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## **The Greek political publishing field during the long 1960s, exemplified by the case of Istorikes Ekdoseis, 1963-1981**

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## CHAPTER 3

### *Visualising the Revolution: Imagery and the Political Imaginary*

During the Greek *long sixties*, the majority of political publishing activity was based on translated works. In what follows, I will present the ways in which book covers and book formats in political publishing—especially that undertaken by political groups, organisations or movements—were heavily based on the originals. I argue that visual resemblance was used as proof of the authenticity—and thus the political authority—of the published titles and the political organisations that produced them. The book format and the allusions it produced, such as the allusion to political authority, enhanced the publisher's symbolic capital. The book *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*, widely known as the *Little Red Book*, will be treated in both its transnational and its Greek context as a case study supporting these theoretical claims.

To present the argument, books will be mainly treated as material objects or cultural artefacts rather than textual vessels. For this reason, my focus is on *form* rather than *content*. Typically, analysis of political press and publishing has it the other way around—that is, the form is usually disregarded, and analysis of the content foregrounded. While the political press is often viewed as the mere sum of political texts, I argue that, in reality, the form is significant as well, especially on a symbolic level. Political publishing during the Greek *long sixties* was viewed merely as the production of important texts. Thus, the focus was on the content regardless of the form. I drew this conclusion after a series of interviews with people contemporarily or previously involved in political publishing as well as with readers of such

publications. The case of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* will illuminate the neglected or even downplayed aspect of form since, as I will show, its format was crucial for its use as a performative tool.

I will examine two distinctive dimensions of formatting and aesthetics that predominated the field of political publishing. The first aspect is the purposeful copying of originals—since the field was heavily based on translated works—and the second that of very cheap editions of poor aesthetic value, in terms of typography and art. Both books used to showcase these arguments were published by the same publishing venture, Istorikes Ekdoseis, and share the same author, Mao Zedong. These two were the Greek editions of the aforementioned *Quotations from Chairman Mao*<sup>325</sup> and *the treatise On “Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR”*.<sup>326</sup>

Why we might ask, did poor aesthetics predominate in Greek political publishing activity? There are several reasons. When asked, many of the agents involved in the radical press often implied that just as politics is the art of the possible, so were the aesthetics of their work. In other words, the form was objectively defined by their personal and collective lack of both expertise and economic capital. Of course, these two very real restrictions must have played some role but viewing poor aesthetics as the objective end product of technical and financial limitations or the lack of skills is far from convincing. We know, for example, that the quality of translations was given high priority, especially in the case of Istorikes Ekdoseis. The majority of the translators employed had a working—rather than an in-depth—knowledge of foreign languages, yet their translations were considered very good. The importance of good translations was taken for granted and extra collective effort invested to ensure that outcome. The significance of the form was, in contrast, downplayed and design was therefore neglected.

The fact that several actors in the political publishing field—who also lacked either expertise or capital—attempted to focus on graphic design

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325. *Apospasmata apo ta erga tou proedrou Mao Tse-Toung* [*Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*] (Athens: Istorikes Ekdoseis, 1966) [in Greek].

326. *Mao Tse-tung, Pano sta “Ekonomika provimata tou sosialismou stin ESSD”* [*On “Economics Problems of Socialism in the USSR”*] (Athens: Istorikes Ekdoseis, 1978) [in Greek].

and not just the content is indicative of the fact that up to a certain point poor aesthetics was a matter of choice. This is an indication that the course taken—as far as aesthetics is concerned—was not as deterministic as the agents of the publishing field describe. The latter viewed the outcome of their work as inevitable due to their shortfalls. The interviews with agents and readers of the time hardly ever feature any mentions of such shortcomings either concerning the form (aesthetics), or the content (translations, errata). When examined today, with the benefit of current knowledge and insight, such shortcomings are quite obvious. However, at the time, neither the agents nor the readers were able to identify them. What they were fully aware of was the fact that the audience for political press could only afford cheap publications.

One might wonder whether there is a contradiction—namely, a conflict between the two different practices briefly outlined above. I argue that there is no contradiction. In either case, the actors proceeded to publish by underestimating the dialectics of form and content. In the case of copying the originals to benefit at the symbolic level alone, they did so without actually addressing the issue of form. The publishers gave no credence to national particularities or simply dismissed the fact that design could play a role in communicating important signals for the organisation as well.

### Meaning, Form, and Symbolic Power

According to Roland Barthes, there are three levels of meaning.<sup>327</sup> The first is *informational*—pertaining to the message itself. The second level—which he terms *signification*—is *symbolic*. The third level is *obscure meaning*, a notion that Barthes developed to distinguish this third level from the symbolic one, perceived as conveying obvious—or at least widely understood—meaning. The first level pertains to the textual content and, as already mentioned, will not be analysed at this point. The second, symbolic level will be examined here.

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327. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 52–68.

Andrew Benjamin—no relation to Walter Benjamin—adapts Barthes’ third level of meaning. In so doing, he proposes the replacement—or “critical linking”—of Barthes quite blurry concept of *significance*, with Walter Benjamin’s notion of *aura*.<sup>328</sup> *Aura*—or to be more precise, loss of aura—has been construed as a procedure that may be considered as either positive or negative, thus its use, if not clarified in advance, may bring ambiguity to the whole argument.<sup>329</sup> I argue that in the case under examination there is no such thing as the loss of *aura*, but—on the contrary—the mechanical reproduction of vast quantities of political texts worldwide with similar or identical external characteristics (i.e. covers and formats that recreate the *political aura* of the original). I coin the term *political aura* to describe the symbolic capital enclosed in a book title due to its resemblance with the original text of a prominent political figure. For example, the purpose of creating exact copies of Mao Zedong’s *Little Red Book* was to access and accumulate symbolic capital, drawing on that acquired already by the Chinese leader. Here, we are speaking of the symbolic capital he accumulated as leader of the Chinese Revolution, the head of a vast socialist country and the architect of the Cultural Revolution, an important event in the 1960s. Just as a luminous entity like the sun provides light for dull entities like the moon, political aura transfers illumination from the original to the copy. The Benjaminian *aura* is the capacity of singular objects, namely works of art, to evoke a feeling of uniqueness. Benjamin defines the *aura* as:

[A] strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer’s noon, to trace a range of mountain on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance—this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch. Now, to bring things closer to us or rather to the masses, is just as passionate an inclination in our day as the overcoming of whatever is unique in every situation by means of its reproduction. Every day the need to possess the object in close-up in the form

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328. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 52–68; Andrew Benjamin, “The Decline of Art: Benjamin’s Aura”, *Oxford Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (1986), 30–35, 31.

329. Benjamin, “Decline of Art”, 31.

of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative. The difference between the copy, which illustrated papers and newsreels keep in readiness, and the original picture is unmistakable. Uniqueness and duration are intimately intertwined in the latter as are transience and reproducibility in the former.<sup>330</sup>

Here I draw an analogy between the work of art and political publishing products (i.e. books) as artefacts, rather than merely political texts. I argue that the *aura*—literally in the case of works of art before mechanical reproduction, and metaphorically in the case of ideology and politics where the subject, as in a reader of political texts, experienced a revelation as if the *aura*—was transmitted to the subject by reading or even carrying specific books. Mechanical reproduction provided the publisher with the capacity to convey the authority of the original to the copy and provide a sense of ideological and political authenticity to those producing or carrying and reading the copies.

Thus, I argue that the *political aura* is transmitted by the production of identical—in terms of form—translations. The transmission of the *aura* functions as a transfer of the symbolic power of the original and thus enhances the symbolic capital of the publisher who produces the translated works. The identical copies do not merely spread the content to a global audience, but also the sense of belonging to a special group of the politically and ideologically enlightened, that in a mental way participate in the great events of their fellow believers worldwide. A Greek reader of the *Little Red Book* felt a connection with the Chinese Red Guards in Tiananmen or the French Maoists at the Sorbonne during May '68 by reading the same text in the same format as his or her comrades-in-arms worldwide.

