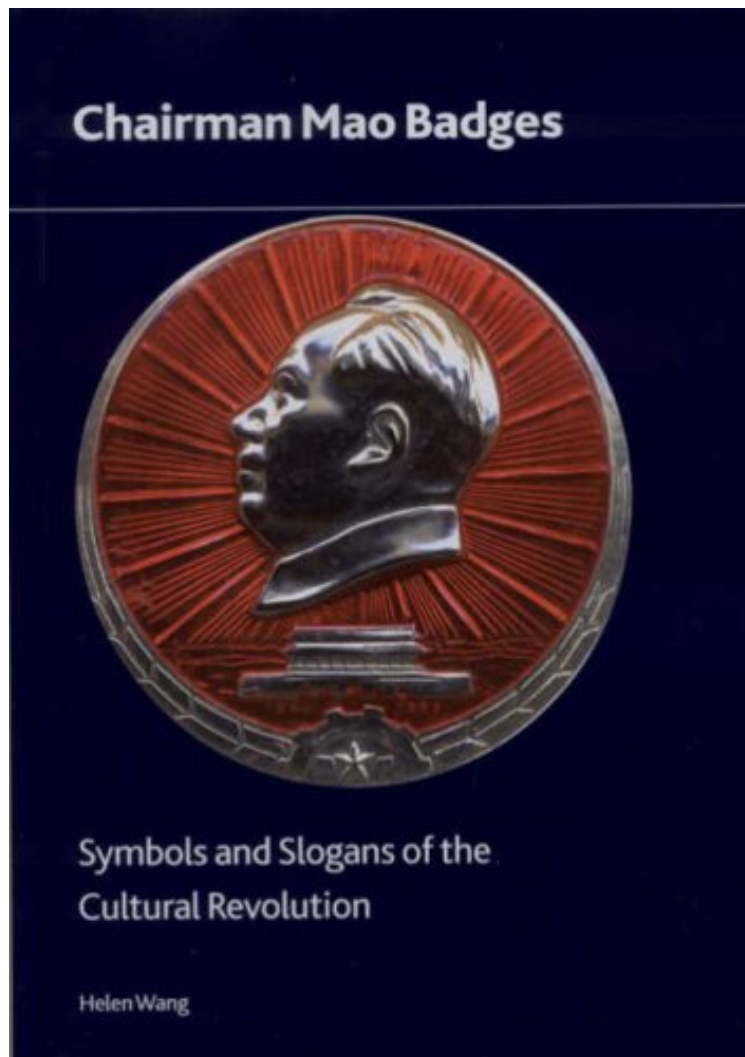


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Chairman Mao Badges: Symbols and Slogans of the Cultural Revolution (British Museum Research Publication)

Helen Wang

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Helen Wang : Chairman Mao Badges: Symbols and Slogans of the Cultural Revolution (British Museum Research Publication) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Chairman Mao Badges: Symbols and Slogans of the Cultural Revolution (British Museum Research Publication):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Helpful, spendy reference monograph rates 3 stars to non-collectors.By Zenticant PangolinThis books does everything it purports to and is a big help to the casual occidental

collector. It is also the only English language publication on Mao badges that I am aware of. Therefore it was an essential purchase to me. For others, people who are not collectors or who can read the Chinese, this book is a discretionary purchase that may not be worth the money. The purpose of this publication is to catalogue the collection of Mao buttons found in the British Museum. The collection of 348 items is large enough to enable the author to hit all of the main points concerning Mao buttons; although, a respectable collection lets at least a thousand buttons bloom, evidently. This should be no surprise as billions of Mao buttons were produced during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when the button craze was in full swing. The author of the book, a curator at the British Museum, does a good if, ahem, repetitive job of explicating the Chinese political button phenomenon beginning with a very brief discussion of pre-Cultural Revolution buttons and ending with a piece by piece description of the medals in the British Museum. A great thing that she does along the way is explain the symbology of Mao buttons and includes both the English translations and the Chinese characters inscribed on the medals so that a person may both identify specific elements of the medals in his collection and grasp their meaning. This is especially helpful in regards to the ideographic pin bars which were often worn in accompaniment with the iconic pictorial badges. She also thoughtfully included pictures of the obverse and reverse of every item in the collection; an important point in identifying the manufacturers of the buttons; heretofore never done in Mao button references. Two things that may irk buyers of this book is that it is paperback bound, and not particularly well-made. Still, the color reproductions are adequate, and the combination of English translations and Chinese characters is very well-executed. I look forward to the day a book is published that focuses exclusively on Mao button aesthetics for, while the bulk of the Mao badges produced were rather proletarian, a fair number of them veer into art territory. Unfortunately, the British Museum collection contains only a single example of the genuinely remarkable bamboo pieces, and few of the appealing porcelain models; the bamboo and porcelain issues being generally more rare and attractive than the ubiquitous aluminum models. In fact, even the casual collector of Mao buttons will rapidly come to the following ironic conclusions: Mao buttons can be boring because there are so many of them and they all look alike; Mao was doing Warhol long before Warhol did Mao. I suspect that this book will soon be out of print and will immediately become collectible. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The best work yet in English on the topic. By zhuxi. Though not the only work in English on Mao badges, this is by far the most erudite, with transcriptions of hard-to-read Chinese inscriptions, full translations of everything, and much background material about the social context of the badges. Furthermore, it is full of references to other relevant works. The collection is relatively small but hits the main points so far as inscriptions go; most other badges you run into will have various permutations of the inscriptions found here. I am delighted with this book. Melissa Schrift has written another book, "Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge: The Creation and Mass Consumption of a Personality Cult" which fleshes out more of the social context but does not delve into the inscriptions as does this work. The collector should have both books, as they are intended for very different purposes.

Millions of Chairman Mao badges were produced during China's Cultural Revolution, and were worn by almost all Chinese people, from Premier Zhou Enlai down to the smallest child. Made in a wide variety of materials (aluminium, plastic, bamboo, porcelain, gold, silver, copper, iron and lead) and with an extensive range of shapes, sizes and designs, they immediately became collectors' items. To give an idea of scale, in China today serious collections start at 10,000 different Mao badges. This catalogue starts with the modest collection of 300 Mao badges at the British Museum. It is the first serious catalogue of its kind in a Western language. While Chinese catalogues assume an extensive prior knowledge of Chinese revolutionary history, this new English catalogue is designed for the beginner and specialist alike, offering a narrative history, as well as extensive glossaries of the symbolic imagery and slogans found on the badges.

More than merely a book about badges - she has covered a complex subject in a succinct and user friendly way. If you are at all interested in China and the Cultural Revolution then I can only recommend that you get hold of this book.' (The Badger Newsletter 177) for those who are interested in and collect this kind of thing, it will be a necessity for their bookshelves.' (Medal News) A very impressive accomplishment...formed and arranged...makes a difficult and complicated subject accessible.' (Art Newsletter) About the Author Helen Wang is curator of East Asian money in the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum.