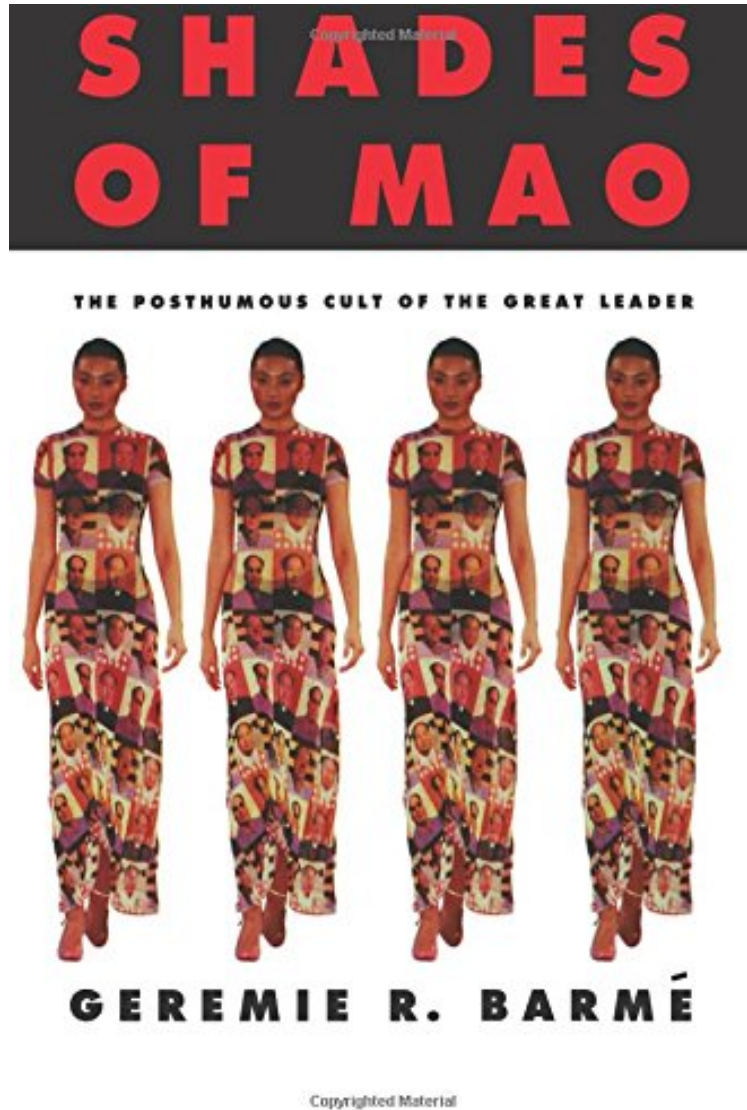


# Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader

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**Geremie Barme : Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Mao EverlastingBy Rose MengFrom the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, to his monumental death in 1976, Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, ruled China. While he ran the country with the help of other revolutionaries, such as Liu Shao Qi and Deng Xiao Ping, towards the end of his life Mao Zedong enjoyed almost unchecked power over the government and people of China. While his formal ruling ended in 1976 with his death, through his prose and ideology, Mao Zedong has