The *Little Red Book*, with all its fetishised qualities and as an extreme (but not unique) example, made very good use of this “appearance or semblance of distance”. These dialectics of distance and proximity are very visible in the fact that the widespread circulation of the book intended to collapse distances between the West and China. And yet, the mere fetishising

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330. Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography”, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, vol. 2, part 2 (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1931–1934), 518–519.

of the book-object, not to mention its content, reproduced the distance—that is, attempted to salvage the *aura* precisely through its reproducibility.

The elements of authority and authenticity will also be examined as constituents of symbolic power that provides added value to Bourdieuan symbolic capital,<sup>331</sup> a crucial element of the political publishing field, and a key factor in the formation of political and ideological groups. *Quotations from Chairman Mao* will be used to illustrate the aforementioned arguments. The choice of this specific book as a case study is far from random since it is one of the most widely known and read books of all time and, as I will detail further below, the *Little Red Book* had a transnational impact during the *long sixties*, especially on the youth.

In addition, the ideological and the publishing alignment between Istorikes Ekdoseis and the Chinese FLP, which was the publisher of the original *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, demonstrates the significance of imagery and visual representation in the political and ideological imaginary. The latter was transformed into symbolic capital for the domestic publisher—in our case, Istorikes Ekdoseis—derived directly from the symbolic power of the published works and mainly from the author of the works, Mao Zedong. The mechanism here are the links between authors and publishers of the originals, whose aura is transmitted to a global audience by diffused local translations of those originals. In this way, symbolic capital from the originals—via translations into various local languages—is diffused and accumulated across time and space.

### **“Of All Books, We Love to Read Chairman Mao’s the Most”:<sup>332</sup> The Little Red Book that Shook the World**

Translated works were at the core of the attempt of the CPC and the PRC

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331. See Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power”, *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1989): 14–25; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1984).

332. “National Conference on the Work of Printing and Distributing Chairman Mao’s Works”, *Peking Review*, no. 33 (12 August 1966): 15.



to create and transmit a global language for their revolutionary vision.<sup>333</sup> The latter was taken literally by some young revolutionaries and as a young French Maoist of the 1960s admitted: “we used a Maoist language, taken straight out of the Little Red Book”.<sup>334</sup> The FLP, the state publisher of China, established in 1952, grew extensively during the *long sixties* and spearheaded its production for a global audience.<sup>335</sup> At the heart of the dissemination effort was Guozi Shudian—or the “International Bookstore”—which functioned as the Chinese centre for book exports. Although its purpose in serving national propaganda was stated as early as 1953—just four years after its establishment in 1949—it was not until the late 1950s that it assumed an active role regarding its aforementioned operation. In 1959, it ceased being part of the Ministry of Culture and from then on it was part of the newly formed Foreign Affairs Committee of the China Culture Council. From this point on, it occupied a vital role as a piece on the PRC’s foreign affairs chessboard.<sup>336</sup> During this time there was a shift from book distribution being perceived as a commercial act to being performed as a revolutionary act, with the assumption that “distribution should accelerate world revolution”.<sup>337</sup>

The epitome of this effort was the mass translation, production and distribution of Mao Zedong’s works on a global scale. In 1968, when FLP exports reached their peak, 7.73 million volumes in thirty-two different languages were exported, along with 9.55 million periodicals.<sup>338</sup> Almost 1.5

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333. Lanjun Xu, “Translation and Internationalism”, in *Mao’s Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander C. Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), iTunes e-book edition.

334. Cited in Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 111.

335. Cagdas Ungor, “Reaching the Distant Comrade: Chinese Communist Propaganda Abroad (1949–1976)”, (unpublished PhD thesis, Binghamton University, 2009), 90.

336. Lanjun “Translation”.

337. Cao Jianfei, ed., “*Zhongguo guoji tushu maoyi zonggongsi sishizhounian: shilunji* [The Fortieth Anniversary of the China International Publishing Company: Selected Papers on its History] (Beijing: China International Publishing Group, 1989)”, excerpted from Cook, *Mao’s Little Red Book*.

338. *Ibid.*, 254.

million copies of the *Quotations from Chairman Mao*—by far the FLP’s best seller<sup>339</sup>—were distributed between October 1966 and September 1967, in one-hundred and twenty-eight different countries or regions.<sup>340</sup> The book was even translated in Braille script so that even the blind would be able to see the revolutionary truth.<sup>341</sup> From 1966 and for the next few years, almost every single issue of *Peking Review* featured articles or reports about the publication, distribution, dissemination and reception worldwide of the *Little Red Book* and Mao Zedong’s other translated works.<sup>342</sup> The *People’s Daily*, the daily newspaper that served as the organ of the CPC, also carried headlines regarding Mao’s works during the *Little Red Book* frenzy, such as: “Read Leader Mao’s Words, Go in the Direction that Leader Mao Points”.<sup>343</sup> The *People’s Daily* photo reportages and headlines were also used to present the focus of Chinese publishing activity to a global audience from the culmination of the Cultural Revolution onwards; photos of foreigners reading the *Little Red Book* were published along with “pictures of soldiers, workers, students and farmers all studying the Little Red Book” in China.<sup>344</sup> This was not just propaganda; the book was well-received on

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339. Ungor, “Distant Comrade”, 206, notes that large quantities of the volumes of FLP books were freely distributed by the national distributor Guozi Shudian. Therefore, the term best “seller” is not exactly accurate.

340. “New Era with Mao Tse-tung’s Thought As its Great Banner”, *Peking Review* 48 (4 November 1967): 18.

341. Daniel Leese, “Performative Politics and Petrified Image—The Mao Cult During China’s Cultural Revolution” (unpublished PhD thesis, International University Bremen, 2006), 122.

342. See “The ‘Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung’ Lights the Whole World”, *Peking Review* 10 (3 March 1967): 24–26; “Use ‘Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung’ As a Weapon in Struggle: Call by the Organ of the Union of the French Communist Youth (M–L.)”, *Peking Review* 10 (3 March 1967): 23; “All True Marxist-Leninists Must Grasp Mao Tse-tung’s Thought: *La Voix du Peuple*, Organ of the Belgian Communist Party, Hails the Distribution of *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung* in Belgium”, *Peking Review* 10 (3 March 1967), 23; “New Era With Mao Tse-tung’s Thought As its Great Banner”, *Peking Review* 48 (24 November 24 1967): 17–19; “‘Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung’ Published in Foreign Languages”, *Peking Review* 25 (16 June 16 1967): 8–9.

343. Cited in Cagdas Ungor, “Impact of Mao Zedong Thought, 1966–1977” (master’s thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University 2004), 21.

344. *Ibid.*, 22–24.

a global scale within the movements of the 1960s, especially among the youth.<sup>345</sup>

The sheer volume of books produced and distributed is astonishing. The *Little Red Book* is considered to be the second-most printed book of all time.<sup>346</sup> This remarkable achievement is probably why the format of the book—a crucial variable—is often ignored or at least downplayed. Indeed, the book's format was as salient as its content, or—to be more precise—as its author. This is evident in the way the book is remembered or widely referred to as *Mao's Little Red Book* instead of its actual title, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*. It is self-evident that this is a direct reference to both its format and the colour used on the cover. What is interesting is that such references regarding the format were probably initiated by the Chinese state through the *Peking Review*, something highly unusual since it was not possible to trace similar cases of descriptions or projections based on the visual depiction for other publications of the FLP. Especially during 1967–1970,<sup>347</sup> there are numerous references to the “Red Book” many of which give it as the “treasured Red Book”,<sup>348</sup> ascribing not only a descriptive but also a qualitative essence to the object.

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345. Zachary A. Scarlett, “China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the Imagination of the Third World”, in *The Third World in the Global 1960s*, eds. Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 48–51; Thomas C. Kageff, *Towards a Transpacific Dialectic: Encounters with Maoism in the American Literature of the Long Sixties* (unpublished PhD thesis, Claremont Graduate University, 2011), 23–24.

346. Tania Branigan, “Mao's Little Red Book to Get Revamp”, *The Guardian* (27 September 2013), accessed 16 March 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/27/mao-little-red-book-revamp>.

347. This title has been linked to the Chinese Cultural Revolution which took place in 1966–1969. The fact that the majority of the references to the book comes from issues of the *Peking Review* from that period seems to be no coincidence.

348. See Zachary A. Scarlett, “China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the Imagination of the Third World”, in *The Third World in the Global 1960s*, eds. Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 50; David G. Atwill and Yurong Y. Atwill, eds., *Sources in Chinese History: Diverse Perspectives from 1644 to the Present* (New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall), 2010, 274; Liu Ching-chih, *A Critical History of New Music in China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010), 467. Beyond the above, a search at the marxists.org digital database provides a dozen of search results referring to the “treasured red book”, accessed 11 April 2018, <https://www.marxists.org>

The following excerpt is characteristic of how the CPC and the PRC presented and promoted the book:

The bright red-covered *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* has become the invaluable and best-loved revolutionary handbook, not only of the Chinese but of all the revolutionary peoples of the world. Editions in various foreign languages are being received abroad with unprecedented enthusiasm and are now the world's best seller. Publishers in some countries have produced their own translations of this volume to meet the urgent demand of the reading public. Some foreign friends, because no printed translation yet exists in their own language, have got friends to make translations which they have copied down to study.

Many foreign revolutionary friends who visit China eagerly ask for copies of the Quotations. They describe it as a "most precious gift" and a "priceless treasure". There are quite a few progressive friends from abroad, who, like their Chinese comrades, take along their Quotations wherever they go, study them whenever opportunity offers and take them as their guide to action. It is a demonstration of their boundless love and admiration for our great leader Chairman Mao.<sup>349</sup>

The symbolism is crystal clear, with the bright red colour of the cover being identical to the colour used to identify revolutionaries and communists worldwide. A reference found in another article—published a few months after the one quoted above—proceeds to further describe the foreign language editions of the *Quotations from Chairman Mao*:

The foreign languages editions of this cherished book have a red plastic cover. The title page is followed by a photograph of the great leader Chairman Mao and a facsimile of an inscription by Comrade Lin Piao.<sup>350</sup>

Beyond the red colour of the cover (see Figure 10), the picture of Mao that follows the title page (not shown)—a standard in Mao's works by FLP—familiarises the reader with the author. This specific book design is an exception since FLP's works of Mao Zedong followed a very specific pattern

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[google.gr/search?q=site:marxists.org+%22treasured+red+book%22&newwindow=1&client=firefox-b-ab&dcr=0&ei=3RnOWpiIK4PZwQLCpouYQC&start=0&sa=N&biw=1258&bih=636](https://www.google.gr/search?q=site:marxists.org+%22treasured+red+book%22&newwindow=1&client=firefox-b-ab&dcr=0&ei=3RnOWpiIK4PZwQLCpouYQC&start=0&sa=N&biw=1258&bih=636).

349. "The "Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung" Lights the Whole World", *Peking Review* 10 (3 March 1967): 24.

350. "Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung" Published in Foreign Languages", *Peking Review* 25 (16 June 1967): 8–9.

in which Mao's figure is depicted in the form of a seal on the cover which until then was not made of red plastic but out of plasticised paper (see Figure 9). These differences in respect to the majority of FLP publications and those of Mao's works, in particular, provide a uniqueness to *Quotations* since its distinctive format and design makes it impossible to be mistaken for any other of the publisher's titles. The uniqueness of the book emerges on every level of the publishing sphere, not only in producing a title with a distinct design but also regarding the favourable and upscaled promotion and distribution.

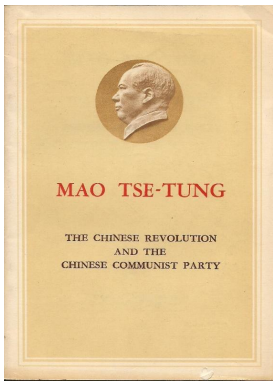


FIGURE 9.  
An example of the ordinary cover of Mao's works published by China's Foreign Language Press

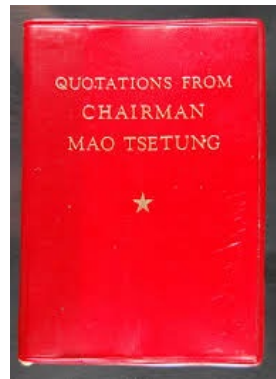


FIGURE 10.  
The cover made for *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*.

### *Waving the Little Red Book: Performativity and Doctrine Identification*

Translating, publishing, choosing a distinctive cover, printing, distributing and finally reading a book are not unfamiliar processes. On the contrary, these are all procedures one can find in the traditional publishing chain.<sup>351</sup> Yet the singularity of the *Little Red Book* lies in that it also introduced

351. Thompson, *Books in the digital age: The transformation of academic and higher education publishing in Britain and the United States*, Cambridge: Polity 2005, 20–26.



FIGURE 11. Chinese red guards holding and waving the *Little Red Book*



FIGURE 12. Black Panthers waving the *Little Red Book*

manifestations of mass performativity: millions of its readers in China and abroad waved the book at rallies and other gatherings, using it as an object, a banner *and* a book.<sup>352</sup>

Photographers of the time captured the momentum created by a book that was carried or waved by the youth worldwide from the Chinese Red Guards in Tiananmen Square (Figure 11<sup>353</sup>) to members of the Black Panther Party in the cities of the United States (Figure 12<sup>354</sup>).<sup>355</sup>

The philosopher Alain Badiou referred to the *Quotations* as being his and his comrades' guide "not at all, as the dummies say, in the service of dogmatic catechism but, on the contrary, in order for us to clarify and invent new ways in all sorts of disparate situations that were unknown to us".<sup>356</sup>

A similar experience was described by Mike Ely, who participated in the Maoist movement in the *long sixties* in the United States. Ely wrote a small piece on his Facebook page titled, "On the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Mao Zedong's Red Book":

The Red Book changed my life. I bought a copy in Paris during 1968 when I was still in high school, in my mid-teens. I read it over and over and over, hiding it from my father.

I still have that copy, full of scribbled question marks around the parts I couldn't understand.

But at the end, it made me a communist.

Six months later, I was smuggling Mao's Red Books across borders, into eastern Europe in 1969. We were three students, and my friends knew I had hidden them, sealed in packages at the bottom of my knapsack—in English, as many as I could find and buy in Paris.

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352. L. S. Stavrianos, *Global Rift: The Third World Comes to Age*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981, 609.

353. See <https://weeklybolshevik.wordpress.com/author/klaasvelija/>

354. See [http://s21.photobucket.com/user/That70sPhoto/media/China%20Cultural%20Revolution/5300027-cultural-revolution-01-800x537\\_zps297ca5e1.jpg.html](http://s21.photobucket.com/user/That70sPhoto/media/China%20Cultural%20Revolution/5300027-cultural-revolution-01-800x537_zps297ca5e1.jpg.html)

355. Amy Jane Barnes, "From Revolution to Commie Kitsch: (Re)-Presenting China in Contemporary British Museums through the Visual Culture of the Cultural Revolution" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Leicester, 2009), 100.

356. Alain Badiou, "The Cultural Revolution: The last Revolution?", *Positions* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2005): 483.



They were extremely illegal. And no one in Czechoslovakia had had access to any.

[...]

When we told people we met that we had Mao's Red Book, the word went out, in whispers, person to person, in ways that startled us.

We would sleep in hostels (in Prague or Bratislava), and there would be a knock on our door... someone looking for me and a Red Book.

[...]

There are Soviet tanks in the city square. There are ugly puppets running the government. But somewhere, brother, sister, somewhere, there is a communist movement alive and radical and crackling. Its name is Mao. Its heart is the red guards. Its book is RED. And they wanted it.

