived the part of Mao's secret police chief, dressing and accessorising all in black: lustrous, Soviet-style leather jacket, breeches, boots, moustache, horse, riding crop and Alsatian. His two weaknesses were Song-dynasty pots and good food (his personal chef in Yan'an had previously cooked for Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing dynasty); otherwise, he was 'obsessed with power but totally lacking in beliefs'. Kang Sheng's work also made possible the globalisation of Maoism through the 1960s and early 1970s. As head of the CCP's secretive International Liaison Department (in charge of relations with foreign Communist parties, and therefore more important than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Kang Sheng oversaw the export of revolutionary ideas, strategies, money and weapons to Communist insurgencies; he hosted worshipful Western Maoists in Beijing and funnelled cash and intelligence to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.<sup>52</sup>

For sure, Rectification and the early 1940s in the Communist north-west were frightening times if you were a highly educated, liberal intellectual, inclined to question the need for absolute party discipline. If, by contrast, you were a local farmer, you might have had a different perspective, for Rectification coincided roughly with the 'cooperative movement', a renewed push for socio-economic levelling, rolled out across local villages. Such individuals often found their rents being reduced and their interest rate on loans cut; they benefited from schemes to share animals, tools and seeds; some were even able to

choose village officials in local elections; many enjoyed a boost to local productivity, as soldiers and Communist cadres pitched in to help with farming and crafts; and there were opportunities to learn to read and write, as urban intellectuals descended on villages to spread education.<sup>53</sup> Communist recruits in Yan'an from poor backgrounds spoke in the 1980s of appreciating Mao because of his understanding of Chinese society and organisation of political work.<sup>54</sup> Rectification was both a terrifying ordeal and the process through which Mao created a disciplined party and bureaucracy – in contrast with the corrupt lassitude of the Guomindang.

In 1943 Mao (with the help of Kang Sheng) intensified Rectification into the badly named 'Rescue Campaign', a witch-hunt for 'spies' and 'traitors' in which so many were arrested 'that the caves could not hold them all', and in which more than 90 per cent of accusations were later deemed groundless.<sup>55</sup> He also coined another of his key policy ideas: the 'mass line'.

[A]ll correct leadership must come from the masses and go to the masses. This means to take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and . . . turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas by means of study, then propagandize and explain these ideas to the masses until the masses embrace them as their own . . . testing [their] correctness [in action]. Then, once again concentrate ideas from the masses and persevere in sending them back to the masses. In such an endless cycle, the ideas will become ever more correct, vital, and abundant each time.<sup>56</sup>

This policy idea installed a slippery relationship between dictatorship and democracy at the heart of Mao's polity. True to his peasant origins, Mao acclaimed the brilliance of the (rural) masses, for only their ideas were 'correct'. (The following year he exhorted his followers to 'serve the people', further laying claim to the populist benevolence of his regime; this slogan travelled the world during the Cultural Revolution, winning Mao particularly fervent followers among African and Asian American communities.) Yet only he (and the party) could concentrate, systematise and apply the brilliance of their ideas. One of contemporary China's most outspoken critics of Mao, an academic who almost died twice under Mao's policies (of starvation in the Great

Leap Forward, of violent persecution in the Cultural Revolution), has put it this way: ‘Mao’s great talent lay in turning the Chinese people into slaves, while making them feel like they were the masters of the country ... All the world’s dictators have studied Mao.’ Rectification and the mass line provided the framework for ideological unity and ‘thought work’ in Mao’s party. It formed a basis for mass mobilisation – and theoretical justification for the CCP to claim that its methods were ‘democratic’ – that would be followed in the Malayan jungles, in the black neighbourhoods of California, on the Peruvian sierra and in the mountains of Nepal.

6. *‘The East is Red, the sun rises.  
In China a Mao Zedong is born.  
He seeks the people’s happiness.  
He is the people’s Great Saviour.’*

In the early 1940s in Yan’an, Mao was enthroned as the philosopher-king of Chinese Communism, and the Maoist anthem ‘The East is Red’ was written.<sup>57</sup> Until the late 1930s Mao was famed as a military man: his doctrinal skills in Marxism–Leninism lagged far behind those of his rivals for power – the party members who had recently returned from study in the dark arts of Stalinism in Moscow. Their leader, a pudgy-faced theoretician called Wang Ming, was well trained in both theory and practice: he had sent several of his compatriots to the Gulag during Stalin’s purges. Mao, by contrast, was – even in the late 1930s, almost two decades after his conversion to Communism – still a rudimentary Marxist. He had almost no time for Marx’s more careful historical and economic analyses, condensing the message of *The Communist Manifesto* down to: ‘Class struggle, class struggle, class struggle!’<sup>58</sup> Some of Mao’s closest colleagues listening to his lectures were embarrassed by his *bêtises* and blatant plagiarism from Chinese translations of Marxist texts. Perhaps as a result of all this, Mao long harboured a sense of inferiority towards intellectuals that no doubt shaped his harshness towards them once in power.

