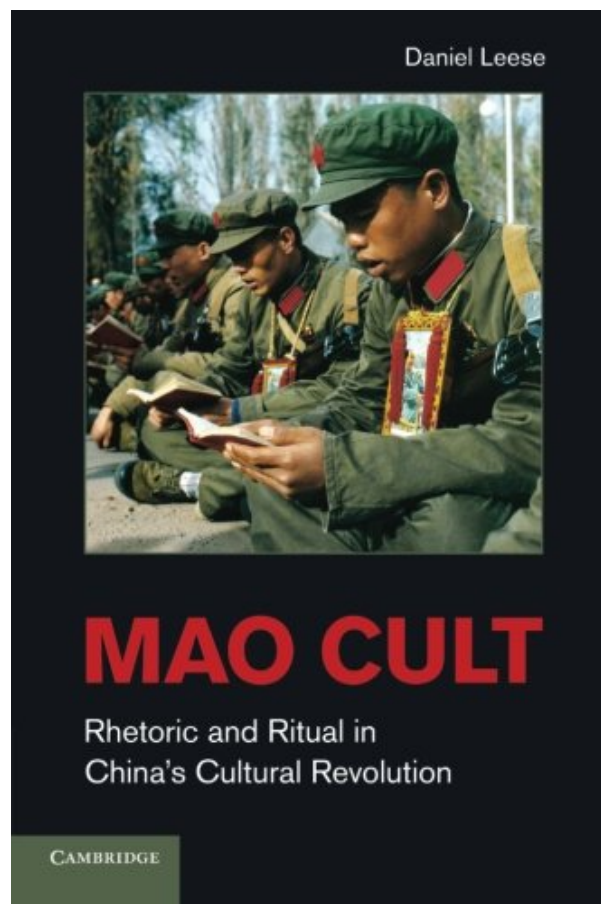


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Review

'Leese charts the rise of Mao's cult in clear stages, with an excellent eye for its intricacies.' The Times Literary Supplement

About the Author

Daniel Leese is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Chinese Studies at Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich. He is the editor of Brill's Encyclopedia of China (2008).

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Mao Zedong's political and cultural legacy remains potent even in today's China. There have been many books that have explored his posthumous legacy, but none that has scrutinized the cult of Mao and the massive worship that was fostered around him at the height of his powers during the Cultural Revolution. This riveting book is the first to do so. By analyzing previously secret archival documents, obscure objects, and political pamphlets, Daniel Leese traces the tumultuous history of the cult within the Communist Party and at the grassroots level. The Party leadership's original intention was to develop a prominent brand symbol, which would compete with the nationalists' elevation of Chiang Kai-shek. They did not, however, anticipate that Mao would use this symbolic power to mobilize Chinese youth to rebel against party bureaucracy itself. The result was anarchy, and when the army was called in, it relied on mandatory rituals of worship, such as daily reading of the Little Red Book or performances of 'the loyalty dance', to restore order. Such fascinating detail sheds light not only on the personality cult of Mao, but also on hero-worship in other traditions.

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A must read on the Cultural Revolution

By Sergey Radchenko

Cultural Revolution rarely makes for dull reading, so packed it is with political twists, hidden plots, mass hysteria and jaw-dropping absurdities. Leese's exploration of Mao's personality cult is a wonderful addition to the genre. Based on extensive archival research in the PRC, and on careful examination of Maoist propaganda, this book accounts for the development of Mao worship from the late 1930s, through the trials of de-Stalinization in the 1950s and the excesses of the 1960s, until the cult was toned down after Lin Biao's demise in 1971. The most fascinating finding of the book is that, far from being necessarily imposed from

above, the Mao cult - in some of its creative manifestations - was actually a grass-root phenomenon. It was moreover hijacked for political purposes and contestations by rival groups, especially during the high tide of the Cultural Revolution, leading to grave dissatisfaction not only on Mao's part but also among the members of the so called Cultural Revolution Group, who were apprehensive of losing control of the brand. The book is also simply a great read, especially in places where the author discusses some of the unusual facets of the Cult like "quotation gymnastics" and "loyalty dances." Leese's conclusion is a poignant one: "until the party finally allows for an independent assessment of Mao and opens its archives, the shadow of Mao will continue to haunt his successors."

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A must read book for those with any interest in Mao

By Anonymocaris

This is an essential book for anyone wishing to understand the cult of personality that arose around Mao. Leese's insightful analysis not only documents the origins of the cult (as a counterweight to that arising around Chiang Kai-Shek), but through it's many surprising manifestations (exercise regimes done while chanting revolutionary slogan) and the surprising fact that ultimately the party lost control of Mao's image and, to some degree, the cult itself and had to struggle to regain it. Replete with accounts of the many, many ways the cult was manifested this book both astounds and educates and you will finish it much more knowledgeable than when you started. The cult of Mao is part of every book about Mao and Mao's China, but none come close to giving the reader the detailed understanding of the phenomenon that one gets in this book. I read the Kindle version and it was an excellent digital conversion. No problems with garbled names, strange spacing, or any of the other problems that sometimes plague Kindle versions.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

... for academic or leisure reading this book will not disappoint. Excellent synthesis of previous scholarship combined with an

By Brian J. Clark

Whether for academic or leisure reading this book will not disappoint. Excellent synthesis of previous scholarship combined with an impressive array of primary sources. Easy to read and compliments the works by Schram, Dikotter, and Meisner. More of a real book than "Shades of Mao", and far more available.

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