Then I came back to the US, where the Black Panther Party had exploded left politics, by selling that Red Book on the Berkeley campus. I sat in Panther study groups, where youth paired up in twos and threes, to read the quotations out loud—literally teaching each other to read, in order to get at the meaning.<sup>357</sup>

While some, like Badiou and Ely, were fond of the book since it served as a guide for them in answering the thorny questions of their time, others used it as an accessory, more in the direction of performativity rather than in political and ideological exploration.<sup>358</sup> Although it is not possible to determine which of the two was the dominant aspect—namely, mere performativity or reading and studying of the book by interested parties—it is certain that both existed.<sup>359</sup>

The feeling or presence of this performativity was strong enough to lead Jean-Luc Godard to make *La Chinoise*, a film released in late 1967. Godard—who soon after this film (in the post-May '68 era) inclined towards Maoism—proposed that the film was a positive representation of Maoism, a viewpoint that was not countered by others.<sup>360</sup> The perception of the film

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357. See <https://www.facebook.com/mike.ely.fb?fref=nf&pnref=story>, posted on 21 April 2015.

358. Pirkko-Liisa Kastari, "The Discovery of Chairman Mao in Finland in the 1960s", 449–450, accessed 29 May 2015, <http://elektra.helsinki.fi/kastarisum.pdf>.

359. The well-known historian Tony Judt argues that the "Mao Look", which included the *Little Red Book* as an accessory, "remained a minority taste—even among 'Maoists'". See Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 397.

360. Jacques Bontemps, Jean-Louis Comolli, Michel Delahaye, Jean Narboni and Jean-



by both the filmmaker and the pro-Maoist audience as a positive representation of Maoism is somewhat surprising. It depicts a group of French students, dressed as Chinese Red Guards, hanging around a Parisian apartment reciting Mao Zedong all day long; the walls of their rooms are filled with quotations and posters of Mao Zedong, as well as Chinese magazine covers, while the bookshelves are packed with neatly arranged little red books.

The film viewed today would readily be reviewed as an orientalist parody, in which young Western Maoists proceeded to aestheticise an ideology; the outcome projected was not of a political group but a sect or a cult. Richard Wolin's assessment is that the pro-Chinese illusions of the "normaliens"<sup>361</sup> were immortalised in an idiosyncratic agitational film.<sup>362</sup> This aestheticisation took the form of a performative Maoism in which the *Little Red Book* held a key position. The fact that this aestheticisation was not perceived as such is an indication that it had roots in the Maoist movement and was not simply expressed through its cinematic representation.<sup>363</sup> This is strengthened by Wolin's point that in 1967 Mao-collared suits were "immensely fashionable" while Parisian bookstores were "perpetually selling out of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*".<sup>364</sup> Art historian Lars O. Ericsson recalled a similar performance:

[He] remembers with horror the first lecture he ever gave, in the Philosophy Department at Stockholm University. Ericsson was twenty-three years old and

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Luc Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard", *Film Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (Winter, 1968–1969): 20–35.

361. *Normaliens* is a reference to students of l'Ecole normale supérieure.

362. Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 15.

363. "The Internationalists are Maoists in the style of the young people portrayed in Jean-Luc Godard's film *La Chinoise*". This is how a group of Canadian Maoists are described by a sociologist who was doing field research with political groups in Canada during the 1960s. See Roger O'Toole, "Organizational Weapons and Political Sects", in *Philosophy, History and Social Action: Essays in Honor of Lewis Feuer*, ed. Sidney Hook (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 332; Roger, O'Toole, "Some Social-Psychological Aspects of Sectarian Social-Movements: A Study in Politics and Religion", in *International Yearbook for the Sociology of Knowledge and Religion*, eds. Günter Dux, Tomas Luckmann and Joachim Matthes (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975), 162.

364. Wolin, *Wind from the East*, 15.

had prepared to talk about Aristotle. Every time he said something they did not like, “The students, most of them wearing caps with red stars, slapped Mao’s Little Red Book against their desks”.<sup>365</sup>

Using the *Little Red Book* as the core of a performance is the most indicative, globally widespread, and probably the most extreme case. Yet it is not unique. Carrying titles of books by specific authors or publishing houses—or certain newspapers and periodicals—was a political statement during the *long sixties*. Doing so as a means of ideological and political identification and as a political statement was used both to attract prospective fellow believers and to provide the specific ideological and political mark that would distinguish and separate one group from the other in the vast ocean of groups that existed during the *long sixties*.

### **Publishing Politics as Identity Politics**

The differentiation of one political group from the other—although presented as unbridged by the groups themselves—was almost imperceptible to an outsider. Distinctions were even more difficult if not impossible to make because many groups had similar or nearly identical names, such as *Marxist–Leninist Party of Greece* (M–L KKE), *Communist Party of Greece (Marxist–Leninist)* [KKE (M–L)], *Communist Party of Greece/Marxists–Leninists* (KKE/ML), and so on.<sup>366</sup> The blurry distinctions between the myriad of political groups is hardly a Greek particularity. A brilliant projection of how such differentiation can play out in almost absurd fashion can be seen in Monty Python’s classic, *The Life of Brian*. Who can forget the hilarious dialogue in which the various characters attempt to hash out the differences between the “Judean People’s Front”, the “People’s Front of

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365. Perry Johansson, *Saluting the Yellow Emperor: A Case of Swedish Sinography* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 171.

366. In *Maoism in the Developed World* by Robert J. Alexander, the section on “Greek Maoism” (97–101) is full of errors mainly due to its main source, the *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs* of which the author of the majority of the Greek reports, D. George Kousoulas, seemed unable to distinguish one organisation from the other, confusing the who is who of Greek Marxist–Leninist groups and their publications.

Judea”, the “Judean Popular People’s Front” and—last but not least—the “Popular Front of Judea”?<sup>367</sup>

These distinctions among almost identical groups were partially managed by identifying individuals or collectivities by their textual code of arms—that is, their publications. Many of them used the names of their publications to clarify their identity so that they would not be mistaken for their rivals. For these groups, differences in terms of ideology or political practice were vast; conversely, for the majority of the uninitiated, the variations in brand names were hardly even noticeable. In our case, the circle of people around Istorikes Ekdoseis in its first stage (1964–1967) were known as “Anagennites”, after the review. The importance of publications as trademarks was so crucial that during the various splits that occurred throughout the period, fierce custody battles over titles took place. These battles were so ferocious that some self-proclaimed revolutionaries—for whom Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* was a sacred text—appealed to the institutions of the state to enforce legal possession of their titles.<sup>368</sup>

Brand name and distinct book design were two of the few means employed by the ideological currents within the Greek Left, at a time when state terror against the Left was very intense.<sup>369</sup> Emphasis was put on differentiation, and on attracting or reaching out to a new audience. The *Little Red Book*—with its distinctive design in terms of size, cover and colour—became a matchless revolutionary talisman.<sup>370</sup> Mao Zedong’s thought, as I will illustrate further on, was considered or projected as a weapon for the “soldiers” of revolution worldwide. At the same time, the *Quotations* was also cherished as a talisman; small enough that it could be carried

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367. Terry Jones (director), *Life of Brian*, Python Pictures 1979. The script with the dialogue concerning the variety of sects can be found at [http://montypython.50webs.com/scripts/Life\\_of\\_Brian/8.htm](http://montypython.50webs.com/scripts/Life_of_Brian/8.htm).

368. In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin claimed that bourgeois state must be destroyed, and a new socialist state constructed in its place. See V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964). This was one of the fundamental texts for all Marxists–Leninists and Maoists of the time.

369. On the relation between state terror and the Left in Greece, see Neni Panourgia, *Dangerous Citizens: The Greek Left and the Terror of the State* (New York: Fordham, 2009).

370. Barnes, “Commie Kitsch”, 85.

anywhere, it was studied as if it was a sacred book,<sup>371</sup> much like Muslim soldiers used miniature copies of the Qur'an during World War I.<sup>372</sup> Public mass waving of the book took the form of a ritual.

### Greek Editions of the “Quotations from Chairman Mao”

Although there was a Greek FLP version of the book in 1969 (reprinted in 1972), I will focus on the edition published by Istorikes Ekdoseis in 1966.<sup>373</sup> I do so not only because this one was published first, or because Istorikes Ekdoseis is the case study for this research. What is particularly interesting about this edition is that the Greek publishers chose to produce a Greek edition that was almost identical to the original. The Greek edition was slightly larger—supposedly due to restrictions set by the typographers—but just as likely to save money by economising on paper. One should always bear in mind that Istorikes Ekdoseis had limited, barely sufficient, economic capital with the basic source of revenues being the sales of their books. Thus, reducing losses—such as paper waste—was crucial.

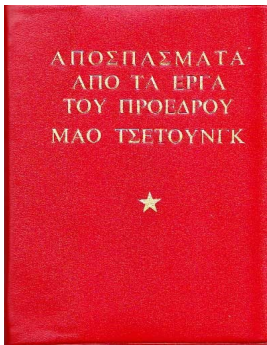


FIGURE 13.  
The Greek FLP edition  
of the *Quotations*

371. Leese, “Performative Politics”, 2; David Childs, *The Two Red Flags: European Social Democracy and Soviet Communism since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 60.

372. Christos Mais, “Miniature Qur’ans: Past and Present”, *Miniature Book Society Newsletter* 80 (March 2009): 13–15.

373. Throughout the *long sixties* the book was published by other Greek publishers in larger formats that differ significantly than the original. The title chosen was often different from the original but more recognisable by the public, that is *Kokkino Vivlio* [Red Book] (i.e., Ekdoseis Manole Geronte, 1972).

We now turn to discuss how the publication of the *Istorikes Ekdoseis* edition was presented through the pages of *Anagennisi*, the monthly review published under roof of the same publishing house. On the back cover of issue 26–27, one will find the following advertisement:

OUT NOW  
 “QUOTATIONS FROM CHAIRMAN MAO”  
*The book that the whole world is talking about*<sup>374</sup>

This *Anagennisi* issue also carried another advertisement for booklets of *The Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in China*, originally published in Beijing by the FLP in 1966. Here—and even though the title clearly implies the subject of the publication—two lines describing the content were added: “A series of important articles and other documents regarding the Cultural Revolution in China”.<sup>375</sup> The *Quotations* needed no further explanation; this was—after all—“the book the whole world is talking about”. The publishers did not feel the need to provide any further information about their newest release to promote it. At the same time, the way they presented their latest publication—positioning it at the epicentre of the whole world—placed the book (and thus themselves and their politics) within a global context.

On a winter’s day in 1967, a letter from China arrived in the working-class district of Drapetsona in Piraeus, Greece.<sup>376</sup> The recipient was Isaak Iordanides, one of the founding members of the *Istorikes Ekdoseis* publishing house. The sender was one Y. Gou from Beijing. I was able to identify the Beijing post office box given as Mr Gou’s postal address as that of International Bookstore, better known by its Chinese name, Guozi Shudian. The letter concerned the Greek edition of the *Little Red Book*. It

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“KIKLOFORISE  
 APOSPASMATA APO TA ERGA TU PROEDRU MAO  
 To vivlio gia to opio ginete logos s’ olo ton kosmo”

Back cover advertisement in *Anagennisi*, issue 26–27 (November–December 1966), accessed 17 March 2015, [http://morfotikesekdoseis.gr/sites/default/files/pdf/anagenisi\\_26-27.pdf](http://morfotikesekdoseis.gr/sites/default/files/pdf/anagenisi_26-27.pdf).

375. Ibid.

376. The letter can be found in, ASKI, EDA Archive, box 483, folder 7.

seems that the Greek translation was based on the first FLP edition, so it did not include the infamous “Foreword to the second edition of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*”. The *Foreword*, written by Lin Biao, then a leading cadre of the CPC and one of the most high-ranked officials of the PRC, is now considered to be the key figure behind both the cult of personality of Mao Zedong and the frenzy regarding the *Little Red Book*, two issues that intertwine.<sup>377</sup> The envelope contained a two-page typed letter of the *Foreword* accompanied by a note asking for the content of the letter—that is, the *Foreword*—to be added to the book *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*. This is indicative of the fact that the PRC and CPC not only monitored activity regarding their works abroad but also tried to keep their international counterparts up to date with publishing developments in China. Istorikes Ekdoseis tried to please the Chinese and the *Foreword* was supplemented in the book. This is supported by the fact that letters from Guozi Shudian announcing new editions of FLP were sent to Istorikes Ekdoseis.<sup>378</sup>

It is not possible to precisely identify the impact of the book in Greece. The reason is that the 21 April coup occurred soon after its publication. Just a month before the military regime came to power—on 8 March—1,200 copies of the Greek edition were given to a news agency for distribution.<sup>379</sup> Isaak Iordanides tells how, after the collapse of the publishing house in 1974, he received a call from the bookbinder with whom Istorikes Ekdoseis had done business prior to the dictatorship. The bookbinder reported that

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377. Regarding the foreword by Lin Biao and culminating Mao’s cult of personality, see Alexander C. Cook, “The Spiritual Atom Bomb And its Global Fallout”, in *Mao’s Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander C. Cook (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010). iTunes e-book edition. On the cult of Mao Zedong, see, also, Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism: Eight Essays* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 155–183.

378. ASKI, EDA Archive, box 483, folder 7.

379. Statutory Declaration dated 8 March 1967, written and signed by Giannis Hontzeas to the Neon Praktoreion Efemeridon kai Periodikon [New Press and Periodicals Agency] regarding the delivery of 1,200 volumes of the Istorikes Ekdoseis Greek editions of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* and 500 volumes of Stalin’s *Concerning Questions of Leninism*. ASKI, EDA Archive, box 483, folder 7.

he had a great number of unbound volumes of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* in his workshop, which had been sitting there gathering dust since 1967; he asked what he ought to do with them. While the authorities sent forces to confiscate leftist books and press from the premises of publishing houses, bookstores or even printers known to work with leftist firms and groups, it never occurred to them to raid bookbinders as well. This claim by Iordanides is supported by the archival remainders of Istorikes Ekdoseis. In handwritten notes on pending business, in *Anagennisi* or the newly published weekly newspaper *Laikos Dromos*, there is a reference to the name Kolovouris. He was a bookbinder at the time and next to his name there was a note “MAO Reminders (2,000)” and another regarding an offer made by Kolovouris in December 1966 regarding bookbinding per volume.<sup>380</sup> According to these notes, the print run for Istorikes Ekdoseis publications was a standard 3,000 copies. Since 1,200 were given to the news agency and 2,000 more were still at the bookbinder—and if we bear in mind that publishers kept central distribution for themselves through their offices and network of political affiliates—it is safe to assume that the print run of *Quotations* exceeded the norm.

### Symbolic Capital and Publishing Decisions

One of the distinctions of the political publishing field in respect to trade publishing is that while the latter would never consider removing best-sellers from the market, the former would not think twice if the bestseller stopped serving its ideological or political purposes. For this reason, the *Little Red Book* was not available in stock—nor was it republished—in the post-junta era by Istorikes Ekdoseis,<sup>381</sup> although other editions were available in Greek, including the FLP edition. In addition, as we know, unbound volumes from the pre-junta era were also available.

The explanation of this “puzzle” lies beyond the sphere of publishing.

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380. ASKI, EDA Archive, box 483, folder 5.

381. Istorikes Ekdoseis book catalogue, Athens (1974–1976), Christos Mais Archive.

Interviewees within the political circle around *Istorikes Ekdoseis* and its political descendants, while discussing the *Little Red Book* frenzy of the long sixties felt the need to distance themselves from the fetishism surrounding the Quotations and to clarify that this was something they as individuals and as political groups did not engage in or embrace.<sup>382</sup> The position papers written by the Central Committee of KKE (M–L)—the political backbone of *Istorikes Ekdoseis*—for its second congress (published in 1980) refer to the *Little Red Book* in very negative terms. Here is the political explanation for the choice not to republish the *Little Red Book*:

Politicising the masses through the *Little Red Book* with the quotations from the works of Mao Zedong, and the mass memorisation of the quotations by youngsters and elders was a consequence of the domination of a dogmatic and mechanical viewpoint, which replaced the necessity of ideological and political education of the working class and the popular masses by the shallow, fragmental memorisation of certain quotations.<sup>383</sup>

The critique quoted above lies on two levels, one regarding the reading habits and the practice of memorising instead of in-depth reading and the other, the mass performativity that attended these habits. They further on criticise other aspects of the *Little Red Book* such as its role in the cultivation of a cult of personality, which went hand-in-hand with the depreciation of the works of other theorists, such as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.<sup>384</sup>

The symbolic power of a specific title, author or publisher is not only inherently fluid but sufficiently vulnerable that it may later attenuate or even expire altogether. The abrupt finish of the Cultural Revolution in 1969 ended the *Little Red Book* frenzy. The era in which this book was promoted by the CPC and PRC apparatus by any means possible is long gone. In 1979,

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382. Stelios Manousakas, interviews with the author, Athens, 21 May 2011, 25 June 2013; Vasilis Samaras, interview with the author, Thessaloniki, 22 August 2014.

