

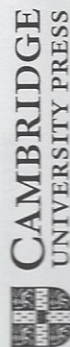
Mao's Little Red Book

A Global History

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The "Little Red Book" was the most important Maoist text in China. This award-winning book is the first to examine its global history, showing how Mao's ideas spread across the world and how they were adapted and transformed in different contexts. The book is a landmark work of global history that will change the way we think about Mao and his legacy. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of China and the world.

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11 Partisan legacies and anti-imperialist ambitions

The Little Red Book in Italy and Yugoslavia

Dominique Kirchner Reill

We should support whatever the enemy opposes and oppose whatever the enemy supports.

Classes and Class Struggle

You've got (Chinese) mail: Italy and Yugoslavia

In early 1971, a university student in Venice, Italy, wrote to the Chinese embassy in Rome expressing interest in receiving an Italian-language copy of the Little Red Book. At more or less the same time, a high-school student in Pakrac, Yugoslavia, wrote to the Chinese embassy in Belgrade expressing interest in receiving a Serbo-Croatian-language copy of the Little Red Book. Each Chinese embassy complied and sent free of charge "exotically packaged" bundles to their respective applicants containing a little red book with a gold star, a plastic covering, and Mao's portrait inside. But with one difference: intent.

The university student in Venice was called into the Central Post Office to receive his mail from the Chinese embassy. And once he saw what awaited him, he was perplexed by the fact that the Chinese embassy had sent well over a hundred copies of the Little Red Book. With no way to carry such a quantity in a city with many bridges and no cars, the student corralled his friends to help him carry the books home. And once home, he opened a letter from the People's Republic of China inviting him to distribute the books.¹ The high-school student in Pakrac received no such surprises. Instead, he strolled along the busy provincial streets of his town in northern Yugoslavia to pick up, at the local post office, the single copy of the Little Red Book he had requested. To his delight, he also received a letter, but this one only expressed the guarded compliments of the People's Republic of China.²

¹ Interview with Roberto D'Agostino, Friday, June 24, 2011, Venice.
² Blog from Zdenko Coban, zdenko-coban.blogspot.hr/default.aspx?date=1.7.2010, accessed July 16, 2011.

The Little Red Book arrived through the state postal systems of Italy and Yugoslavia into the hands of two students on either side of the Iron Curtain. Both students independently sought out the book. And each student directly contacted the Chinese embassy in his country to obtain it. In response, both received letters from their Chinese embassies, and both were excited to collect packages that had been clearly produced and prepared in China, bundled together in a fashion and with materials that spoke of faraway Chinese practices. But what the Chinese embassies expected from the reception of the books was very different. One bundle was sent to help proselytize; the other was sent to inform. This chapter will highlight the commonalities and differences in how the Little Red Book was received in both contexts, commonalities and differences that both coalesced with and diverged from what Chinese embassy officials probably would have expected.

Italy: *La Cina è vicina* (China is near)

In similar vein to the French and German cases discussed by Julian Bourg (chapter 13) and Quinn Slobodian (chapter 12) in this volume, how and why Italians sought out, read, quoted, and ceremonially flaunted the Little Red Book varied enormously, and ran the gamut from hard-headed communists immersed in untangling intellectual dialectics, to heady youths seeking pop liberation from their conventional surroundings, to Mussolini-loving neo-fascists who believed Mao held the key to national liberation from the Americans. Even chronologically, the drive to read the words that fed China's Cultural Revolution was uneven, beginning in the mid-1960s and still attracting a reading public well into the late 1970s, if not longer. Contact with the Chinese communists and distribution of the book itself did not follow the top-down approach of the Albanian case described here by Elidor Mèhilli (chapter 10). No state or party, no centralized organization spearheaded the introduction of Maoist thought and Maoist propaganda into the lives of Italians. And unlike the West German or Soviet cases, no state initiatives worked to "attack" or "block" the book itself. The Little Red Book was first translated in China and distributed in Italy through communist and socialist centers, student centers, and individuals with direct connections to China. But as was true in the West German, Austrian, and French cases, for-profit domestic editions of the book were also produced and sold by booksellers, most notably the communist publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.

So, why this multifaceted, multi-temporal, and multi-sited distribution of the Little Red Book? To even begin to answer that question a much

more simple one needs to be posed: why would Italians want to read it in the first place? What did they hope to learn from the Little Red Book? Having the largest Communist Party in Western Europe, Italians were not ignorant of the teachings of Marx and Lenin. Also, living in one of the richest and most industrialized countries in the world with an astoundingly religiously and linguistically homogeneous population, what could they really learn from a book written for a largely agricultural, largely industrially undeveloped, and incredibly ethnically diverse country so far away? To people who experienced the thirst for Mao in the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps this question seems naïve, but it is a useful one to ask when considering that until the mid-1960s only a select few could have talked at length about the current political situation in China; and almost no one could have quoted Mao at a rally, let alone across a dinner table. By the early 1970s, few did not talk at length about the current political situation in China, and if they didn't quote Mao to each other, they certainly would hear him quoted *at* them often enough.

To understand why Italians wanted to read the Little Red Book, two timelines are necessary: before and after August 1966. That is to say, before and after the dramatic pictures of China's Red Guards were splashed on the front page of almost every newspaper. The first sparks of interest in studying Mao's thought were not a natural consequence of the well-received and widely read 1965 Italian translation of Edgar Snow's 1937 *Red Star Over China*. Though inspiring and sympathetic, Snow's account was interpreted as depicting a China that was coming closer to the developed world through communism, not one that was formulating a new kind of communism that would teach the developed world how to do it. Before 1966, interest was spurred by a 1963 book titled *Le Divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi* (Divergences between Comrade Togliatti and us).³ Written and published in China and then sent to communist activists in Italy, *Divergenze* was an extension of the Sino-Soviet conflict set on Italian soil. It was published in response to the Tenth Annual Italian Communist Party Congress, where the leader of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti, directly upbraided Mao's stance against de-Stalinization. *Divergenze* was a pointed Chinese response to Togliatti's criticisms.

