

Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*. London: Bodley Head, 2019, 606pp., £30.00 h/b.

Despite its considerable influence at the height of the Cold War and in the post-World War II events in the global South, Maoism is often remembered through the lens of kitsch Mao-era memorabilia or Maoist chic. It is surprising then, that an ideology which so influenced the geopolitics of the last century has only now received its first comprehensive account in Julia Lovell's *Maoism: A Global History*.

Over the course of twelve chapters, Lovell makes the case that the ideology of Maoism may have faded into a historical anomaly had it not been for its global repercussions by illustrating Maoism's impact in South-East Asia, the decolonisation and development in Africa, as well as its influence in Western Europe and the United States of the late 1960s, and in the successive guerrilla wars in India, Latin America and Nepal (p. 150).

Lovell anchors *Maoism's* focus over such a vast scope of geography through the character of Chairman Mao himself. Born in rural China in 1893, Mao rose prominence within the Chinese Communist Party, ultimately founding the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. It is this seminal period of Chinese history in which Lovell sets her inquiry as she follows the trajectory of Mao's ideology as it travelled and influenced the world, even after the Chairman's death in 1976.

By approaching the legacy of Mao's ideology from a global perspective, Lovell invites comparisons between Mao's ideology with those of contemporary politicians, revealing a Mao who feels familiar to observers of our populist era. In Chapter 2, for instance, Lovell takes as her focal point the publication of Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*—itself an influential take on Mao's early exploits in north-west China—and extracts Snow's sympathies with the Communist cause and the Chairman's charm in winning over an impressionable Snow who, Lovell reminds us, was “an ambitious journalist from the American Midwest looking for an international scoop” (p. 21). Upon his arrival in Shanghai in 1928, Snow would go on to work as the “head of advertising for a local newspaper” (p. 64). It is an ironic juxtaposition that he would later write *Red Star*, advertising Maoism to the world and laying the foundation for how Mao's idea's and persona traversed territories, countries, languages and classes, and attracted international cheerleaders (p. 63). Lovell's analysis of *Red Star* is a particularly insightful and long-overdue reassessment of Snow's account of Mao's early political ambition and serves as an introduction to her book's successive chapters, which move to the political afterlives of Maoism beyond China's borders, as well as pretext for Lovell's wider exploration of Mao's ideology, of which *Red Star* survives as a cornerstone text of the international Mao cult.

One of the many strengths of Lovell's book is showing how the Mao cult and Maoist ideologues endured outwith China in the decades following Mao's death, particularly amongst colonised nations such as Nepal and India, in which Maoist guerrillas remain active to this day. In Chapter 6, Lovell's exploration of the impact of Maoism within the People's Republic of Congo illustrates that, as Mao's successors within China were trying “to return the genie of high revolutionary Maoism to the bottle” (pp. 221-2), his ideology and practices nevertheless continued to spread throughout India, Peru and Nepal.

Throughout *Maoism*, Lovell concludes her chapters by means of analogy or illustration, rather than attempting to predict the impact of the PRC's ideology beyond the timeframe of her book. It is an interesting narrative choice that Lovell takes to, instead, end her chapters by use of analogy or illustration; one which benefits the impartiality of Lovell's exploration of global Maoism and also highlights the author's impressive capacity for narrative. The juxtaposition of individuals' experiences against the wider, political backdrop of Maoism's remain as some of the most illuminating sections of *Maoism* and helps tie

together the global influence of Maoism in a book which might otherwise struggle for narrative consistency across its wide variety of countries and timeframes.

Lovell's brief but salient conclusion to *Maoism* strikes one as surprising given its scope, but perhaps is reflective of the book's wider call to revisit the legacy of Maoism and how it has travelled around and influenced the world. Instead, by taking a global view of Mao's ideological legacy, Lovell presents the case for the underestimation of Maoism as a global—not singularly Chinese—phenomenon (p. 460): one that has shaped the past, present, and seems likely to continue to shape the future of China's position on the international stage.

In a similar vein to how Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* introduced Mao and advertised Maoism on the global stage, in *Maoism*, Julia Lovell opens the field of global Maoism for scholars once again. Unlike Snow's band wagoning of the Mao cult, however, Lovell's impressive study seems to invite scholars to assess Maoism's ongoing global legacy and impacts writ large. For such scholars of global Maoism, Julia Lovell's trailblazing scholarship in *Maoism: A Global History* exists as an indispensable guide for future studies and scholars alike.

RONALD TORRANCE, PhD Candidate, School of Humanities, Lord Hope Building,
University of Strathclyde, 141 St James Road, Glasgow, G4 0LT, UK. *Email:*
ronald.torrance@strath.ac.uk