From the late 1930s on, however, Mao launched his own claims to doctrinal originality and to a leadership cult. On 22 June 1937, a key CCP publication, *Liberation*, published Mao’s portrait for the first

time. The message of the iconography was unmistakable: marching columns in the background lent the portrait movement and dynamism; Mao's face was lit up by the sun's rays from behind; space was made for a quotation.<sup>59</sup> Mao's writings and speeches began to be collected and canonised. His secretary Chen Boda, a former professor of ancient history, edited a new version of the CCP's history that turned Mao into the presiding party genius, and helped him formulate most of his key essays: 'On Guerrilla Warfare' (1937), 'On Contradiction' (1937), 'On Practice' (1937), 'On Protracted War' (1938), 'On New Democracy' (1940).<sup>60</sup> In 1939, *Liberation* acclaimed Mao as the 'leader of the people who is esteemed by the masses both at home and abroad'.<sup>61</sup> '[T]he leading, most typical person in applying creative Marxism to Chinese problems', enthused a young theoretician in 1941, 'is our party leader, Comrade Mao Zedong. He is our party's great revolutionary, a talented theorist, a strategist, and one of the most creative Marxist-Leninists in China.'<sup>62</sup> In January 1942, as Yan'an geared up for Rectification, Mao's writings were recommended for study *above* those of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.<sup>63</sup> At the cult's apogee – in the early years of the Cultural Revolution – Chinese citizens abroad would weep with emotion in front of customs officials when declaring their Chinese-language editions of Mao's words.<sup>64</sup>

Mao's direction of the 1942–43 Rectification Campaign marginalised those in the party with lingering doubts about his prowess as a theoretician. According to Wang Ming, Mao's nearest rival at the time, Mao launched Rectification 'to replace Leninism by Maoism, to write the history of the Chinese Communist Party as the history of Mao Zedong alone; to elevate the personality of Mao Zedong above the Central Committee and the entire Party [so as to] capture the chief leading place in the Party leadership and all power in the Party in his own hands'.<sup>65</sup> Ai Qing lionised him in verse ('Mao Zedong'), and a cartoon in the party daily lined up Mao's portrait next to those of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.<sup>66</sup> Zhu De – founder of the Red Army and a former equal in the party – offered him glowing encomia: 'our party now has its own most talented leader in Comrade Mao Zedong. He has genuinely comprehended Marxist-Leninist theory, and moreover is adept at using this theory to guide the Chinese revolution step by step to victory. Not only is he the

most authoritative person in our entire party, but he also enjoys the greatest political confidence among the people throughout the country. In addition, a large number of sincere and courageous party cadres, fully experienced in struggle and having close relations with the masses, have been nurtured for the party and the revolution under his education and care.<sup>67</sup> Mao was transitioning from machinating warlord to revolutionary sage.

In addition to its Stalinist terror tactics (Mao adored Stalin's 1938 potted guide to managing the Bolsheviks, *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Short Course*, and made it required reading for the CCP leadership), Yan'an projected a reverence for culture. Soon after Mao arrived, this impoverished corner of China began to teem with schools, universities, research institutes – the Lu Xun Academy, the Resistance University, the Central Research Institute. Yan'an Communists devoted themselves to study: cavefuls of earnest revolutionaries – eight to each cave – were woken at six in the morning, attended lectures until lunchtime, then conducted private study or production work until bed at nine. There was, quite simply, not much else to do but read and talk: there were no private radios and few film projectors. They were allowed free time on Sundays to wash in the river.<sup>68</sup> In this 'republic of caves', Mao was Socrates, Plato and – as a practising romantic poet – Byron, transforming an army camp into the 'Tantric centre of the Chinese revolution'.<sup>69</sup> It was a place of testing pilgrimage – the journey there through the Nationalist blockade was perilous – in which the business of revolution was infused with religious fervour. It was no coincidence, perhaps, that the centre of propaganda operations (a printing press heaved up and down the Long March on the backs of the rank and file) was rebuilt and installed in Yan'an's highest point: the Cave of the 10,000 Buddhas. There, thronged by these myriad Buddhas, it became the textual loudspeaker for Mao's authority.<sup>70</sup> After Yan'an became a Communist stronghold, the caves occupied by the leadership – Mao, Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai – were clustered together, physically embodying the cohesive intimacy of this ideological community.