So, what was in *Divergenze* to spur committed Italian communists to seek out the Little Red Book? Well, much that one would suspect.

³ As a side note, the recognized influence of this book in communist circles was so widespread that a 1980s-1990s Italian punk group, CCCP, named one of their albums after it. See CCCP, *Affinità-divergenze fra il compagno Togliatti e noi*, distributed by *Attack punk records*, 1986.

The *noi* (aka Chinese communists) criticized the ideological and political corruption of their sister Italian party for falling into line with the "revisionist" policies that defined the field of action for communism within the halls of Rome's parliament and local election booths, instead of preparing a mass party capable *also* of fighting capitalist-imperialism through revolutionary means. Fine and good. But what about this book inspired Italians to believe that the Chinese promoted a type of communism to be learned from instead of just to be criticized by? Well, to answer that I first must commit a crime for the sake of space and simplify to the point of absurdity a book that is over two hundred pages long and includes sections on the history of communism, the history of China, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Congo Crisis, Vietnam, decolonization throughout the world, Tito's socialism, the Sino-Indian War, the Cold War, the history of Italy, the history of the Soviet Union, analysis of Marxist, Leninist, and Stalinist thought, and the future of international communism. So, short but sweet, here it goes: *Divergenze* asked the accusatory question: "Italian communists, what have you done since the war?"

To sharpen the punch of this question *Divergenze* interwove a comparative history of China's successful communist seizure of power against local "capitalists" and aggressive American imperialism vis-à-vis Italian communists' history of cooperation and peaceful coexistence with unrepentant (ex?) fascists and American imperialists. Essential throughout the book is Mao's famous line "Imperialism and all Reactionaries are Paper Tigers," the argument being that sphere-of-influence, Cold War, atomic-bomb excuses for why Italian communists had no choice but to work purely within a bourgeois-imperialist parliamentary system were false, as could be seen by the example of China and, more recently, Cuba. Also false, according to *Divergenze*, were recent arguments that Italian socialism could be achieved through the proletariat being *elected* into controlling the state. The Italian state, according to *Divergenze*, was no socialist utopia ripe for Italian communist takeover. Instead, it was a bureaucratic octopus where the political party could never hope to control the state through elections. As *Divergenze* stated: "with a population of 50 million . . . in times of peace it [Italy] has hundreds of thousands of functionaries, plus 400,000 men permanently assigned to the military, around 80,000 military police, around 100,000 regular police, over 1,200 courts and circa 1,000 prisons, if you don't count the secret services of repression and their armed personnel."⁴ With that kind of manpower,

⁴ *Le Divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi: Ancora sulle divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi* (Beijing: Casa Editrice in Lingue Estere, 1963), p. 98.

who was controlling whom? The state, the electorate, or the proletariat? *Divergenze* argued it was the state, and to prove this it listed off statistics for the period covering 1948–62 showing how many workers and political protesters were either imprisoned, injured, or killed for disrupting the state's "peace."⁵

So, what did *Divergenze* require? It called on Italian communists to recover their "glorious history of struggle within the ranks of the International Communist movement" and give up bourgeois delusions of changing social structures primarily through liberal politics.⁶ *Divergenze* repeatedly voiced its own admiration for Italy's propensity for revolutionary communist action, and invited its members to shed the corruption of revisionism and return to their Marxist-Leninist roots, the same roots that had led them to triumph over Nazi occupiers and Fascist sympathizers in World War II, and which now could be channeled to combat the American imperialist occupiers and their capitalist sympathizers who were working to re-enslave the Third World just as they were oppressing the First.

Divergenze sent shockwaves through communist circles. Sections of the text were published in mainline communist journals, such as *Avanti!*, with Togliatti's dismissive replies. But where *Divergenze* really took off was in the splinter groups of Padua, Venice, Milan, Turin, Rome, and Naples that had been suspected of displaying "Trotskyist" sympathies. *Divergenze* argued that fighting capitalism in the West was tantamount to fighting imperialism in the Third World: they were one and the same enemy. *Divergenze* also insisted that voting is not fighting, that revolutionary activity needed to be prioritized, and that communism had as its goal the downfall of the bourgeois state through the overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat. These were exciting words for those who reviled the Italian Communist Party's daily deal-making with the ruling Christian Democratic Party and abhorred what they viewed as a party apparatus ever more vulnerable to cronyism.

One thing must be made explicit: The excitement over *Divergenze* was not limited to Italy's youth. Instead, it reverberated amongst an older group as well: the veterans of Italy's World War II Partisan movement. Figures such as Giuseppe Regis and Luciano Raimondi, who had fought during the Communist Party's battle with Fascism and then the Nazi occupation, recognized in the Chinese example a continuity with the Partisan movement that had brought communism to the greater Italian consciousness in the first place. Communism for them was the fight, was

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

taking sides, was against the occupier, and was unafraid of upsetting unjust orders or using violence to promote social justice. Mao's hardline communism seemed exactly what they needed to recover the fight. Within a few months the first Mao-inspired party was founded in Padua, with their own journal, *Viva il Leninismo!* In Milan a few months later, the ex-Partisan Giuseppe Regis – who had joined his wife in China between 1957 and 1961 while she worked with the circle of Beijing translators described by Xu Lanjun (chapter 5) – founded the publishing house Edizioni Oriente (Eastern editions), which translated and distributed Maoist texts (including the Little Red Book).⁷ In early 1964, various Maoist activists got together and founded their own newspaper, *Nuova Unità* (New unity), in direct opposition to Antonio Gramsci's historic journal *L'Unità*. The Maoist *Nuova Unità* proclaimed the need for Italian communists to drop the official Italian Communist Party (PCI) and unite their efforts – among themselves and with the rest of the socialist world – to battle American imperialism. And so began the local grassroots drive throughout the peninsula to convince Italians that "Imperialism and all Reactionaries are Paper Tigers." And so began, also, the first spurts of Italian interest in reading and disseminating Maoist texts.

As mentioned earlier, the origin of Italians' interest in reading the Little Red Book follows two timelines: one before August 1966 and one thereafter. Before August 1966, the only people interested in reading a copy of the Little Red Book would have already been firmly entrenched within activist communist circles. And within these circles, interest was not generational. Old and young Communists proved receptive to a return to the "revolutionary." Old and young hoped to reinvigorate Italian Communism with the "Chinese turn" to recapture the energy and success that Partisan-Communism had embodied just fifteen years earlier. Nevertheless, on the streets of Bologna, Florence, Rome, Palermo, or Milan few would have noted this transformation. By 1967, however, few people could ignore it. And mainline center-right newspapers such as the Milanese *Corriere della Sera* dedicated bylines to explaining its appeal.⁸ The reason for the change? China's Red Guard student movement and Italian youths' interest in replicating it.

⁷ Giuseppe Regis explained his and his wife's interest in China as a direct consequence of their experience in Italy's Resistance movement and their disillusion with Cold War European socialism in Roberto Niccolai, "Intervista a Giuseppe Regis, Cofondatore delle Edizioni Oriente," *Parlando di rivoluzioni* (Pistoia: Centro di Documentazione di Pistoia, 1998), pp. 70–76.

⁸ For example, see "Chi sono, come nascono e cosa vogliono i terroristi di Mao," *Corriere della Sera* (January 13, 1967), p. 3.

It is easy to understand the appeal Italian teenagers and college students felt for the daily news stories reporting how China's youth had become the political protagonists of the country. "Bourgeois" teaching practices – the target of Red Guard scorn – were also something that Italian students were already beginning to rebel against. When flipping through a newspaper and reading how Beijing Red Guards, with Little Red Books in hand, humiliated their teachers for promoting reactionary value systems, Italians felt that China was near, that their trials were similar. Italians, like the Chinese, needed to rise up to lead their country to transformation. All of a sudden, interest in Mao's thought exploded from the relatively limited meetings of the Maoist political parties, and now included a myriad of participants, mostly under the age of thirty, who responded to the idea of "liberation" from old hierarchies, old injustices, and old hypocrisies. From being a message for some, the Little Red Book became a symbol for many. From being a book that encapsulated the question: "Italian Communists, what have you done since the war?" it became a quick and visible means for baby boomers to bark against their elders, "Daddy, what did you do during the war and why are you trying to teach us to keep doing it?"

While in West Germany these questions focused on Nazi participation in the Holocaust, à la Kommune 1, in Italy they focused on the country's over twenty-year-long idolatry of Mussolini. Though scholars agree that the de-Nazification of West Germany's infrastructures proved wanting, Italy's process of de-Fascitization was even more of a joke. After World War II, only 1,580 government employees were dismissed for their Fascist activities. This in a country of 50 million that had participated in and been controlled by a fascist state for over twenty years. As such, by the mid-1960s, radical youths throughout the Italian peninsula rallied to "oust their fascist functionaries."⁹ The temerity of China's Red Guards in opposing their "bourgeois" elders was something Italians could identify with, and they carried their Little Red Books and quoted Mao at rallies to show their common cause. Overtly, with Little Red Books held high, they were the Red Shirts fighting their Black Shirt elders. They were the next generation of Partisans – the fighters – taking up a battle the official Italian Communist Party had set aside and most of their parents hadn't ever fought.

By 1968, so many different groups of people waved the Little Red Book that identifying the movement as "Maoist" per se would be foolhardy. Some joined the growing Maoist branch of communism begun

⁹ For a succinct comparison of postwar de-Nazification and de-Fascitization policies in Europe see chapter 2 in Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), pp. 41–63.

after the publication of *Divergenze*. Others waved their Little Red Books alongside pictures of Che Guevara, Black Power fists, and Peace doves, while singing the Resistance-era Partisan song *Bella ciao*. But there were new hard-core Maoists around, as well. Perhaps the most visible faction to plaster images of Mao on every flyer, wall, newsletter, and party program was the ur-Maoist group *Servire il Popolo* (Serve the people), which not only took up Mao's message of reigniting Italian socialism with a revolutionary spirit, but actually fashioned themselves as members of China's Red Guard: they practiced "self-criticism" sessions; they marched into the countryside intent on "serving and teaching the peasants"; they instilled in their members a strict observance of party hierarchy and order; and they concentrated their efforts on educating "pioneers" by introducing Maoist teachings into daycare centers and afterschool programs.

Interestingly enough, in Italy Mao-mania was not purely a left-wing phenomenon. Some ultra-right-wing groups, too, quoted their Little Red Books to bolster their arguments. For example, the 1968-73 neo-fascist party *Lotta di Popolo* (The people's fight) characterized Mao as a brilliant nationalist who correctly identified the United States as a global colonizer intent on controlling and weakening Europe's nations in tandem with similar activities in Asia, Africa, and South America.¹⁰ Just as Mao pushed for China's national liberation against American imperial aims, so too, *Lotta di Popolo* argued, Italians needed to fight the Americans to reinvigorate their own nation.

But of all the groups that cited Mao, the most famous Little-Red-Book wavers were the terrorist cells that began their activities in 1967, planting bombs in police stations and American military bases, robbing banks, and kidnapping "enemy" political figures. The Brigade Rosse (Red brigades) were the most notorious of these cells, but other groups such as *Lotta Continua* (Continuous fight) identified themselves with Maoism as well. Some of these terrorist cells had grown out of the original post-*Divergenze* Maoist parties, others from the mishmash of liberation movements infusing themselves within the Italian political scene. One way or another center- and right-wing newspapers and politicians in Italy began a campaign to equate the Little Red Book with Molotov cocktails, indelibly placing within the Italian imagination the idea that "Mao Means Murder." When some of the more chilling facts about the Cultural Revolution were unveiled, this impression was only strengthened.

¹⁰ For those interested in the so called "Nazi-Maoist" movement in Italy, which included many other figures and groups besides the aforementioned *Lotta di Popolo*, see the new documentary: Gaudenzi, Ugo, *Ci chiamavano Nazi-Mao* (They called us Nazi-Mao), distributed by Rinastica, 2010.

Except for the neo-fascist *Lotta di Popolo*, most interest in the Little Red Book combined a yearning for the exotic with a seemingly contradictory desire for continuity. Third-Worldism was evident throughout. This can be seen in part by which Mao Zedong "quotations" were most often quoted. Though the Little Red Book is filled with political arguments that read far from Orientalist, Mao-quoters in Italy preferred (alongside the all-time favorite "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun") the un-Western-sounding sayings such as "Women hold up half the sky," "Let one thousand flowers bloom," and "The guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea." The journalist Stefano Ferrante described his baby-boomer cohort's fascination with Mao in these terms: "with his armory of analysis and his maxims soaked with Confucianism, the *Little Red Book* and the athletic swims in the Yellow River, a prophet who speaks of a faraway, misunderstood, and mysterious Orient."¹¹

Critics of the Little Red Book craze took special aim at Maoists' desire to be "different," to insert themselves in a world as far away as possible from the daily expectations of "comfortable" Italy. In Marco Bellocchio's 1967 film *La Cina è vicina* (China is near) – a searing satire of Italian socialism in a provincial town – a young boy points out another fellow student to his grandmother, saying:

(BOY): "That one's Chinese."

(GRANDMOTHER): "Chinese? What are you talking about? He's a European, of the Aryan race."

(BOY): "Hm. I don't know."

(GRANDMOTHER): "What do they say about him at school?"

(BOY): "That he's a Chinese Communist."

(GRANDMOTHER): "A Communist? In such a respectable school? That's something from another world."¹²

Being from "another world," upsetting expectations of class and environment, strengthened readers' interest in the Little Red Book. And this was exactly what anti-Maoists pounced upon to brush it off. By 1969, when Chinese-mania was at an all-time high, the top-selling singer Bruno Lauzi – a liberal and anti-Maoist – released a song that used the humor of racism to jab at the growing number of Italians professing themselves "Chinese." The song "*Arrivano i cinesi?*" (The Chinese are coming) became a radio favorite that year:

¹¹ Stefano Ferrante, *La Cina non era vicina: Servire il popolo e il maoismo all'italiana* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2008), p. 20.

¹² Marco Bellocchio, *La Cina è vicina*, Vides Cinematografica, 1967.

The Chinese are coming / They'll get here by swimming / Ruggero Orlando [famous Italian newscaster] says / That they'll be here tomorrow.

The Chinese are coming / They're coming by the millions / Yellower than the lemons / That I put in my tea. Why? Why? / I'm asking you why.

The Chinese are coming / And they happily eat / The Quails and partridges / That you got.

The Chinese are coming / A real 1848 / They plant themselves in the living room / And they won't go away. Why? Why? / I'm asking you why.

I only eat boiled rice / I dress in silk / I've gotten all yellow / And if I have an idea / I write it, if I can, / In a special book / A little red book.

The Chinese are coming. / They're small and fast / They pass you / When crossing the street / With their heads bowed low.

The Chinese are coming / They'll teach you the greeting / With their mute alphabet / That way you won't talk anymore. Why? Why? / I'm asking you why.¹³

Reminiscent of the anti-Maoist Russian songs discussed by Elizabeth McGuire (chapter 9), communists and non-communists alike sang along to Lauzi's racist slurs, belittling their "Aryan-race" Little-Red-Book-reading co-nationals by intimating that they were "getting all yellow" and would soon turn "small, fast, and mute" if they kept up this obsession with their "special book." As can be imagined, to most Italian "Chinese" these shows of racism only strengthened their conviction that Italy was steeped in cultural degeneracy and that it was their job to fight in the name of the "faraway, misunderstood, and mysterious Orient."¹⁴ The more racist the attacks became, the more readers of the Little Red Book proudly presented themselves as "Third-worldly."

As mentioned earlier, rupture with norms was not the only thing that drew followers to Maoist teachings. Continuity with prior Italian models also appealed. Just as "Old Guard" Partisans responded with interest to *Divergenze's* call to reinstate Italian communism with the revolutionary values they had fought for during World War II, baby boomers framed their Maoism within the rites and rituals of their spiritual parents, the Partisans. Perhaps the clearest expression of this can be seen in the Maoist marriage ceremonies conducted in the early 1970s. "Maoist marriages" were not one of the practices that Italians copied from their

¹³ Lauzi, Bruno, "Arrivano i cinesi," 1969.

¹⁴ Ferrante, *La Cina non era vicina*, p. 20.

