



---

Publishing Posters Before the Cultural Revolution

Author(s): Kuiyi Shen

Source: *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Visual Culture and Memory in Modern China (FALL, 2000), pp. 177-202

Published by: Foreign Language Publications

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41490832>

Accessed: 21-12-2016 18:45 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



*Foreign Language Publications* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*

# Publishing Posters Before the Cultural Revolution

Kuiyi Shen

The propaganda poster is an art form filled with militancy (*zhandouxing*) and mass character (*qunzhongxing*) that directly serves politics, production, the workers, peasants, and soldiers. It is a powerful tool of the party's propaganda agenda. It carries out the mission of publicizing and agitating for political movements and economic production. After liberation, therefore, a series of critically important political movements each received timely response and support. They have included the Establishment of the People's Republic of China, the War to Resist American Aggression and Aid Korea, the Movement to Suppress Counter-revolutionaries, the New Marriage Law, the Increase Production and Practice Economy Movement, the Patriotic Public Health Campaign, the Rural Cooperative Movement, the Party's General Line, the Great Leap Forward, the People's Communes, and the Preserve World Peace Movement. Propaganda posters, with their simple, lively forms and bright, powerful images, as well as their high volume printing and circulation throughout the whole nation, publicize the principles and policies of the party and government to the multitude of the masses. This unique form of art, the propaganda poster, enables the policies of the party and government to open the door to the hearts of the people and inspire their utmost efforts.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the "Editor's Words" in *SNXC* 1960.

The introductory statement to the authoritative compilation *Ten Years of Propaganda Posters* clearly defines the function of this mass art form.

The Shanghai editor who wrote those words in 1960 goes on to describe the achievements of the Chinese propaganda poster as the fruit of Mao Zedong's thought on literature and the arts, as well as of the experience of fraternal socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union. The writer characterizes the propaganda poster as a new genre.



Propaganda pictures were not actually new in 1949—the Communists very successfully used woodblock-printed posters in their struggle against the Japanese between 1937 and 1945, and continued to deploy them against the Nationalist party in the 1940s. Nevertheless, the development of the genre into the most widespread form of Chinese visual art, one that totally changed the aesthetic standards of an entire generation, is an extraordinary story.



The New Woodblock Print Movement promoted by Lu Xun (1881-1936) in the early 1930s, now considered the foundation of political art in China, was originally very much associated with reform-minded intellectuals, and like most reform programs of the period, its models were Western. It adopted the style of German Expressionist art, aimed to arouse the social conscience of the viewer, was critical of social ills, and sought to portray faithfully the essence of everyday life. But its politically leftist stance and its criticism of current social issues offended the Nationalist government and led to its suppression. After the outbreak of the anti-Japanese war in 1937, many young woodcut artists of the suppressed movement went to Yan'an or southern Anhui and Jiangsu, base areas of Communists throughout the anti-Japanese war and civil war periods. The black-and-white woodblock print, an economical and convenient medium for art, merged with traditional modes of New Year prints, and gradually became a very successful visual tool for the propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).



On October 1, 1949, decades of war and internal strife were concluded when Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the new People's Republic from atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tian'anmen). In response, a

tremendous effort was made to consolidate the Communist victory and create a new socialist world. It was believed that a large proportion of the population in the newly liberated urban and rural regions needed to be reached with the new Communist ideology and the goals of socialist construction. Mao's famous talk at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942 was reintroduced as the infallible law of the art world:



The purpose of our meeting today is precisely to ensure that literature and art fit well into the whole revolutionary machine as a component part, that they operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy, and that they help the people fight the enemy with one heart and one mind. (in Denton 1998: 459)

In step with the "Yan'an Talks," the party advocated the use of the "rich, lively language of the masses," instead of the "art for art's sake" approach of bourgeois artists, in order to better serve peasants, workers, and soldiers. In applying the process of popularization to the visual arts, the need for development of a popular format was even more acutely felt. In gaining control of the commercial publishing industry, which was based mainly in Shanghai, after 1949, the party, perhaps for the first time, had the resources to print full-color pictures in large runs. Revolutionary New Year's prints (*nianhua*) were very successfully promoted by the party during the 1940s because they could easily reach a large part of the population. During the early 1950s, such prints received a great deal of support from the government and were further developed in the full-color format. Artists who specialized in all media, including oil painters, woodcut artists, traditional-style painters, cartoonists, and illustrators, participated in creating this new form of New Year's pictures. The Ministry of Culture sponsored New Year's picture competitions in 1950 and in 1952. In 1950, 400 New Year's picture designs were published; in 1952, 570 new pictures were issued in 40 million copies.<sup>2</sup> Most of these New Year's pictures were executed

<sup>2</sup> Laing (1988: 20) cites Yu Feng, "New Year Pictures," *People's China* (March 1, 1953): 14; and "'New Year Pictures,' An Old Custom Serves the New China," *China Reconstructs* 2 (1953): 26.

in traditional formats, with recognizable links in subject matter to folk art. The two predominant pre-1949 techniques in Shanghai New Year's pictures were *gongbi* (a meticulous technique using fine lines to contour figures and objects; the contours are then filled with bright colors) and *cabi* (rubbed charcoal and watercolor, as used in *yuefen pai* calendar prints). The post-1949 New Year's pictures followed the old styles but modified them with new revolutionary themes. They remained popular with their consumers, who were primarily rural, until large color photo-calendars were introduced in the mid-1980s.

