

# The Cold War in the Classroom Week 7

## Cold War Fellowship Report

Ben Walsh, 27th March 2017

## The Cold War in Asia

Many teachers teaching the Cold War find themselves with that nagging sensation that because of the restraints of time and or curricula they don't manage to convey to their students the full breadth and scope of the Cold War. This is particularly true of the Cold War in Asia. Some of us dip into the Korean War, and perhaps more of us investigate Vietnam in more depth. But there is the elephant in the room – China. The aim of this week's reading and discussion was to try to get a sense of China's role in the Cold War, particularly its role in shaping political culture internationally. The teachers were asked to summarise how an understanding of China helped to improve understanding of the Cold War in Asia and beyond. They were asked to read and listen to the work of Julia Lovell and Glennys Young (references below).

### **Key points emerging in the discussion about the history were...**

One phenomenon which struck many of our teachers was Global Maoism:

- “Julia Lovell claims Global-Maoism had effects in Western Europe, the US and Singapore, while Anthony Best also argues that the PRC had a major impact on Third World countries. According to Best, after 1959 “the PRC moved towards a more divisive policy towards the Third World” (which coincided with denunciation of the non-alignment movement). Chinese leaders spread anti-imperialist propaganda and supported national liberation movements; this led to strong ties with Jakarta, Burma, Cambodia, Pakistan and Vietnam. However, China's relative economic poverty (in comparison to the Super Powers) meant they weren't always able to offer as much financial support as they would have liked, for example North Vietnam turned to the USSR for military equipment because the Chinese couldn't compete with American technology.”
- “However, a less obvious influence of Mao on the Cold War as written by historians is his cultural and ideological influence. For those around the world searching for a path outside of the binary world-views of the USA and USSR Mao seemed to offer something genuinely anti-imperialist, egalitarian and empowering. This, inspired not least by his

deliberate propaganda drive, influenced countless movements across the world to challenge authority in their own contexts – creating problems of opposition, control and dissent particularly in capitalist countries. Mao therefore played a unique role in the Cold War, offering an alternative source of support and inspiration to those who were disillusioned with US and Soviet power politics.”

- “I likewise, having taught China at IB, was in turns shocked and flummoxed by the response of Western countries to the Cultural Revolution – I guess I've always seen it as a cynical attempt by Mao to solve his internal political problems in China, rather than an earnest means of spreading revolution abroad. I always had Mao pegged as a 'China First' revolutionary after the stamp of Stalin, rather than at continuous revolutionary after the mould of Trotsky. However, when I thought about it more, especially in the context of Europe in 1968 (and Civil Rights in America after the death of MLK), it made sense that people there were looking for a movement to link themselves to. This demonstrates much more about the disillusionment in Europe and the effectiveness of Maoist propaganda than it does about the intentions of Mao in starting the Cultural Revolution.”

Another was the relationship between China and the USSR, and China and the USA:

- “The first and most obvious value in studying China and its revolution is to see how the USSR attempted to foster, support, and eventually control another major communist revolution. As Glennys documents in his chapter focused on a Chinese student’s reflections of his role in the USSR, even as the governments of the USSR and PRC drifted apart, there was still a great deal of cultural exchange until January 1967 when all Chinese students were ordered to leave the USSR by the PRC. While many are keen to argue the Sino-Soviet split was inevitable, at the time Stalin and Mao seemed determined to support one another, especially on the topic of supporting burgeoning communist revolutions in South-East Asia, such as Korea. This also continued beyond Stalin’s death via economic support and the sharing of Russian Industrial technology and eventually China’s nuclear capabilities. As a result, in order to fully understand the USSR’s approach to the Cold War following the failure of the Berlin Blockade, it is crucial to take into account China. Otherwise, as many students do, it is easy to assume the USSR becomes a passive actor until the 1961 Berlin Wall crisis.”