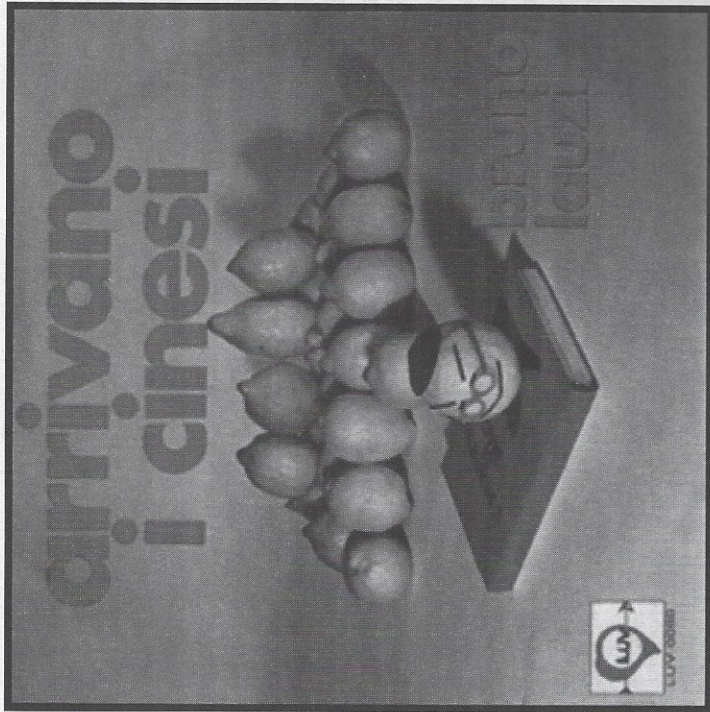


Fig. 7. Album cover for Bruno Lauzi's "Arrivano i cinesi" (1969), Ariston LUV 0088 7" sleeve. Note the slant-eyed lemon in Chinese scholar's cap.

comrades-in-arms in China. Instead, they were a conscious "Italian" invention, one that even merited the publication of a handbook to teach Italian Maoists throughout the peninsula how to do it.¹⁵ As described in memoirs, newspaper reports, and the aforementioned handbook, a Maoist marriage was one conducted within the Communist Party (the *Servire il Popolo* Party, to be exact) without the presence of Catholic priests or Italian state officials. The services were organized around the rites of a loyalty oath to party and spouse, where young heterosexual couples stood in front of a leading party member who asked them "Do you, comrade [insert name], want to unite yourself to comrade [insert

¹⁵ *Un Matrimonio Comunista* (Milan: Edizioni "Servire il Popolo," 1972).

name] so as to constitute a communist family, to serve the people of Italy in its march towards a popular insurrection and the instauration of a revolutionary government?"¹⁶

These ceremonies were "Maoist" in that they emphasized the interpenetration between "political" space and "family" space. And, of course, the walls of the marriage hall were covered with pictures of Lenin, Stalin, Mao, hammer-and-sickle flags, and a big banner proclaiming "the unity of the Communist family for the people's unity on their way to socialist revolution." But how the marriage itself was celebrated, both in vows and banquet style, was a direct copy of the "Partisan" marriages that had been conducted in the hillsides of northern and central Italy during World War II. According to tales told by former Partisans, couples eager to marry during the war received permission from the Partisan Command to be married "in the Partisan way." Few knew exactly what the guidelines for the "Partisan way" were, but as a whole it seems to have included the highest-ranking Partisan officer conducting the service, with wedding guests consisting primarily of fellow comrades-in-arms. Marriage vows did not make reference to Church or state, but instead to the "people of Italy," and once married the Partisan commander expressed the wish that from the new union "[little Garibaldi] [Partisan] militants" would be born. Festivities were brought to a close with a wedding banquet potluck, where everyone would make whatever music they could until the wine ran out.¹⁷ Italian communists who conducted Maoist marriages made explicit reference to these Partisan marriages when inventing the rites to be followed, imagining it as a "revival of the marriages celebrated by Partisans in the mountains."¹⁸

The first of the approximately one hundred Maoist couples to conduct such a marriage rite were convinced to do so with the Servire il Popolo party secretary explaining that "the communist marriage is like the marriage celebrated between Partisans in the mountains during the war

¹⁶ Ferrante, *La Cina non era vicina*, p. 214. I emphasize "heterosexual" couples for two reasons. First, these Maoist marriages were never intended to upset sexual norms. Families were defined as being made by a man and woman. Though gender norms regarding female orgasm and gender roles in political and household activity were challenged in Marxist-Leninist circles, sex as a positive "revolutionary" activity was imagined in particularly hetero-normative terms. Second, today political groups pushing for the acceptance of gay marriage in Italy have made direct reference to Maoist marriages, indicating that if state and Church will not accept single-sex unions then perhaps everyone (even non-gays) should make use of extra-state marriages until the laws are changed.

¹⁷ For more on the ritual and symbolism of marriages conducted by Italian World War II Partisan groups see Filippo Colombara, *Vesti la giubba di battaglia: Mitì, riti e simboli della guerra partigiana* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2009).

¹⁸ Ferrante, *La Cina non era vicina*, p. 208.

of liberation, who awaited the Republic. Only now we await the socialist State, the real one, the Chinese one."¹⁹ Couples who exchanged their "Communist I dos" marched to their outdoor potlucks to boisterous singing of "The Internationale," convinced that they were keeping an old tradition alive while they awaited the new "Chinese" state to come. In this and a myriad of other ways, Italian "Chinese" identified their fight for communism against the American occupier and the fascist functionaries as a continuation of their Partisan elders' battles against the Nazi occupier and the Fascist sympathizers. Reading and citing the Little Red Book served as a means to leave the world of Italian spiritual corruption and Cold War compromises behind while contemporaneously reverting to the traditions of a better, more heroic, Italy. China, thus, was far and near, and that's just what radical Italians were looking for.

Yugoslavia: *Kina je tako blizu a tako daleko* (China is so close and so far)

If in Italy the field was ripe for distribution of the Little Red Book because of the compromises and corruptions of the Italian Communist Party, the same could be imagined for Yugoslavia. In Yugoslavia, too, student demonstrations and university occupations erupted in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo, with protesters claiming that Tito's socialism had lost its way and had forgotten its commitment to the proletariat. How else could you explain, students asked, the growing unemployment rates the country was facing in the late 1960s and 1970s while a capitalist culture of luxury accumulation was in full swing? How else could you explain the increased centralization of the state that disregarded the needs of its people? As was happening throughout Italy just on the other side of the Adriatic Sea, baby boomers were asking their communist leaders "what have you done since the war?" But unlike their Italian equivalents, they didn't use the symbol of the Little Red Book to do it.

Before investigating why not, it is useful to remember all the reasons why Mao could have proved a potent instrument for indictment. First, unlike the Italian case, in general terms Yugoslavia resembled much more the Chinese body politic. Like China, Yugoslavia was a multinational state par excellence. Like China, during World War II the country was the playground of imperialists and their gruesome "nationalizing" campaigns. And like China, it was also a country trying to realize the promises of socialism with a predominantly undereducated and

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

non-industrial proletariat. What is more, the People's Republic of China authored attacks against the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ) that were so biting that the jibes of *Divergenze* against the Italian Communist Party look fawning. In fact, Tito's brand of "non-aligned" socialism that manipulated American and Soviet interests to finance its own domestic economic and social reforms served as Mao's favorite punching bag when discussing the corruptions of "socialist revisionism." In countless speeches, pamphlets, and even the aforementioned *Divergenze*, Tito's Yugoslavia symbolized "false socialism," where Mao consistently described Tito's People's State as being an "accomplice" of American imperialism and a moral lesson of how quickly socialism can degenerate into capitalism if strong ideological foundations are not preserved.²⁰ In many ways, the Little Red Book was conceived as a means to ensure that China would not suffer the type of "socialist degeneration" that students in Belgrade and Zagreb decried. So, why did this same book not act as a guide and symbol of socialist renewal and liberation in Yugoslavia as it had in the Italian case?

Explaining why things didn't happen is a task that the careful historian should avoid when possible. But a few key factors can be identified. First of all, a major reason why Yugoslavs proved much less interested in Maoist handbooks on how to realize a revolutionary communist takeover is because they had already had one. While in World War II Italy Partisans fought tooth and nail to kick the Germans out and usher in a new republic, Yugoslavia's Partisans kicked out the Germans (and Italians), and then kept right on kicking until they didn't just have a republic, they had a People's Republic. As numerous studies have shown, this communist takeover was no bloodless affair. Historians estimate that around 100,000 Yugoslavs were killed to secure a single-party state.²¹ And once this state was put in place, its toddler years were spent collectivizing, nationalizing, secularizing, and industrializing with a gusto that would have made Mao proud. Though after the 1948 Stalin-Tito split the country began to seek a socialist path on its own terms, including the self-management schemes and free-market incentives Mao so derided, none of this could have been possible without those first "revolutionary" years that by the 1960s were a long-forgotten memory. In fact, as Milan

²⁰ Some examples of these arguments can be found in Mao's speeches "Why it is Necessary to Discuss the White Paper" (August 28, 1949) and "Refutation of the So-Called Party of the Entire People" (July 1964).

²¹ Though there are no trustworthy census reports for the immediate aftermath of World War II (because of population movements and the lacking infrastructures to confirm estimates), we can assume that at least 10.5 million people lived in Yugoslavia when Tito came to power.

Kusturica's 1995 film *Podzemlje: Bila jednom jedna zemlja* (*Underground: Once Upon a Time There was a Country*) so brilliantly evoked, state-sponsored cultural initiatives in Yugoslavia seemed to many a broken record of commemorating the Partisan-style heroics that had been required to found the "soft" socialist state of the 1960s.²² Radios were inundated with tunes from the Partisan songbook.²³ One of the country's most successful soccer teams, Belgrade's Partizan, had fans donning Partisan regalia to support their team. Books, theaters, movie theaters, and later television programs featured one World War II era dramatic extravaganza after another retracing the Partisan sacrifices that would eventually lead to the founding of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

One of the most visible examples of how the Yugoslav state promoted a cult of the Partisan to consolidate a socialist, federalist, and multinational postwar body politic can be seen in the Pioneer movement. Founded in 1941 and originally modeled along the Soviet Pioneer model, Yugoslav children were incorporated into the Communist Party by the same means that Lenin, Stalin, and later Mao applied. All schoolchildren were inducted into the Young Pioneers at age seven with an emphasis on converting future generations from "ideologically undecided" to "ideologically decided" members of the Communist Party. As was happening throughout the entire communist world, young Yugoslavs were made to learn the tenets of socialism and the role of the state in realizing revolution through the recitation of oaths and songs, all bedecked in triangular red scarves worn throughout communist Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa.²⁴ According to Ildiko Erdei, up until the Stalin-Tito split few

²² Emir Kusturica, *Podzemlje: Bila jednom jedna zemlja* (*Underground: Once Upon a Time There was a Country*), distributed by New Yorker Video, 1995.

²³ There has been an explosion of publications in ex-Yugoslavia and beyond about the fascinating interplay between top-down official state culture (epitomized by Partisan hagiography), state-sponsored consumer culture, and the rich counterculture that blossomed in most of Yugoslavia's republics. The most colorful example is Iris Andrić, Vladimir Arsenjević, and Đorđe Matić, eds., *Leksikon YU mitologije* [Lexicon of Yugoslav mythology] (Zagreb: Postscriptum and Belgrade: Rende, 2004). For more scholarly studies see Patrick Hyder Patterson, *Bought and Sold: Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Jason Vuic, *The Yugo: The Rise and Fall of the Worst Car in History* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2010); Breda Luthar and Marusa Pusičnik, *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2010); Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor, *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950–1980)* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010).