In 1951, Zhou Yang (1907-1990), a longtime ideological and cultural spokesman for the CCP, said that ancient Chinese culture should be re-evaluated as "a necessary prerequisite for the development of our new national culture," but at the same time, Chinese "must learn from other countries and especially from the Soviet Union. Socialist realistic literature and art are the most beneficial spiritual food for the Chinese people and the broad ranks of intelligentsia and youth."<sup>3</sup> He claimed that socialist realist works were "good at combining the reality of today with the ideals of tomorrow."<sup>4</sup> Along with development of the political relationship with the Soviet Union, in art, Soviet socialist realistic art was also adopted by the government as the new artistic standard. Zhou Yang endorsed "the method of socialist realism as the highest criterion for all our literary and artistic work and criticism" and urged artists to adopt the style in order to fulfill the "demand [of people] that . . . [art] works be of a high level."<sup>5</sup>

It is against this background that the propaganda poster became institutionalized in China. Although the propagandistic nature of many forms of visual art in post-1949 China, and especially that produced during the Cultural Revolution, has led overseas observers to label all such printed matter "propaganda posters," in practice the "propaganda poster" (*xuanchuan hua*) was produced in different circumstances, on different schedules, and for different functions from other kinds of printed matter, such as the New Year's picture or "reproduction" (*huapian*). The designs

<sup>3</sup> Laing (1988: 20) cites Zhou Yang, "Mao Zedong's Teachings and Contemporary Art," *People's China* (Sept. 16, 1951): 7.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Link 1984: 6. The original can be found in *Zhongguo wenxueshi cankao ziliao* (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu, 1959), 3: 203.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Chang/Wachs 1999: 36. Zhou Yang delivered a very important report, "For More and Better Literary and Artistic Works," to the Second Congress of Literary and Art Workers in September 1953, in which he set out the ideological tone expected for creation of literary and art works. This report was later published in *Renmin Zhongguo* (Nov. 1, 1953).

for *xuanchuan hua* were painted in gouache on paper and combined the bright colors of traditional Chinese New Year's pictures with the use of light and shade, perspective, and bold but simple propaganda slogans typical of Soviet propaganda posters. Propaganda posters reflected virtually every political movement and social program. Issued on an irregular schedule, as deemed necessary by developing political events, the posters may be distinguished from that of a New Year's picture: the latter was usually bought at the end of the year by common people to decorate their homes or paste on outside doors or gates. Artists of New Year's pictures were thus busy with annual deadlines to assure that a plentiful supply would reach bookstores and other distributors well before the new year. Propaganda posters, by contrast, were usually ordered by "work units" (*danwei*) in response to particular events or ideological movements and were displayed in public spaces, in meeting rooms, in hallways, or on propaganda bulletin boards. *Huapian*, a general term that includes full-color reproductions of oil paintings or ink paintings, were available all year round, and were purchased by both individuals and work units for decorative or inspirational purposes. Although many *huapian* are reproductions of paintings that are propagandistic in subject matter, the circumstances of their production, marketing, and use are somewhat different from those of the two major genres of full-color single-sheet publication.

In the early 1950s, before professional propaganda poster teams were established within the state publishing industry, design of propaganda posters largely relied on professors at select national art academies, especially those of Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou. Some of these artists had no experience in the commercial publishing industry. With greater or lesser degrees of enthusiasm, they joined propaganda painting teams that produced large quantities of such posters. Prominent participants included the director of the newly established Central Academy of Fine Arts, Xu Beihong (1895-1953) (fig. 1); oil painting professors Wu Zuoren (b. 1908), Li Binghong (b. 1913) (fig. 2), Ai Zhongxin (b. 1915), and Dong Xiwen (1914-



Figure 1: Xu Beihong, Li Hua, Ai Zhongxin, and others, *Must Giving Harder Attacks and Harsher Lessons to Mongers*, 1951. From SNXC, 1960.



Figure 2: Li Binghong, *Resist America and Aid Korea, Protect Home and Country*, 1952. From SNXC, 1960.



Figure 3: Zhang Ding, Dong Xiwen, Li Keran, Li Kuchan, Wu Guanzhong, and others, *Long Live the Victory of the Korean People's Army and Chinese People's Volunteers!*, 1951. From *SNXC*, 1960.



Figure 4: Hou Yimin, Jin Shangyi, Zhan Jianjun, Luo Gongliu, *Chairman Mao Receiving the Red Guard*, 1976.

1973) (fig. 3); revolutionary printmakers Li Hua (1907-1990) and Zhao Yannian (b. 1924); and even ink painters Li Keran (1907-1989) and Li Kuchan (1898-1983). The oil painter Wu Guanzhong (b. 1919), who had just returned from studying modernist art in France, immediately threw himself into propaganda painting activities. The production of propaganda posters and new New Year's paintings absorbed the energies of most artists, particularly those in the academies, during the first half of the 1950s. The posters of this period reflect the atmosphere of enthusiasm that was widespread among the Chinese population of the time, despite the numerous political campaigns organized to consolidate Communist rule. Later, during the Cultural Revolution period, when design studios of the publishing industry were dismantled, their students, including Jin Shangyi (b. 1938) and Hou Yimin (b. 1930), by that time professors themselves, found themselves in a similar role as poster designers (fig. 4).

By 1953, the Chinese government had managed to rebuild much of the war-devastated infrastructure, bring hyperinflation under control, and institute a degree of cooperation among the population. Intent on building a socialist state, it now entered a period of intensive industrialization, as well as organization of agricultural cooperatives (fig. 5). The first Five-Year Plan, based on the Soviet model, was set up as a basic structure for the new state-planned economy (fig. 6). The establishment of a formal, professional poster design team, intended as an important means of conveying party ideology, was explicitly listed in the agenda of the party.

The first professional propaganda poster team in China, with eight professional poster painters, was organized in 1954 in the East China People's Art Publishing House in Shanghai. Its staff was expanded in 1958, as part of the centralization of the industry, when it was merged with the New Year's picture team from the old Shanghai Art Print Press (*Shanghai huapian*), and reorganized as the New Year's Picture and Propaganda Poster Editorial Department of the new Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House (SSZN 1992). By 1966, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, it had



Figure 5: Ma Lequn and Huang Zhenliang, *Joining the Agricultural Cooperatives*, 1956. From *SNXC*, 1960.



學習蘇聯先進經驗建設我們的祖國

Figure 6: Ding Hao, *Learning Advanced Experiences from Soviet Union for Constructing Our Country*, 1953. From *SNXC*, 1960.



Figure 7: Yang Wenxiu, Ha Qiongwen, Qian Daxin, and Weng Yizhi, *Exerting the Utmost Effort, Aiming High and Constructing Socialism in More, Faster, Better and Cheaper Ways*, 1958. From SNXC, 1960.



Figure 8: Qian Daxin, *Firmly Move Towards Socialism*, 1955. From SNXC, 1960.

nineteen painters and editors. In that twelve-year period, this team alone published more than 2000 poster designs, issued in more than forty million prints.

Besides Shanghai, art publishers in other major cities during this period also expended tremendous effort on the production of propaganda posters. For example, Beijing People's Fine Arts Publishing House published more than 500 poster designs and printed about twenty-eight million copies between 1951 and 1959, and Tianjin Fine Arts Publishing House published 267 varieties of posters in 16,760,000 copies (Anon. 1960).

Propaganda posters from the 1950s can be divided into five categories, those that:

1. Publicize party slogans (fig. 7)
2. Support current mass movements (fig. 8)
3. Idealize the life of workers and peasants in the new society (fig. 9)
4. Urge the solidarity of the Chinese people in realizing the party's goals (fig. 10)
5. Popularize military goals, especially the liberation of Taiwan (fig. 11)



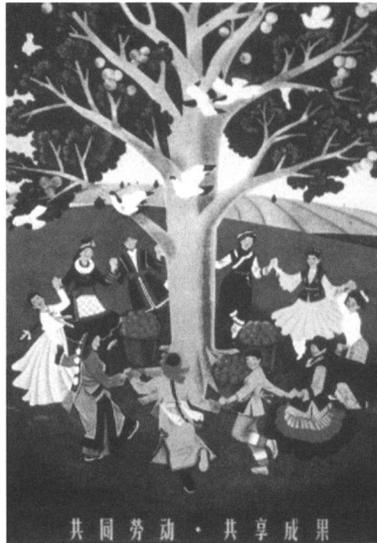
The styles of the propaganda posters can be quite easily divided into two groups based upon the education and training of the poster painters. In 1955, among the eight Shanghai propaganda painters, three were originally commercial artists: Cai Zhenhua (b. 1912), Qian Daxin (b. 1922), and Ding Hao (b. 1917) had worked in various advertising agencies and design studios before 1949.

Cai Zhenhua, for example, began his career drawing comics in 1928. Between 1929 and 1934, he studied in the commercial art department of the newly established National West Lake Art Academy in Hangzhou. Upon graduation, he worked for Commercial Press in Shanghai as well as for some smaller advertising agencies, such as the Jingyi, Hongye, and Xinye advertising companies. In 1945, he set up a free-lance design studio (ZGMS



顆顆金粒粒黃，合作化的道路真正強！

Figure 9: Lin Kai, *Every Single Grain is Yellow like Gold, the Road Towards the Cooperative is Really Correct*, 1956. From SNXC, 1960.



共同勞動 · 共享成果

Figure 10: Cai Zhenhua, *We Work Together and Enjoy the Fruit Together*, 1957. From SNXC, 1960.



我們一定要解放台灣！

Figure 11: Gao Hong, *We Must Liberate Taiwan!* 1954. From SNXC, 1960.



Figure 12: Qian Daxin, *Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the Liberation of Shanghai*, 1959. From *SNXC*, 1960.

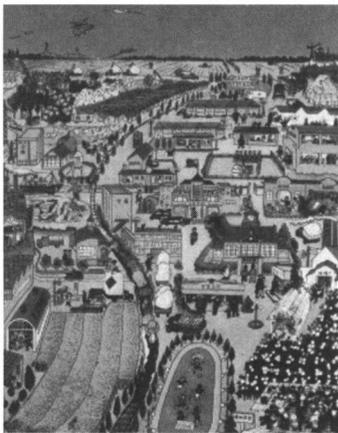


Figure 13: Cai Zhenhua and Le Xiaoying, *Establishing People's Communes and Speeding Up the Socialist Construction*, 1958. From *SNXC*, 1960.

1948: *zhuan* 106). During this period, he designed everything from decorations for enamelware to cigarette and toothpaste advertisements, from comics to elegant book covers.

Other commercial artists, such as Ding Hao and Qian Daxin, were originally commercial art designers and calendar painters in the so-called *yuefen pai* manner. Qian Daxin worked as a commercial art designer in the Shirovsky Studio and China Production Company (*Zhongguo zhipin gongsi*) in Shanghai during the 1940s (*ZGMS* 1948: *zhuan* 116). The styles of posters made by artists of this group show the strong influence of their earlier experiences in the Shanghai advertising industry (fig. 12). Much of their work is quite colorful and rather decorative, or even sweet (fig. 13).

Painters of the second group tend to be art school graduates of the late 1940s or early 1950s. They received formal training in oil painting rather than in commercial art and are often highly skilled at figurative rendering in an academic manner. You Longgu (1923-1995) received her training as an oil painter at National Central University in Nanjing, which was under the strong influence of the academic style of Xu Beihong. After graduating in 1949, she became an art teacher and worked in the army for several years. In 1955, she joined the newly established propaganda poster team in Shanghai, along with her classmate and then colleague Ha Qiongwen (fig. 14). Another woman painter, Yang Wenxiu (b. 1929), joined the press in 1953 after several years of training in oil painting at what was then called East China Arts Academy (*Huadong yizhuan*), a school established in Wuxi in 1952 by combining, as part of a national reorganization of art schools, two of the most influential private art schools in Shanghai, the Shanghai Art Academy and Suzhou Art Academy, with the art department of Shandong University (fig. 15).

An exception is Weng Yizhi (b. 1921), who joined the Communist New Fourth Army as a middle school student in the early forties and learned to paint from young art school graduates with whom he worked in the propaganda department of the army. After 1949, he and other former New



Figure 14: You Longgu, *Our Heroic Steel Eagle: For the Sake of Our Motherland and Peace*, 1957. From *SNXC*, 1960.



Figure 15: Yang Wenxiu, *More Hogs, More Manure, More Production!* 1959. From *SNXC*, 1960.

<sup>6</sup> Zhao Yannian entered the Shanghai Art Academy in 1938; he began to learn woodcuts a year later. Throughout the 1940s, Zhao worked as both a teacher and an art editor. After 1949, he worked in Shanghai Art Publishing House as a staff artist, and began to teach at Zhejiang Academy of Art in 1956, where he is still a professor.

Fourth Army art cadres, such as Lü Meng and Shen Roujian, went to work as supervisors at the publishers in Shanghai. Later Weng became a prominent poster painter in his own right, and won several awards (fig. 16). The well-known printmaker and illustrator Zhao Yannian (b. 1924)<sup>6</sup> (fig. 17) and oil painter Yu Yunjie (b. 1917), both of whom became well-known art professors, also joined the publishing team for a short time between 1954 and 1955.

Among Shanghai propaganda poster artists, the best known is Ha Qiongwen. His 1959 poster *Long Live Chairman Mao* may be China's most famous poster design (fig. 18). It was issued in a total printing of more than 2.5 million copies. In a telling coincidence, Ha Qiongwen's career as an artist exactly spans the years when Chinese propaganda posters, as a

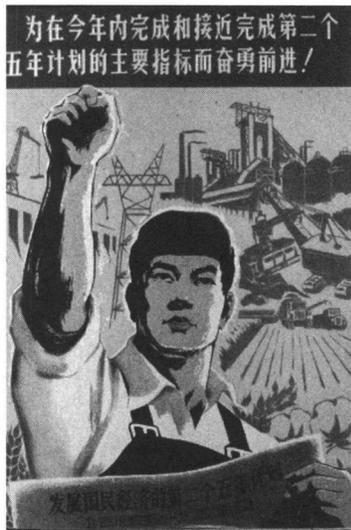


Figure 16: Weng Yizhi, *Forge Ahead to Accomplish the Main Goal of the Second Five-Year Plan Within This Year!* 1959. From SNXC, 1960.



Figure 17: Zhao Yannian, *Gathering the Crops Carefully*, 1954. From SNXC, 1960.

genre, flourished. He went to work in the propaganda poster studio of East China People's Art Press in 1955, the year after its establishment, and retired in 1992, the year the propaganda poster department was abolished. Ha was born in Beijing in 1925. He studied oil painting in the National Central University art department under the directorship of the realist oil painter Xu Beihong, first in Chongqing, and after the war in Nanjing. Upon his graduation in 1949, he joined the People's Liberation Army and became an art teacher in the East China Military and Political Academy. When he moved to the propaganda poster department of East China People's Art Press, he became the major figure in the studio (fig. 19). In the thirty-seven years between 1955 and his retirement in 1992, more than ten million copies of his posters were released.<sup>7</sup>

Not only does Ha Qiongwen's career typify that of most propaganda painters, the fate of his most famous product, *Long Live Chairman Mao*,

<sup>7</sup> The biographical information comes from the author's telephone interview with the artist on August 31, 1999. Additional reflections on his career are published in Ping Shuyi 1999 and Anon. 1999.



Figure 19: Ha Qiongwen, *Learning from the Spirit of Daqing*, 1964. By courtesy of the artist.

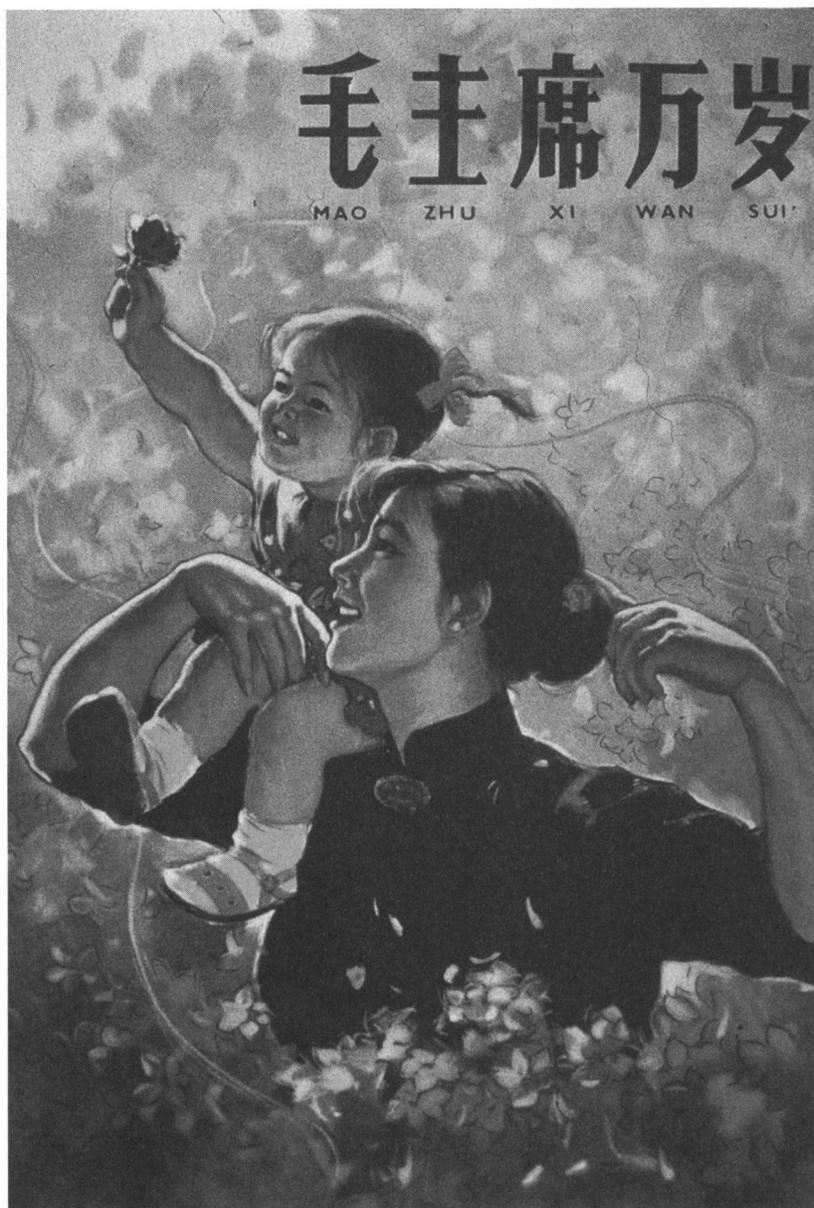


Figure 18: Ha Qiongwen, *Long Live Chairman Mao!* 1959. By courtesy of the artist.

may exemplify that of the genre. *Long Live Chairman Mao* was commissioned in 1959 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the PRC. According to the artist's recollection, he first tried to paint a celebratory scene, based on his memories, of images of the happy faces he had seen at the 1959 May Day parade at People's Square in Shanghai. He painted several drafts depicting a parade, but could not achieve an effect of sufficient originality. Then he tried several drafts that included images of Mao Zedong, but was unable to achieve an adequately lively tone. Finally, as he gazed out the window of his studio, he had an idea: the publishing house occupied an old mansion in the French concession of Shanghai, and the ornamental trees that still bloomed outside the window of his studio had exactly the upbeat tone he sought. He thereupon painted a young woman surrounded by pink blossoms, holding her young daughter on her shoulder. He wanted to emphasize the Chinese character of the woman, so he dressed her in a black velvet *qipao* (cheongsam), ornamented with a brooch and pearl earrings. But in the first draft, for the sake of political correctness, he retained a portrait of Mao in the upper left corner. Although he felt the effect of Mao's black-and-white image was incongruous with the warm tone of the composition and seemed to give the painting two disconnected centers of attention, he didn't dare remove it once it was part of the painting. When the draft was sent for approval to his supervisors, however, the obvious disharmony of the composition and tone of the painting made the deputy editor-in-chief suggest removing the image of Mao. Ha Qiongwen happily accepted his suggestion. As soon as he returned to his studio, he painted out the image of Mao and replaced it with a pale image of a column recognizable as one in Tian'anmen Square. This composition received final approval from the press and was immediately published. We should remember that this occurred right after the disastrous failure of the Great Leap Forward, when the Communist Party was eager to use such optimistic images, regardless of their artificiality, to promote their political agenda. Ha Qiongwen's *Long Live Chairman Mao* was hung in

public buildings all over China, in schools, in factories, and on military bases. During the next year, over two million copies were printed. It was even reproduced in a large format and hung from the tenth story of the First Department Store on Shanghai's bustling Nanjing Road.

One of the most famous female writers in Beijing, Bing Xin, wrote an article entitled "Using Painting to Sing Praise" (Yong hua lai gesong). She wrote that she tried to buy the poster in Beijing for several months after seeing it reproduced in the newspaper, but it was always sold out:

Several months ago, I saw a propaganda poster in the newspaper that showed a young mother holding a small girl with a flower in her hand. Both of them, with upraised heads, gaze into the distance. The poster was called *Long Live Chairman Mao*. It was very lively, and after I saw it I could not get it out of my mind. Later, I saw it several times in newspapers and magazines, but I could never find it in the bookstore to buy one. Recently, I asked a friend in Shanghai to buy it for me.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The text was provided by Ha Qiongwen, as transcribed from *Beijing wanbao* (1960), no date specified.

Bing Xin further suggested that this image should be printed as a postcard that could be sent to foreign friends, so that other people could share the joy of China's peaceful, happy life.

In 1964, the China Women's League decided to use Ha Qiongwen's image as the cover for the English and French editions of a special issue of their journal, *Chinese Women*, devoted to the International Women's Conference. To better suit the topic of the conference, they switched the title of the poster to "Long Live Peace," and removed the Tian'anmen column in the upper left.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Interview, August 31, 1999.

