

”Mao's Globalization?: A New Look at China's Economic Cold War”

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Abstract

In this talk, I will introduce some preliminary insights from my ongoing book project, tentatively titled “Mao’s Globalization: China and the Economic Cold War, 1945-1982.” Making use of primary sources in Chinese, Japanese, English, and Russian, this book examines China’s external economic relations during the era of Mao Zedong (1949-1976). By examining China’s changing trade relations with the Soviet Union, Japan, Hong Kong, and Western European countries, among others, I will elucidate Maoist China’s connections with the global economy, which are often overshadowed in historical narratives that focus on political turmoil and international isolation.

After briefly discussing the overall book project, the rest of the talk will focus on the transformation of China’s foreign economic relations following the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the Sino-Soviet Split (c. 1960). These events triggered severe crises in China’s domestic and international politics simultaneously. Although largely driven by Mao’s revolutionary enthusiasm, ironically, they resulted in integrating China into the capitalist world economy, dominated by the United States and its allies.