²⁴ For a fascinating analysis of the Pioneer movement and its many transformations within the Yugoslav state throughout the postwar period see Ildiko Erdei, "The 'Happy Child' as an Icon of Socialist Transformation: Yugoslavia's Pioneer Organization," in John Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of*

differences could be noted between the Yugoslav version of the Pioneer movement and the other sister organizations in Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the USSR, except for the ever-present *titovka*, the Partisan-uniform sidecap named after Tito himself. After the Stalin–Tito split, however, the Pioneers became one of the prime battlegrounds for differentiating Yugoslav socialism from Stalinism, where reforms of rituals, oaths, songs, and activities emphasized how Yugoslavia would avoid the pitfalls of the USSR and its satellite states by displacing extreme militarization and bureaucratization with the encouragement of creativity and individuality.²⁵ While young Pioneers in the USSR promised “to passionately love and cherish my Motherland, to live as the great Lenin bade us to, [and] as the Communist Party teaches us to,” young Pioneers in Yugoslavia had a much longer list of vows to recite:

*Today when I'm becoming a Pioneer
I give my honorable Pioneer word
That I will diligently learn and work
Respect parents and teachers
And be a faithful and honest friend
Who keeps his word of honor;
That I will follow the path of the best Pioneers,
Appreciate the glorious deeds of Partisans
And all progressive people of the world
Who stand for liberty and peace;
That I will love my Homeland
Self-managing socialist Yugoslavia
And its brotherly nations and nationalities,
And that I will build a new life,
Full of happiness and joy.*²⁶

Liberty, peace, brotherly nations, and the glorious deeds of Partisans! Yugoslavs knew all about the necessary sacrifices for socialist revolution, national liberation, and the danger of imperialist powers wishing to encroach on their territory. In fact, they wore their partisan *titovka* hats to symbolize just such an awareness. And in case they ever forgot, the little red *Pionirske knjižice* (Pioneer booklets) they received upon initiation into the Pioneers could remind them. But the lesson of Yugoslav socialism intertwined the ever-present awareness of Partisan sacrifice with a sense of responsibility of what all that Partisan fighting had really been for. Partisan-adoring Yugoslavs had to move beyond the fighting; they needed to love “self-managing socialist Yugoslavia.” They needed

²⁵ *Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003), pp. 154–72.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170. Translation taken from *ibid.*, p. 173.

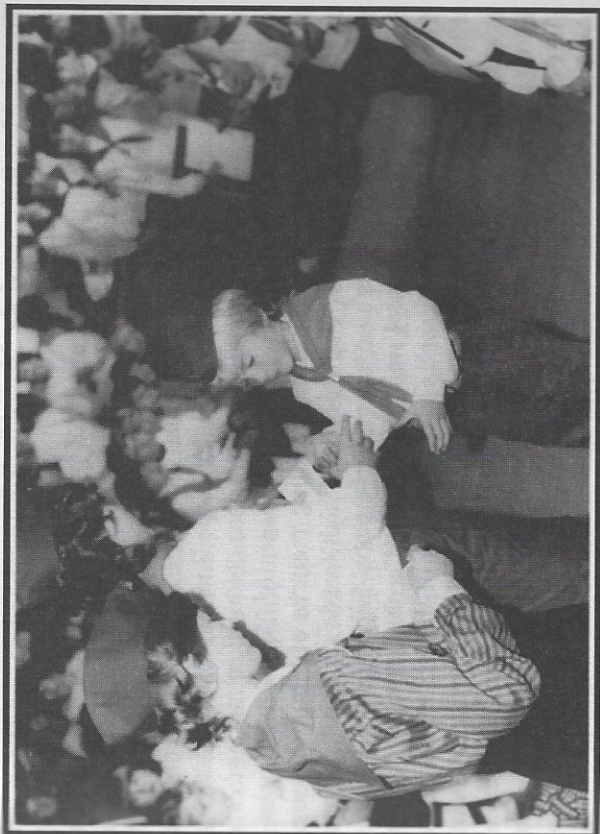


Fig. 8. Slovenian Young Pioneer in loyalty oath ceremony, wearing *titovka* and red scarf, holding out hand to receive his little red *Pionirska knjižica* (Pioneer booklet). (Mitja Vidović.)

to stand for “liberty and peace.” And most importantly, they needed to work at building a new, post-combative life “full of happiness and joy.” Mao’s Little Red Book filled with barrels of guns and paper-tiger imperialists had some tough competition with the message of Yugoslavia’s universally distributed little red booklets.

Mao’s Little Red Book also probably failed to induce the same amount of excitement in Yugoslavia because the anti-imperialist, Third World-liberation arguments that so attracted Italian youth to Mao’s cause were initiatives that Tito’s socialist state, too, was proposing. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Yugoslavia was one of the most visible actors seeking aid to support Asia and Africa’s bid to shed the chains of postcolonial indentured servitude. The consolidation of the Non-Aligned Movement and Yugoslavia’s criticism of America’s involvement in Vietnam and Israel are just some of the more famous instances of this commitment.²⁷

²⁷ For the most-often cited English-language study of the non-aligned movement see Peter Willetts, *The Non-Aligned Movement: The Origins of a Third World Alliance* (London: Pinter, 1978). Studies of Yugoslavia’s role in formulating and participating in a global

Though Mao interpreted the Non-Aligned movement as empty posturing, to everyday Yugoslavs it was very real, filling the pages of their newspapers and opening the arena of political action and imagination well beyond the Balkan peninsula to which they had formerly been relegated. Interestingly enough, it was this overlapping Chinese and Yugoslav commitment to the global anti-imperialist movement that probably sparked most interest in Mao's Little Red Book. For example, stories of activists demonstrating against British colonialism in the streets of Hong Kong splashed across the front pages of Yugoslavia's newspapers, where article after article (including pictures of heroic Maoists standing proud with Little Red Book held high) made explicit reference to the Little Red Book as a potent tool in the anti-imperialist cause.