The Communist government's passion for control and for ideological brainwashing reached its zenith in Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. In this mad decade, not only those opposed to socialist ideology, but even the patriotic *Long Live Chairman Mao* could not avoid attack, and brought its designer complete disaster. The poster was sharply criticized for not rendering the workers, peasants, and soldiers, but instead depicting a bourgeois woman wearing a black *qipao* and earrings. The dark color of her

garment was reinterpreted as implying that socialist China does not have a bright future. The painting was further castigated because it lacked an image of Chairman Mao.

Ha Qiongwen was attacked as the "Top Celebrity of the Literature and Arts Black Line," thus targeting him as one of the most evil enemies in the Shanghai cultural world. For this reason, every time the literature and arts world held a criticism session, he was hauled out as one object of public abuse. On one occasion, he was dragged by Red Guards to the Shanghai Circus, where he was humiliated before a mob of more than ten thousand. His wife, You Longgu, a propaganda painter who had also joined the press in 1955, was "sent down" to a reform farm. Ha was publicly beaten and humiliated more than thirty times. The hopelessness of his situation led him to follow the path taken by many victims trying to escape the Cultural Revolution: one night, after putting his children to bed, he locked himself in his kitchen and turned on the gas. Fortunately, his twelve-year-old son woke up and smelled the odor. When the boy couldn't open the kitchen door, he broke the window and climbed in from outside. His father was already unconscious, but the child hoisted his limp body onto his back and carried him almost a mile to the hospital. Ha Qiongwen's life was saved, but because of the gas poisoning, he lost the sight in his right eye. He was criticized many more times after his suicide attempt, but the debt he felt he owed his son kept him alive.

Despite government complaints of a shortage of paper, the peak production period for propaganda posters was during the Great Leap Forward, a movement officially launched by Mao Zedong in 1958 shortly after the conclusion of the Anti-Rightist campaign. According to a report made during the 1959 national conference on propaganda posters, Beijing People's Fine Arts Publishing House published 241 poster designs and issued 11,340,000 copies in twelve months between 1958 and 1959, which was more than two-thirds of its total output since it started publishing posters in 1950. The Tianjin Fine Arts Publishing House published 130 poster designs and printed 13,200,000 copies, which was almost a hundred times



Figure 20: Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, *Exerting the Utmost Effort, Aiming High and Constructing Socialism in More, Faster, Better and Cheaper Ways*, 1958. From SNXC 1960.

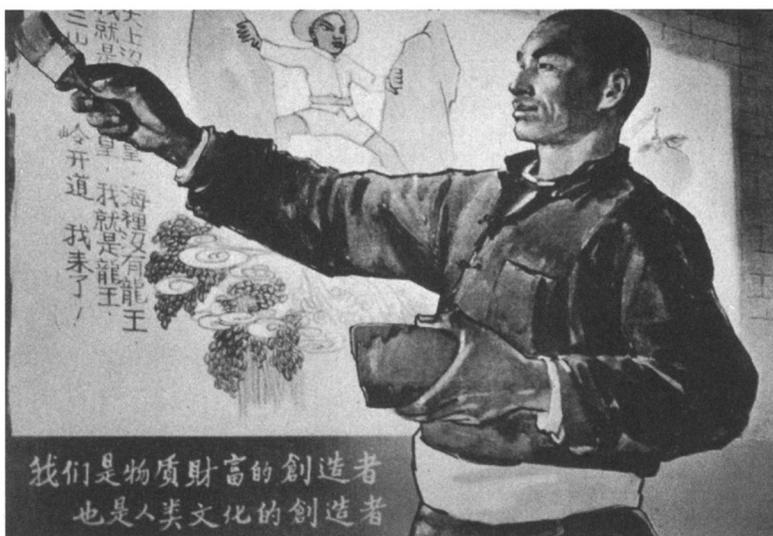


Figure 21: Cao Jianfeng, *We are Creators of Material Wealth, We are Also Creators of Human Civilization*, 1958. From SNXC 1960.



Figure 22: Anonymous, *Art Comes from the Life of Struggle, and Working People are the Masters*, 1970s.

the number of copies they issued in 1957 (Anon. 1960). A great number of professional artists who were not poster designers participated in the production of Great Leap Forward posters (fig. 20). The 1958 poster designed by Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts professor Cao Jianfeng, for example, depicts a happy and ideologically progressive peasant painting a propaganda mural on a village wall (fig. 21). The same theme reappears in almost identical form during the Cultural Revolution (fig. 22).

New designs were created in a few hours and sent directly to the printing factory, where the entire process was monitored by editors on press. Posters of particular importance could be produced in about ten hours, starting from conception and design to printing. The poster thus became an almost instantaneous expression of party policy, reflecting the smallest changes in the thinking of the leadership almost as quickly as did official statements (Galikowski 1998: 98).

During the Great Leap Forward, with its calls for “more, faster, better, cheaper” production, propaganda posters conveyed idealistic expectations for agricultural and industrial production that were inspired by the CCP’s utopian slogans; one such slogan was “Surpass Great Britain’s industrial production within fifteen years” (fig. 23). With this target, the State Planning Committee established in 1957 the ambitious goal of producing 5.3 million tons of steel for the following year. Mao arbitrarily doubled the quota to 10.7 million tons (MacFarquhar 1987: 299-311), a figure that is celebrated in a 1958 poster by Shanghai artists Lu Xinchun and Shen Lin (fig. 24).