- “Both the Soviets and the Americans considered China to be of such importance that they made decisions that would affect the trajectory of the Cold War. China’s fall to communism in 1949 sent shock waves through a US administration that found itself accused of having ‘lost China’. The fear and witch hunts of the McCarthy era would follow, in part influenced by the shock of the loss of the fabled ‘China Market’, leaving a legacy of fear and suspicion, a victory for the hawks who were then able to influence policy towards Cuba and Vietnam. Following the disaster of Vietnam, the US again confirmed the importance of China with rapprochement and Nixon’s 1972 visit. By the late 60’s both the US and China needed each other.”
- “Mao and Khrushchev’s split on the policy of ‘world revolution’ and its conflict with peaceful co-existence led to the breakdown in the relationship between the two countries. It also marks a split in Communist theory in the east, arguably weakening it. This led to a further fronts of the Cold War, e.g. the border war in 1959 between the Soviet Union and China where there were indications of the Soviet Union using the atomic bomb (a very dangerous moment in the Cold War after the Cuban Missile Crisis) Dr Julia Lovell argues that the split paved the way to the end of the Cold War as it weakened the global communist cause. Furthermore it lead to Soviet interest in Afghanistan which weakened its position according to Lovell. Therefore China had an insurmountable impact on the relations between the Americans and Soviets towards the end of the Cold War”

### **Impact on teaching?**

The discussions were very satisfying in the sense that the teachers were beginning to think about their practice and how the up to date academic work they had been looking at might shape future practice.

- “This week’s readings have reinforced my belief that I will need to do more to include China within wider negotiations in the later Cold War, and ensure that I devote more time to the USSR’s reaction to and treatment of the PRC ... the solution is almost certainly not to take excessive time away from my study of the Cold War in Europe, but to deepen my understanding of the PRC so as not to unnecessarily simplify or caricature their actions when making my brief references to them, as well as finding more opportunities to make those references where appropriate.”

Most of the teachers also now have a broad area of focus for their planned resources, which will of course be shared via the HA website.

- “I am still considering investigating ways to teach the historiography of the Cold War more effectively, by teaching it alongside the content, exploring the interpretations in their context. In doing this I would also like to try to bring in the experiences of ordinary people from both sides of the Cold War divide, to encourage students to challenge the official narratives and the orthodox views. I don't know if this is too much or even if this would work but of course with more exploration this will become clear. There are many more areas of the Cold War that I would like to explore, but it is clear to me that this is the part of the GCSE course that my students require the most help with.”
- “I was surprised to see Rudi Dutschke's name pop up again this week as a proponent of Mao's ideology in Europe - this has added to my feeling that my resource will tackle introducing students to the Cold War through the stories of different players in the conflict. We discussed at the residential the challenges of students trying to define the Cold War - I'd like to find a range of representative individuals who students can use a starting point for identifying key features of the Cold War, before comparing them with what other students have found out from their similar stories. This would enable them to work out the essential features of the Cold War whilst also acknowledging its diversity. Once they'd finished the topic they could come back to the stories and add in context of what they'd learned to flesh out the stories and see how representative they were of their understanding of the conflict.”
- “The resource idea will hopefully be based on the kitchen debate and everyday life. I found this area particularly interesting. I think students would find a social/economic aspect of the usually political Cold war debate worthwhile. As I am focusing on KS3 i believe this area would allow students to access a source based lesson investigation connected to an interpretations question.”

If you like the look of what is going on in the Fellowship, we hope to run more programmes on this and other periods of history. Look out for announcements on the HA website.

## References

- [HA podcast](#): Julia Lovell, 'Global Maoism'
- [HA podcast](#): Rana Mitter, 'The Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949'
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- "A Chinese Student Reflects on His Role in the Soviet Union's Virgin Lands Campaign in 1958", in: Glennys Young (ed.), *The Communist Experience in the Twentieth Century: A Global History Through Sources* (New York: OUP, 2012), pp. 98-102.
- David Reynolds, *One World Divisible: A Global History Since 1945* (2001), Chapter 2: "Communist Revolutions, Asian Style", pp. 39-67, or Chapter 12: "Capitalist Revolutions, Asian Style", pp. 404-452
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- 'China Turns Left', in Jussi M. Hanhimaki and Odd Arne Wested (eds.), *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 268-272.
- 'The Breakdown of the [Sino-Soviet] Alliance', in Jussi M. Hanhimaki and Odd Arne Wested (eds.), *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 205-208.