The Yugoslav high-school student mentioned at the beginning of this chapter stated that he had sent away for a copy of the Little Red Book after seeing just such representations of Red Guards and anti-imperialist activists waving Little Red Books in newspapers and on the nightly news. Though for Yugoslavs the Little Red Book did not represent their own Bible or symbol for action against imperialism, it is clear that they recognized how it served its purpose with anti-imperialist comrades-in-arms.

Finally, we know that Maoist thought on revolutionary socialism was not the instigator of 1960s and 1970s movements to re-instill a more socialist orientation to Tito's Yugoslavia because the kind of "new socialism" Yugoslav protesters demanded was one that Mao himself would never accept. Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo students fought Yugoslav police and militia groups demanding a more *humanitarian*, not a more *revolutionary*, socialism. These rebellious youngsters were not acolytes of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, as many of their equivalents in Italy were. Instead, most Yugoslav dissidents were the followers of "humanist" Marx, the Marx championed by some members of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, the *New Left Review*, and Yugoslavia's own Praxis school.²⁸ Taken very abstractly, late 1960s and early 1970s student revolts in Yugoslavia resemble those of China's Red Guard: students decried the "bourgeois" corruption of their teachers

non-aligned movement have also witnessed an increase of interest in the last few years, as can be seen by the two-part workshop sponsored by Columbia University's Blinken European Institute on The Global Cold War in the Mediterranean Area. For particularly interesting examples see Rimna Kullaa, *Non-Alignment and its Origins in Cold War Europe: Yugoslavia, Finland and the Soviet Challenge* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Ante Batovik, *Non-Aligned Yugoslavia and the Relations with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation* (Florence: European University Institute, 2013).

²⁸ Nebojša Popov, ed., *Sloboda i nasilje: Razgovor o časopisu Praxis i Korčulanskoj ljetnoj školi* [Freedom and outrage: discussion of the magazine Praxis and the Korčula summer school] (Belgrade: Res publica, 2003).

and elders and called for a more authentic socialism. To this call, Tito (just as Mao had done a few years before) surprised all and got on national television to concede: "The students are right."²⁹ But broad abstractions are dangerous beasts. Yugoslavs' Praxis-inspired young bloods were no Red Guards, and Tito's return to socialism translated into an increase in social protections, not a return to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy or revolutionary politics.

Compared to the Italian case, Yugoslavs' limited enthusiasm for the Little Red Book point to two significant phenomena. First, the importance of the figure of the "Partisan" in both countries determined to a large degree a predilection toward changing the world through "the barrel of a gun." By the 1960s, many Italians, both young and old, had sanctified the Partisans' World War II struggles to such an extent that when faced with their own reformist, bureaucratic present they thirsted for action, and in some cases even blood. In Yugoslavia, Partisan violence didn't end when the Nazis left, and for years Yugoslavs licked their wounds hoping that all that violence and all those sacrifices would be worth it. By the 1960s and 1970s, Tito's Yugoslavia was working ever harder to prove that this was so. The last thing anyone wanted was another round of civil or political wars in the name of ideology. And dissatisfied Yugoslavs collaborated with Egyptian, Indian, German, British, and American "New Leftists" in demanding a more humane socialist turn. As the Chinese embassy that sent the Little Red Book to the curious Pakrac high-school student expected, Mao's message in Yugoslavia fell flat, while in Italy, where hagiographies of combat-ready Partisan communists dominated the popular imagination, interest in Mao, for a while at least, seemed unquenchable.

But where common cause amongst Italian and Yugoslav Little Red Book audiences could be found (and where Chinese embassies perhaps misjudged their audience) was on the question of anti-imperialism. Both Italians and Yugoslavs demonstrated respect for China's stance against imperialism, and American imperialism specifically. Both populations obtained their Little Red Books in part to show their support and to learn the secrets of China's anti-Western, anti-colonialist convictions. As can be seen by *Divergenze*, Chinese diplomats, propagandists, and strategists expected no less from their fellow "true" socialists in Italy. But in targeting primarily "in between" audiences instead of competing socialist readerships, a strategy described by Xu Lanjun, perhaps an opportunity was missed. In the hearts of many Yugoslavs, the Non-Aligned

²⁹ "Studenti su imali pravo," *Novi List* (June 9, 1968).

Movement was not an underhanded strategy of an imperial pawn: it was a *raison d'être*. Who knows what would have happened if China had approached Yugoslavia as a country not that far away, a country much closer than "Chinese" Italy, a country eager to hold up the Little Red Book as a common symbol against the menace of imperialism?

Nevertheless, by comparing the reception of the Little Red Book in two domestic contexts across Europe's southern reaches of the Iron Curtain one thing is clear: Cold War explanations do not clarify domestic receptions. In capitalist, US-sphere-of-influence Italy, Mao's Little Red Book was a best seller, regardless of the fact that much of its content was intended for an audience that in no way resembled the urban, industrially developed, and consumerist context of most Italians. This apparent paradox can be explained by the fact that the Little Red Book promised a way to retrace a continuity with the uncompromising past of World War II Partisan struggle and a new commitment against American imperialism. In socialist Yugoslavia, the Little Red Book garnered much less interest, and what interest there was had nothing to do with communism. Combat, sacrifice, and political power growing "out of the barrel of a gun" were state-sponsored, old (*titovska*) hat lessons for Pioneer-trained Yugoslavs, and failed to incite enthusiasm. What enthusiasm did exist was subsumed under the same anti-imperialist interests the Yugoslav state was already promoting. If there is a common history of why a student in Venice, Italy and a student in Pakrac, Yugoslavia sent away for Mao's mantras, it is not about World War II legacies, communism, and the Cold War. It is about anti-imperialism.

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