'[Mao] dressed simply and could speak like a peasant, but he was really a teacher,' remembered one Yan'an veteran. 'I knew by looking that he was a presence and not a simple teacher.'<sup>71</sup> Of course, Mao

was assisted by skilled ghostwriters and secretaries; but in his essays of the late 1930s and early 1940s he took discursive control of China's past and present. To be sure, his power did not stem from his oratory. When he announced the founding of the People's Republic from the rostrum at Tiananmen Square in 1949, his cadences were almost squeakily high-pitched and his Hunan accent thick almost to the point of incomprehensibility. But his essays are disciplined pieces of work. In his writings on China's modern history, in particular, he marshalled the dispiriting anarchy of the previous century into a tidy teleology that explained cause and effect, that identified his revolution as the logical saviour of the Chinese nation. By insisting on the malevolence of China's foreign antagonists from the nineteenth century onwards, Mao legitimised his own use of violence, against both imperialists and their alleged Chinese allies – Nationalists, capitalists, compradors, landlords, and anyone suspected of sympathising with them. 'In the face of such enemies,' Mao wrote, 'the Chinese revolution cannot be other than protracted and ruthless ... In the face of such enemies, the principal means or form of the Chinese revolution must be armed struggle.'<sup>72</sup> Mao's ability to create compelling, comprehensible narratives of human history, both ancient and modern, was much admired by global Maoists, and especially coveted by Shining Path's Abimael Guzmán, whose followers named him 'Shampoo' for his ability to 'wash brains' with his easy-to-grasp philosophical certitudes.

And Mao's stories were far more effective than Marxist tracts: they were scattered with surprising, coarse humour and classical references – testament to Mao's background as autodidact peasant. Rectification was experienced both as a terrifying purge and as a cult-like bonding ritual, in which some 20,000 individuals were divided into small, monitored groups and set to study the same texts, to debate the same questions.<sup>73</sup> In Yan'an, Mao became much more than an army man: he was revered as a poet, theorist and calligrapher; as a political philosopher able to slot the confusing elements, forces and ideas with which China had been contending for the previous century into a blueprint for success.<sup>74</sup> As a devoted Chinese collector of Mao memorabilia told me in 2014 (in a turn of phrase that is perhaps my favourite in the thousands of conversations that I have had on Mao): 'Mao was better than Genghis Khan because he was a poet.' It was his apparent

ability to multitask, and often using simple language, that won Mao the hearts of so many foreign acolytes, from West German undergraduates to Indian farmers.

In 1944, after years of seclusion, Yan'an reopened to journalists from the outside. They were struck by its intellectual homogeneity. '[I]f you ask the same question of twenty or thirty people, from intellectuals to workers, their replies are always more or less the same,' observed one reporter. 'Even questions about love, there seems to be a point of view that has been decided by meetings.' The 'air of nervous intensity [was stifling] ... Most people had very earnest faces and serious expressions. Among the big chiefs, apart from Mr Mao Zedong who often has a sense of humour, and Mr Zhou Enlai who is very good at chatting, the others rarely crack a joke.'<sup>75</sup> That same year, the American journalists Annalee Jacoby and Theodore White – sworn enemies of the corruption and censorship of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists – observed a curious obsequiousness on the part of Mao's lieutenants towards their dear leader: the way in which they made 'ostentatious notes on his free-running speeches as if drinking from the fountain of knowledge. Nor were panegyrics of the most high-flown, almost nauseatingly slavish eloquence unusual.'<sup>76</sup>

In 1940, Liu Shaoqi had remarked (doubtless to Mao's considerable annoyance) that Chinese Communism had not yet produced 'a great work'.<sup>77</sup> Within another three years, Liu changed his mind: the history of the CCP had developed 'with Comrade Mao Zedong at the centre ... All cadres and party members ... should diligently study and master Comrade Mao Zedong's doctrines on the Chinese revolution and other subjects. They should arm themselves with Comrade Mao Zedong's thought.'<sup>78</sup> This same essay, published on 6 July 1943, gave birth to the religion of Maoism – Mao Zedong Thought (*Mao Zedong sixiang*, originally *Mao Zedong tongzhi di sixiang*, Comrade Mao Zedong Thought). 'Our Comrade Mao Zedong,' Liu summarised in 1945 at the 7th Party Congress (which enshrined Mao Zedong Thought as 'the guide' for all the CCP's work), 'is not only the greatest revolutionary and statesman in Chinese history, but also the greatest theoretician and scientist in Chinese history.'<sup>79</sup> This sanctification of party control under an absolutist, infallible helmsman inspired other 'dear leaders' such as Peru's Abimael Guzmán, who witnessed the Mao cult at its Cultural Revolution apogee.