383. KKE (M–L) [Central Committee], “2o Synedrio tou KKE (m-): E exelixis sto Pagkosmio Kommounistko Kinima ke e dimiourgia tou Marxistkou-Leninistkou kinimatos stin Ellada” [2nd Congress of the KKE (M–L): Developments in the World Communist Movement and the Formation of the Marxist–Leninist Movement in Greece], *Proletariaki Simea*, 179–184, Athens, 30 [in Greek].

384. *Ibid.*



just a few years after Mao's death in 1976, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* was withdrawn from circulation, copies were banned from being sold through the official channels—either in China or abroad—and apart from a limited number of copies that were held for potential future official use, the available stock of the *Little Red Book* was pulped.<sup>385</sup> During the various splits within groups or within the international communist movement, books of yesterday's comrades had to be destroyed, since the authors had become today's foes. Istorikes Ekdoseis was also accused of pulping a book by a former comrade after a split that took place in 1976 concerning Istorikes Ekdoseis' parent organisation.<sup>386</sup> These polemics were documented in the two—then weekly—newspapers, *Proletariaki Simea* of KKE (M–L) and *Laikos Dromos*, of M–L KKE.<sup>387</sup> A series of articles written in July 1977 refers to the destruction of 2,500 copies of a book published by Istorikes Ekdoseis, the author of which then belonged to M-L KKE. On the other hand, Istorikes Ekdoseis replied that the cost of publishing the book had been covered by them and they would therefore not hand it over free of charge.

Splits at the global level also affected publishing policies. The separation of the political organisation affiliated with Istorikes Ekdoseis and the CPC is probably the reason it decided not to publish the fifth volume of Mao's *Selected Works*, which was published soon after his death. This, despite *Proletariaki Simea*—a newspaper that was affiliated with Istorikes Ekdoseis—having announced ahead of time that the fifth volume would be published upon a later announcement by the Chinese officials. It also published passages from the volume.<sup>388</sup> This is probably because for some

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385. Geremie R. Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 7.

386. After the split, Istorikes Ekdoseis remained in the hands of the majority of the group while the organisation's organ *Laikos Dromos* and the periodical *Spoudastikos Kosmos and Mathitika Niata* of the university and high school student groups respectively remained in the hands of the minority group since its members were owners by law.

387. *Proletariaki simea* is translated as “proletarian flag”, while *laikos dromos* means “people's road”. The articles of the aforementioned debates were published in *Laikos Dromos* on 2 July and 16 July 1977 and in *Proletariaki Simea* on 9 July 1977.

388. Mao Tse-tung, “Pano stis Deka Megaes Schesis” [“On the Ten Major Relationships”], *Proletariaki Simea*, period b', issue 11 (Saturday 22 January 1977), 7 [in Greek];

time the position of KKE (M–L)—which ran *Istorikes Ekdoseis* and *Proletariaki Simea*—towards the CPC and the PRC was unclear. Later on, splits between those who could schematically be called pro-Maoists and those who were Hoxhaists—after the ideological and political line of the Albanian leader, Enver Hoxha—redirected the publishing programme of both camps since in the past they had been united and had either produced or distributed materials from their former allies (now implacable enemies).

### Reception of the *Little Red Book* by Greek Marxists–Leninists Abroad

While in Greece the *Little Red Book* failed to shake the world, many Greeks living abroad during the time its popularity peaked experienced the cultural aftershock of its publication. Gregoris Konstantopoulos, an immigrant worker in Toronto during the Greek military dictatorship, described reading the *Little Red Book* as a revelation. The book served as a guide for young radicals like himself. Konstantopoulos' experience of the enthusiastic embrace of the *Little Red Book* is rather different—or even contra to—the sceptical or reserved views of other Greek Marxists–Leninists. But it resembles that described by fellow believers in other countries, especially in Western Europe and the United States, in “Waving the Red Book” (See Figures 11 and 12 above).

He furthermore explains how he and his small group of Greek Marxists–Leninists requested Greek copies of the book from the Chinese Embassy. One should bear in mind that the majority of these Greek immigrants were workers who had minimal knowledge of English at the time. Thus, reading in their native language was crucial, especially at a time when verbal

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“Ekdothike o 5os tomos ton Eklekton Ergon tou Mao Tse-tung: Isagogi ston 5o tomo ton Eklekton Ergon tou Sintrofou Mao” [“The 5th Volume of the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung was Published: Introduction to the 5th Volume of the *Selected Works* of Comrade Mao”, *Proletariaki Simea*, period b’, issue 24 (Saturday 23 April 1977), 7 [in Greek]; “Ekdothike o 5o tomos ton “Eklekton Ergon tou Proedrou Mao” [“The 5th Volume of the ‘Selected Works of Comrade Mao’ Was Published”], *Proletariaki Simea*, period b’, issue 25 (Saturday 30 April 1977), 7 [in Greek].

fetishism was at its peak. Polemics regarding the interpretation of political texts, especially those of a revolutionary Marxist bent, have always been on the frontline of the Left and the fear of misinterpreting texts written in a language one had yet to master was great.

The Chinese Embassy fulfilled the request of this small group of young Greek immigrants, who called themselves Synepi Pali [Consistent Struggle], the name of their monthly newspaper. Embassy staff took them to a warehouse where they found 10,000 volumes of the Greek edition of the FLP edition of *Quotations*. The books were given to the astonished Greeks free of charge, who—after keeping copies for their personal use—on-sold the entire stock to the Greek community of Canada. The number of volumes sold is indicative of the popularity of the specific title and political publications in general during the *long sixties*. The ease with which the Chinese government delivered 10,000 volumes free of charge to a group with which it had no official relations is a clear sign of the non-profit mentality of its publishing activity and its almost exclusive aim of transmitting its political and ideological viewpoints to a broad global audience.

Especially during the 1960s and after the Sino–Soviet split, part of the Chinese Communist Party considered itself as the centre of world revolution and subsequently every step it took was towards this direction. While Mao himself requested that “foreigners stop being armed with Mao Zedong Thought” and criticised viewpoints that saw China as an exporter of revolution<sup>389</sup>—a task mainly undertaken by Guozi Shudian, FLP and the *Peking Review*—Lin Biao was calling Mao’s Thought a “spiritual atom bomb of infinite power”.<sup>390</sup> Not only did Lin urge the masses in China to study it but his speeches claimed that Mao’s spiritual atom bomb could have a global impact. Through its implementation by revolutionaries worldwide, the old world would be shattered to pieces.<sup>391</sup> Lin’s doctrine was “the orthodox

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389. Ungor, “Distant Comrade”, 56–58.

390. Lin Biao, “Foreword to the Second Edition of ‘Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung’”, *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), [no pp] accessed on [no access date] <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1966/12/16.htm>.