maintained power decades after his death. Gereme R. Barm details this power in his excellent book *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader*. Barm's book is divided into three sections: his take on the "Irresistible Fall and Rise of Mao Zedong", Illustrations of Mao and Mao consumer products, and translations of literature written about the Mao Craze or written by Mao himself. In the first section, Barm argues that the current Mao Cult began in 1991 when talismans started putting laminated pictures of Mao in taxis, buses, and trucks. This phenomenon started in southern China, and subsequently spread throughout the country. Barm identifies the religiousness of the pictures of Mao surrounded by gold frames and red tassels (22). This Mao Cult extended from badges and tattoos, to his face all over the national currency, and his clothing style emulated throughout the country (24). Mao became a consumer item, and these items served more as commercial objects than as signs of ideological belief (14). Barm reveals how Mao's physicality made China "transformed into the temple of the consumer...advancing the reforms through shopping..." (26). This shopping was done by members in society of all ages, even the younger markets; "the Mao cult... capitalized on China's new teeny-bopper and youth culture market--that is, the buying power of the young...unconcerned with the burdens of the past, they could indulge their curiosity and be playful in their approach to Mao memorabilia" (47). Mao's influence ranged from lyrics in songs to major advertisements. Mao's pictures and quotes were used in advertisements for the Great Wall quoting him saying "If you don't make it to the Great Wall you're not a real man". However, in October of 1994, the "exploitation of Mao's image in advertising was officially banned" (35). Barm does a reputable job revealing the irony of Mao's commercialism in modern "Communist" China. While on one hand Mao represents the quintessential symbol of the struggles of the peasant life, he has recently been the pinnacle of a highly profitable consumer market. Mao would not be pleased with this consumer market because Mao himself disliked the mass production of his own Mao badges; "Give me back my airplanes. It would be far more useful...to make airplanes to protect the nation out of the metal being expended in the production of Mao badges" (40). Considering his dislike for the badges promoting himself and communism, he probably would be especially disgusted with the production of useless toys such as Mao yo-yos that have computer chips in them that caused the yo-yo to say phrases such as "The East is Red" and "I Love Chairman Mao" (42). Mao's cousin, Mao Zelian, who was angry with the commercialization of his late cousin details this disgust; "Chairman Mao has no love for private business, and would despise those who now make money from his name" (39). The industry of Mao memorabilia encourages market capitalism and profiteering, ideas Mao Zedong himself despised. Considering the massive famines of the Great Leap Forward and the bloody purges of the Cultural Revolution, it is shocking that Mao has attained such a positive posthumous image. Barm questions whether the 1993 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences survey, which revealed great appreciation for Mao even among his victims, was accurate or impacted by the government's propaganda department, considering it was published in the Beijing Youth News newspaper (22). However, this poll is not terribly surprising considering the reaction of people to Mao's death. After he died in 1976, "a number of workers committed suicide. They hoped to join the Chairman in the netherworld and continue to fight for the revolution under his shade" (3). Mao had attained enormous importance in the daily lives of Chinese citizens and Mao wasn't simply a political leader, but as quoted author Edgar Snow believed; he was a "teacher, statesman, strategist, philosopher poet laureate, national hero, head of the family, and greatest liberator in history" (19). This admiration stemmed from praise for his ideology to appreciation for his sex life; "In anything, people may well regard Mao's voracious appetites as further evidence of his exceptional stature, superhuman energy, and unequivocal success" (20). Barm argues that Mao was a bisexual figure in his representation of the mother/father leader. Barm explains this belief through how Mao, with the help of airbrushing and such, had some feminine features in his pictures and paintings that made him look like the "grand matriarch" (21). Mao's all encompassing roles in the Chinese system gave him the almost god-like status that ensured he would still be revered long after his death. Throughout the first section of his book, Barm does a very successful job of outlining the Mao Cult and revealing its ironies. His arguments are then strengthened by his inclusion of illustrations in the second section. The pictures range from photographs of Mao in the frames hung up by taxi drivers, to paintings of Mao with other revolutionaries such as Chen Yun and Zhu De. The Cult is exhibited very clearly in the pictures of a 1993 Sichuan publication, which featured "True Tales of the Adventures of Mao Ze Dong: Commemorating the Centenary of Mao Zedong's Birth." Seventeen years after his death, Mao is still the center of attention of a public popular magazine Pulp. By including pictures of Mao badges, lighters, teacups, shirts, and other memorabilia, Barm effectively illustrates the extent of the Mao Cult to the reader. The third section of the book contains Barm's translations that range from those of Mao to those of people writing about Mao. Authors such as Liu Yazhou make interesting statements in describing Mao such as; "He returned to Tiananmen Square, never to leave again. He became the Square's resident in perpetuity, it's only resident..." (117). His picture stands above Tiananmen, one of the most contentious spots in Chinese history, a symbol of his immortal influence and power. Barm points out that many of the authors that he has chosen to include; "claim that Mao was the quintessential representation of China, the embodiment of the nation" (12). Barm also includes authors who believe that; "Mao reconstructed the nation in his image, popularizing his personal traits of suspicion, deviousness, hauteur, manipulation, and power play through mass political movements, eventually infecting the whole country with Mao malady, the effects of which are still felt today" (12). Barm does a credible job in explaining the extent of the Mao Cult, his argument is strengthened by his

inclusion of an excerpt from actress Liu Xiaoqing in her memoir *A Star Reflects on the Sun*; "I worshipped and loved Chairman Mao.' If someone said that, even if they prefaced by claiming that they had just come from Mars, we would believe it without question"(171). This unconditional alliance was even demonstrated by the Communist Party in a Central Committee meeting in 1981 where they expressed their views on the late Mao Zedong; "It is true that he made gross mistakes during the Cultural Revolution, but if we judge his activities as a whole, his contributions to the Chinese revolution far outweigh his mistakes" (120). By the government continuing to support the concept of Mao five years after his death, they set the tone of posthumous appreciation and reverence. The conclusion of a 1993 'Galluping Mao: Opinion Poll' supports this posthumous love for Mao; "We got a very strong impression that although a lot of time has passed, Mao still occupies an unassailable position in the hearts of many Chinese" (262). This belief is at the center of the Mao Cult, and it contributed to the huge number of people wanting to buy symbols of Mao in his reader or badges. The combination of this love and the desire to be connected to the late Chairman resulted in the growing and commercialized Cult of Mao outlined by Barm. While Barm does a great job of detailing the Mao Craze throughout his book, I don't agree with his comparison of the Mao Cult with the Cult of Elvis (47). Barm does a respectable job without having to compare it to an American phenomenon. I find the comparison out of place and not applicable. Elvis, a music star, revolutionized rock music, however there is a great deal of difference in the magnitude between revolutionizing music and revolutionizing the world's largest nations. I think that Barm's arguments are strong enough without this forced American pop culture reference. With the exception of this argument, I find Barm's views to be very agreeable and well proven. Barm successfully describes the immortality of the Mao Cult; "There is little doubt that the Cult of the early 1990s is only the first of the revivals he will experience in what promises to be a long and successful posthumous career" (54). If you are looking for an interesting portrayal and analysis of the Mao Cult, Barm's *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* is a great choice. The three sections work well together to give the reader an in depth portrayal of the Mao Cult, not just from Barm's perspective, but from a collection of authors, which provides for a very comprehensive and thought-provoking book.

"Essays, poems, songs, folkloric anecdotes and photographs celebrating the myth of Mao. ... The editor supplies an insightful, and cohesing introduction". -- Reference Research Book News"(A) highly entertaining and informative collection of translations of official, admiring, tacky, but sometimes also highly critical writings, and illustrations of objects, all featuring Mao. ... A must-have book for everybody interested in contemporary China, Mao, and his legacy now and in the future". -- China Information

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