In posters about agricultural production, grain output might be exaggerated to ten times, or even a hundred times, the actual figures (fig. 25). The poster *Zhengqu gengda de fengshou, xiangei shehuizhuyi* (Fighting for a bigger harvest and presenting it to socialism), which portrays an old peasant with a very happy face holding a tray of grains and fruits, implied that “the general line of the party” created the bountiful harvest (fig. 26). In 1958, over 8.2 million copies were sold.



Figure 23: Anonymous, *Surpassing the Main Industrial Productions of Great Britain within Fifteen Years*, 1958. From SNXC 1960.



Figure 24. Shen Lin and Lu Xinchun, *Celebrating of Surpassing the Production Plan of 10.7 Million Tons of Steel*, 1958. From SNXC 1960.



Figure 25: Ha Qiongwen, *Long Live the People's Commune!* 1959. From SNXC 1960.



Figure 26: Qian Daxin, *Fighting for a Bigger Harvest and Presenting it to Socialism.* From SNXC1960.

Behind this bright and happy facade, however, the reality was the complete failure of the utopian economic policy of the Great Leap Forward. The grain output actually declined 26% between 1957 and 1960, while China's population increased 15% during the same period. Cotton output dropped 38%, and by 1961, private agricultural activity was basically eradicated. The hog population declined to 52% of the 1957 level. At least 2.7 million people died of starvation as a result of this disastrous political and economic policy (MacFarquhar 1987: 318). The period between 1959 and 1961 is now called the "Three Disaster Years."

When my generation was young, our minds were filled with pictures of the bright, beautiful, hopeful future for China. Every place in our country was imagined by children raised with posters to be as perfect as what was depicted in these works of art. The stories we read and the songs we sang all told us how happy Chinese people were. But after having encountered as teenagers the reality of the peasants' lives and realized what actually happened to them, we now look at the propaganda posters of that period and read simultaneously two completely different messages. One reminds us of the multi-colored dream-like memories of childhood, when we so naively believed everything we were told. Another darker image that appears in my memory is that of an old Anhui peasant telling city children how he suffered from the man-made disaster of the Great Leap Forward. When I moved to rural Anhui as an educated youth about a dozen years after the Great Leap Forward, I noticed that the two villages immediately adjacent to the one where I lived had been completely abandoned. A peasant told me that all the people in both villages had died of starvation in the 1960 famine, which they all considered the worst disaster of their lifetimes (and erroneously, but in an ideologically progressive fashion, blamed on the evil Guomindang).<sup>10</sup>

After the Cultural Revolution, the function of propaganda posters was no longer limited to directly publicizing political ideology and focused more on promoting the new party agenda of the four modernizations



Figure 27: Ha Qiongwen, *Spreading Spring To Every Corner of Our Country: Dedicated to People Who are Making Contributions to the Four Modernizations*, 1988. By courtesy of the artist.

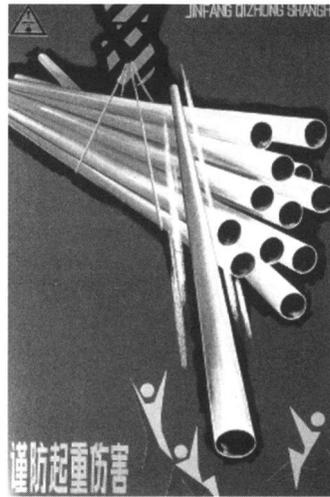


Figure 28: Anonymous, *Please Prevent the Injuries from Cranes!* 1984. From Landsberger 1995.



Figure 29: Anonymous, *Be Polite to Customers*, 1983. From Landsberger 1995.



Figure 30: Anonymous, *Planting Trees, and Bringing Rivers and Mountains under Control!* From Landsberger 1995.



Figure 31: Ha Qiongwen, *Using Music to Praise Reform, Rejuvenating Shanghai and Making the Country Prosperous*, 1992. Courtesy of the artist.

<sup>10</sup> I was in Guoyang county, one of the poorest regions in China, from 1973 to 1975, after working on a state farm in Nengjiang, Heilongjiang, for the three preceding years.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, August 31, 1999.

(fig. 27), social morality, and public safety (fig. 28). In the mid-1980s, they featured campaigns against littering, rudeness, waste, and sloppy work, and promoted good customer service (fig. 29), planting trees (fig. 30), sanitation, and athletics, among other social goals, thus trying to soften the now meaningless revolutionary tone of propaganda posters.

In the early 1990s, however, along with the depoliticization of society, the rise of the new market economy, and the commercialization of society, propaganda posters, to quote Mao Zedong, as a “powerful tool to attack the enemy, to eradicate the enemy, to unite the people, and to educate the people,” eventually lost relevance. The demand for such posters collapsed and publishers could no longer justify their production. Despite its long and successful history, Shanghai People’s Fine Arts Publishing House finally decided to abolish the propaganda painting department. The last propaganda poster design to come from this department was by Ha Qiongwen (fig. 31). The theme of the painting was praise for the new special economic zone in Shanghai’s suburb of Pudong, which was heavily promoted by the party and underwent a boom in the early 1990s. Ironically, this anti-Maoist poster design won the first prize for creativity in the exhibition held to Celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of Mao’s “Yan’an Talks” and was acquired for the permanent collection of the Shanghai Institute of Culture and History (*Shanghai wenshiguan*). Even more ironically, because no advance orders were received from bookstores for this poster, it was never printed.<sup>11</sup>

The decline in the effectiveness of propaganda posters may have been a natural evolution, but it also seems that the widespread revulsion against the June Fourth massacre on the part of both the people and most government officials robbed political propaganda of any chance of persuading people. Full-color propaganda posters, as a unique and special art form, existed in China for almost forty years. Now they serve as a magic mirror to remind us how art can be manipulated as a political tool, and both how effectively they can teach idealistic and socially beneficial values and how convincingly they can fool the people.