391. Lin Biao, “Speech at Peking Rally Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the

interpretation that introduced Mao's *Little Red Book* to the world".<sup>392</sup> The reference to Lin Biao is not random since he is "is credited with being the mastermind behind the Mao cult and with having invented its most prominent symbol, the Little Red Book, for reasons of personal ambition".<sup>393</sup>

The functioning of both Chinese media, especially those with a global target group like *Peking Review* and the FLP,<sup>394</sup> and of high-ranking cadres like Lin Biao, are indicative of the actual policies of the CPC in exporting revolution through exporting books and periodicals—often handed out to those interested, free of charge—with the *Little Red Book* being its master "weapon of mass destruction", its "spiritual atom bomb". During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969), the task of foreign propaganda was taken over by the Cultural Revolution Small Group. This group aimed to "export Chinese Revolution to other countries" and since Mao and his *Little Red Book* were considered to be China's heavy artillery, they were both promoted zealously.<sup>395</sup> Quotations from the book were not limited for use in Chinese magazines; some were even written on the sides of ships, which on occasion led to diplomatic incidents.<sup>396</sup>

### Poorly-Designed Books Are Still Books

I have attempted to demonstrate how the creation of translated works identical to the originals was one of the two aspects of book design. Mimicking the originals boosted the symbolic capital of the producers of the translated

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October Revolution" (November 7, 1967) in *Selected Works of Lin Piao* ed. China Problems Research Center [no pub, no date], 172.

392. Cook, "Spiritual Atom Bomb".

393. Leese, "Performative Politics", 100.

394. On the use of Chinese media and publishing apparatus to internationalise Mao's thought, see Ungor, "Distant Comrade", 177–180.

395. *Ibid.*, 66–68.

396. For examples of the use of the *Quotations* in Chinese media, see Ungor, "Distant Comrade", 177–178. Chinese ships reaching Italian ports in the 1960s faced the problem of either having to remove quotations and slogans or not being able to do business. "Strong Protest Against the Political Provocation by Italian Authorities", *Peking Review* 36 (1 September 1967), 38–39.

works, drawing on the symbolic power of the original works. The other aspect is that of poorly-designed books, either translations or original works.

“It does not matter if it is a yellow cat or a black cat, as long as it catches mice” is a Sichuan proverb—often attributed to the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping—and is quite similar to the mentality of Greek political publishing agents regarding the form of a book—namely, its design.<sup>397</sup> It does not matter whether the design is good or bad, as long as the edition is readable. This was the line that guided the majority of political publishing ventures during the Greek *long sixties*, especially those affiliated with political groups.

This section presents the design and text of one of the works of Mao that Istorikes Ekdoseis produced. I will highlight that the level of professionalism shown in this publication reflects the added value the book would offer in terms of symbolic capital. In this specific case, the lack of symbolic capital—for reasons that I will analyse below—was reflected in the poor overall design of the publication, from its cover to the structure of its contents.

Istorikes Ekdoseis published more than thirty of Mao Zedong’s works between 1963–1967 and again in 1974–1981.<sup>398</sup> All but two were produced by translating the official publications of the FLP. In these cases—as with the *Little Red Book*—Istorikes Ekdoseis tried to create publications that were identical to the Chinese originals. The two works that were not a product of translation of Chinese official publications were Mao’s *Philosophical Works*<sup>399</sup> and *On “Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR”*, both published in 1978. Since these two publication cases are identical, in terms of both being unofficial publications, the presentation of the latter is adequate to illustrate the argument made: the neglect of form when it was

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397. Deng Xiaoping quoted this proverb in his speech “Restore Agricultural Solution”, given on 7 July 1962. *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol I (1938–1965) (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1992), 293.

398. On the Greek editions of Mao Zedong’s works, see Christos Mais, “Ellinikes Ekdosis ton ergon tou Mao Zedong” [Greek publications of Mao Zedong works], in *Mao Zedong: Filosofika Erga* [Philosophical Works] ed. Manolis Arkolakis (Athens: Ektos ton Teichon, 2013), [no pp].

399. Mao Zedong, *Filosofika Erga* [Philosophical Works] (Athens: Istorikes Ekdoseis, 1978) [in Greek].

not related to symbolic capital as in the case of copying the originals. In this case, not spending economic capital was more significant than a well-designed publication.

The treatise *On “Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR”* (See Figure 15) is a translation of an Italian edition of a collection of documents written by Mao Zedong that were included in unofficial publications of his works. The Greek edition’s cover is not a copy of the original, which is highly unusual since in general, the Greek publishers copied the design of the original editions. This is not the only exception since they neither used the original title nor the introduction of the original, and for the first time, they added a very brief introduction of their own.<sup>400</sup> Before moving any further, let me detail the reasons that led to such a shift in the—undeclared but consistent—publication policy of *Istorikes Ekdoseis*.

There are several reasons that differentiate this case concerning the political *aura* and symbolic power and capital treated in previous sections, reasons that lie beyond publishing and extend to the political sphere. On 9 September 1976, Mao Zedong died; in the ensuing few months an internal discussion was initiated within the Greek pro-Maoist forces about whether they would align with the CPC and PRC in the post-Mao era. The majority of the political carrier of *Istorikes Ekdoseis*—KKE (M–L)—decided not to align with the new leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government. Thus, it gradually terminated the translation of new titles of the Chinese FLP without ever denouncing its prior decision to uphold Mao Zedong and therefore, without withdrawing Mao’s works from circulation.

Nevertheless, the death of Mao Zedong and the need of KKE (M–L) and *Istorikes Ekdoseis* to distance themselves from China reversed the prior publishing policy of creating exact copies—or at least very close resemblances—of the Chinese originals. The belief that China had turned “revisionist”<sup>401</sup>—that is, it had turned from the revolutionary path after the

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400. The paragraph-long note that serves as the introduction briefly refers to the source of the translated works of Mao. There are no references to the translator, copyrights or any other information regarding the Italian or the Greek editions whatsoever.

401. Revisionism: “A *fundamental* alteration of a theory, essentially usurping (though

death of Mao Zedong and the political defeat of his followers, known as the “gang of four”—resulted in the loss of China’s political *aura* and of the symbolic power that Chinese publications carried.<sup>402</sup> This is why they went forward and published two books of Mao’s documents that were not officially published by the CPC, although Istorikes Ekdoseis had ceased publishing FLP’s works. In this telling manner, they distanced themselves from Mao’s successors but not from Mao Zedong himself.

The Italian edition was titled *Su Stalin e sull’URSS: Scritti sulla costruzione del socialismo 1958–1961* [*On Stalin and the USSR: Writings on the Construction of Socialism 1958–1961*] (see Figure 14). It was published in 1975 by the left-wing trade publishing house Einaudi and was number 71 of the *Nuovo Politecnico* series established for publications on social and political issues after 1965.<sup>403</sup> The Italian edition included an introduction written by Gianni Sofri—a Marxist intellectual and brother of Adriano Sofri, leader of the revolutionary leftist organisation Lotta Continua [Continuous Struggle]—which was not included in the Greek edition, even though an introductory essay titled “As an introduction” [in Greek] found its way in the contents. But instead of the introduction, the reader will find a text by Mao—namely, the treatise *On “Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR”* (November 1958)—that is missing from the contents. For several reasons, it is safe to assume that the text was unintentionally omitted from the book’s contents.<sup>404</sup>

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taking elements of) the former theory and replacing it with a new one. While the attributes of a theory are subject to change in accordance to changing historic circumstances, changing the *fundamental basis* of that theory is to nullify it in place of a new one”, Marxists Internet Archive, accessed 3 May 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/r/e.htm>.

402. For a summation of the developments in China after Mao Zedong’s death, see Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press), 2010, 159–163.

403. The Greek edition was so flimsy that it referred to the Italian edition—the title of which was not stated—as *Nuovo Politecnico 71 Einaudi*.

404. The text used instead of the “As an introduction” corresponds to the pagination of the latter as defined in the contents. Thus, it cannot be said with certainty if the text is the one described in the contents and therefore the mistake was made in titling each section or whether the mistake was an omission of the actual introduction. The fact that the document by Mao that follows the acclaimed introduction, both in the contents and in the body of the



FIGURE 14.  
The Italian edition of Mao's  
*On "Economic Problems  
of Socialism in the USSR"*

Therefore, three significant discrepancies can be observed between the Greek and the Italian edition. The first difference is visual and concerns the cover. The other two concern the title and the omission of the Italian introduction. Is it possible to read a dialectic relation between the visual and the textual differentiations? Could it be that these discrepancies emerge from issues that—once again—transcend the publishing sphere and lie in the sphere of politics and ideology? Is there a correlation between these differentiations and the symbolic capital of *Istorikes Ekdoseis*?