## Glossary

Ai Zhongxin	艾中信
Cai Zhenhua	蔡振華
cabi	擦筆
Cao Jianfeng	曹劍峰
danwei	單位
dayuejin	大躍進
Ding Hao	丁浩
Dong Xiwen	董希文
Gao Hong	高虹
gongbi	工筆
guzu ganjin, lizheng shangyou, duokuaihaosheng di jianshe shehui zhuyi	鼓足干劲, 力爭上游, 多快好省地建設 社會主義
Ha Qionghen	哈瓊文
hezuohua	合作化
Hou Yimin	侯一民
Huadong yizhuan	華東藝專
huapian	畫片
Huang Zhenliang	黃振亮
Jin Shangyi	靳尚誼
kang mei yuan chao	抗美援朝
Le Xiaoying	樂小英
Li Binghong	黎冰鴻
Li Hua	李樺
Li Keran	李可染
Li Kuchan	李苦禪
Lin Kai	林鐸
Lu Xinchun	陸星辰
Lu Xun	魯迅
Luo Gongliu	羅工柳
Ma Lequn	馬樂群
Mao Zedong	毛澤東
nianhua	年畫
qipao	旗袍
Qian Daxin	錢大昕
qunzhongxing	群眾性
renmin gongshe	人民工社

Shanghai huapian	上海畫片
Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe	上海人民美術出版社
Shanghai wenshiguan	上海文史館
Shen Lin	沈霖
sufan	肅反
Weng Yizhi	翁逸之
Wu Guanzhong	吳冠中
wunian jihua	五年計劃
Wu Zuoren	吳作人
Xu Beihong	徐悲鴻
xuanchuanhua	宣傳畫
Yang Wenxiu	楊文秀
yong hua lai gesong	用畫來歌頌
You Longgu	游龍姑
Yu Yunjie	俞雲階
zengchan jieyue	增產節約
zhandouxing	戰鬥性
Zhan Jianjun	詹建俊
Zhao Yannian	趙延年
zhengqu gengda de fengshou, xian'gei shehuizhuyi	爭取更大的豐收 獻給社會主義
Zhongguo zhipin gongsi	中國制品公司
Zhou Yang	周揚
zongluxian	總路線

### Bibliography

Andrews, Julia F. 1994. *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Andrews, Julia F. and Kuiyi Shen. 1998. *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China*. New York: Guggenheim Museum and Abrams.

Anon. 1960. "Promoting the Further Development of Propaganda Posters—A Conference in Conjunction with the Exhibition of Propaganda Posters of the Past Ten Years." *Meishu* 2: 8.

Anon. 1999. "Buneng wanghuai de xuanchuanhua" 不能忘懷的宣傳畫 (Unforgettable posters). *Xinmin wanbao* (August 30).

Chang, Tsong-zung and Iris Wachs. 1999. *Half a Century of Chinese Woodblock Prints From the Communist Revolution to the Open-Door Policy and Beyond, 1945–1998*. Ein Harod, Israel: The Museum of Art.

Denton, Kirk A., ed. 1998. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Evans, Harriet and Stephanie Donald, eds. 1999. *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Galikowski, Maria. 1998. *Art and Politics in China, 1949–1984*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Gong Jixian 龔繼先, Shen Kuiyi 沈揆一, et al., eds. 1992. *Zhongguo dangdai meishujia renminlu* 中國當代美術家人名錄 (Dictionary of contemporary Chinese artists). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu.

Laing, Ellen Johnston. 1984. *An Index to Reproductions of Paintings by Twentieth-Century Chinese Artists*. Eugene: Asian Studies Program, University of Oregon.

———. 1988. *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Landsberger, Stefan. 1995. *Chinese Propaganda Posters: From Revolution to Modernization*. Amsterdam and Singapore: The Pepin Press.

Link, Perry, ed. 1984. *Roses and Thorns: The Second Blooming of the Hundred Flowers in Chinese Fiction, 1979–1980*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lü Xuedong 呂學東 and Zheng Zejun 證則俊. 1999. "Shidai yuequ shang de liangli yinfu" 時代樂曲上的亮麗音符 (A beautiful note in the music of the times). *Jiefang ribao* (August 7).

MacFarquhar, Roderick and John K. Fairbank, eds. 1987. *Cambridge History of China, vol. 14 The People's Republic Part I, The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1949–1965*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Ping Shuyi 平叔乙. 1999. "Ta yong huihua jilu shidai" 他用繪畫記錄時代 (He uses paintings to record history). *Shanghai huabao* 4: 28–31.

Qi Fengge 齊鳳閣. 1994. *Zhongguo xinxing banhua fazhanshi* 中國新興版畫發展史 (History of Chinese new woodblock prints). Changchun: Jilin meishu.

SNXC. 1960. *Shinian xuanchuanhua xuan* 十年宣傳畫選 (Ten years of propaganda posters). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu.

SSZN. 1992. *Sishi zhounian huigu* 四十周年回顧 (A review of the past forty years). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu.

Sullivan, Michael. 1996. *Art and Artists in Twentieth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

ZGMS. 1948. *Zhongguo meishu nianjian 1947* 中國美術年鑑 1947 (Yearbook of Chinese art 1947). Shanghai: Shanghai shi wenhua yundong weiyuanhui.

ZGMS. 1993. *Zhongguo meishu nianjian, 1949–1989* 中國美術年鑑, 1949–1989 (Yearbook of Chinese art, 1949–1989). Nanning: Guangxi meishu.