As we have discussed at various points, *Istorikes Ekdoseis* was established as the publishing branch of a Marxist–Leninist group that evolved into KKE (M–L). Fundamental elements of this group's identity politics cheered the USSR until the death of Joseph Stalin and supported China until the end of Mao Zedong. The collection of Mao Zedong's documents was the first—and the last—publication by *Istorikes Ekdoseis* to familiarise its audience with the criticism raised by Mao Zedong, one of their two funda-

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book, is subtitled "Kimeno II" ["Document II"] is the reason I lean towards the latter rather than the former. It is highly unlikely that this document was meant to serve as an introduction instead of being part of the core of the collection. Not only this is a very significant text for the whole argument of this collection, a criticism of Stalin's economic policies implemented in the USSR, but also since the title of this collection, in a shorter version, serves as the title of the aforementioned document.



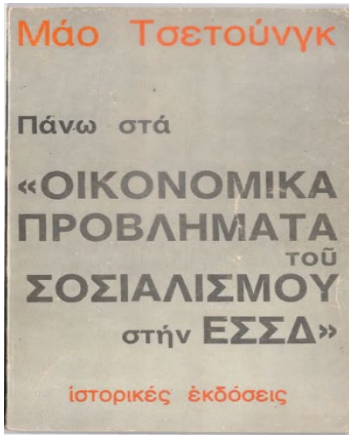


FIGURE 15.  
Cover of the Greek translation of Mao's  
*On "Economic Problems  
of Socialism in the USSR"*

mental ideological and political benchmarks, regarding the other: Joseph Stalin.

It is highly unlikely that the cadres of Istorikes Ekdoseis and KKE (M–L) were unfamiliar with these documents after 1975. A similar version was published in December 1975 by a small Marxist–Leninist publishing group called Ekdoseis Tou Laou [People's Publishing] titled *For the Construction of Socialism: Criticism of Stalin and the USSR: Unpublished Documents*. This edition was better designed both in terms of cover as well as content than the one by Istorikes Ekdoseis. Ekdoseis Tou Laou used the two different editions<sup>405</sup> available at the time to compile their own collection, making a selection from the translations of the documents they judged to be the best in each case. They also wrote a seven-page introductory note to familiarise readers with both the content of the book and the reasoning behind the decision to publish it.

According to the book's publisher, Giannis Koutsaftis—one of the leading figures behind this small group—their books were sampled and usually sold at the Istorikes Ekdoseis bookstore. Regarding Ekdoseis Tou Laou's publication of Mao's work, including *For the Construction of Socialism:*

405. The Italian edition was used by Istorikes Ekdoseis as well as the French edition, *Mao Tse-toung et la construction du socialisme* (Paris: Editions Seuil, 1975).

*Criticism of Stalin and the USSR: Unpublished Documents*, he mentioned that they were considered heretic since they did not follow official Chinese publications and the main Marxist–Leninist groups of the time accused them of being agents provocateurs.<sup>406</sup> Although Koutsaftis did not mention who these groups were, only two fit the description: the OMLE, the forerunner of KKE (M–L), and the EKKE. The fact that a smaller political publishing group would proceed to such publishing activity can also be explained in terms of the publishing field. While Istorikes Ekdoseis was the principal agent of the Marxist–Leninist subfield of the political publishing field—followed by EKKE’s editions—it was difficult for smaller groups to establish a foothold within the field. Thus, minor differentiations in their ideological and political identity would provide them with an often marginal but also a distinctive position. By publishing unofficial versions of Mao’s works that were critical of Stalin, (i.e., those not approved by the CPC), Ekdoseis Tou Laou pushed itself as a distinctive and recognisable actor within the Greek political publishing field. The reason was that this publishing attempt differentiated itself from the official Marxist–Leninist narrative that saw Stalin and Mao in absolute unity.

It seems contradictory, to say the least, for an institution to publish something in 1978 that it had rebuked others for doing only three years prior. In reality, certain political conditions can explain the change of heart. Some occurred at the international level and others relate to shifts within the political formation behind Istorikes Ekdoseis itself between 1975–1978. Let me briefly discuss these conditions. In 1975 Istorikes Ekdoseis was closely following the publishing paradigm of the Chinese FLP. This was because the OMLE leadership at the time was unconditionally—and uncritically—Sinophile, which led to a split in late 1976; KKE (M–L) was formed in opposition to this trend. Sinophilia—conceptualised by many Marxist–Leninist groups as a blind trust in anything officially deriving from China—meant it was unthinkable to translate or publish unofficial documents by Mao, especially during his lifetime.

As will be detailed further on in the dissertation, Istorikes Ekdoseis

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406. Giannis Koutsaftis interview with the author, Athens, 12 September 2013.

in the post-1976 period had a more diverse and less dogmatic publishing programme. While until 1976 their publishing programme seemed to be dictated by FLP, seeking to present the purportedly revolutionary truth that OMLE supposedly possessed, the post-1976 period seems more like an extended quest for answers. *Istorikes Ekdoseis* reoriented their publications to the fields of culture, gender and economy. *Istorikes Ekdoseis* would now seek works worth publishing beyond the Chinese and Albanian state publishers, which had been their almost exclusive source until 1976. The publication of this somewhat heretical book needs to be interpreted in this light.

But for a political organisation like KKE (M–L), whose symbolic capital was accumulated through the two benchmarks of Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong, it was not easy to proceed to such a publication wholeheartedly. Especially since this accumulation was based on the narrative of an ideological and political continuity and alignment between Stalin’s USSR and Mao Zedong’s China, a narrative that such a publication could easily unsettle. For this reason, Stalin’s name—despite being directly implied, and having been included in both the Italian edition they drew on and in the Greek edition from *Ekdoseis Tou Laou*—was omitted from the title. This gives us good reason to conclude that the omission of Sofri’s introduction was intentional, and an extensive book review he wrote at the same time as the Italian edition also supports this case. The book reviewed was Stuart Schram’s *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*<sup>407</sup> which, among others, included Mao’s speeches and letters concerning Stalin. In his review, Sofri proceeds to a critical assessment of both Stalin’s USSR and, up to a point, the CPC and Mao’s stance towards the USSR, an assessment that was not likely to be embraced by the members and the supporters of KKE (M–L).<sup>408</sup> It was not until 1980, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of KKE (M–L), that some of this criticism was raised in the position papers that were written for the Congress.<sup>409</sup>

In this case, both the content and the cover create a distance from the

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407. Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed: Talks and Letters: 1956–1971* (London: Penguin Books, 1974).

408. Gianni Sofri, “Inediti di Mao”, *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea* 4, no. 1 (1 January 1975): 78–92.

409. KKE (M–L) [Central Committee], “2o Sinedrio”, 3–4, 25–28, 30.

publishing tradition of Mao's works developed by Istorikes Ekdoseis from the early 1960s. The new cover was very different from the official yellow one—with Mao's head depicted in a prominent position—that was copied from the Chinese FLP originals. The poor design of the cover and publication, in general, is not very far from the majority of the ideological and political publications during the Greek *long sixties*, except for cases in which the originals were copied, as with the *Little Red Book*. The unwritten guidelines for political book design were simple—if the cover did not provide symbolic added value, then only the content mattered.

## In Conclusion

Book-cover design of the Greek political publishing field during the *long sixties* generally followed two divergent, if not opposite, paths. The first was a consistent attempt to duplicate the originals—since the field's book production was heavily based on translated works—to vest the translated work with the political *aura* of the original. This political *aura* was the added value for the publisher leading to the accumulation of symbolic capital that, in turn, served the identity politics of the political organisations that were behind the publishing groups. The *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, also known as the *Little Red Book*, an iconic text of the *long sixties* on a global scale, was used as the case study of my proposed argument. The analysis of the *Little Red Book* highlighted the element of political publications treated as material objects apart from their textual usage and emphasise its performativity. On the other hand, when political *aura* was not present and symbolic capital would not be accumulated through the form of the book published, then the cover design was considered irrelevant. Spending time, money or effort on decent book design was alien to the mentality of most agents in the political publishing field, a fact that becomes self-evident when one browses through the books accumulated in the period by the radicals of that time.