

# Graphic Arts

## TO THE TEACHER

**OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIT:** To examine the impact of social and political change on China's visual culture during the twentieth century. To foster discussion of foreign influence during this period.

**TEACHING STRATEGIES:** Students will find the commercial ads closer to their own experience than the political posters. It should be easy for them to compare the ads with western ones and think about what might account for possible similarities and differences in strategy. They might also look for typically "Chinese" or "Western" elements in the ads as they consider the product being sold and the aims of the audience.

Students will get more out of the section on political posters if they have some familiarity with the major political events of the twentieth century and the types of messages authorities wanted to convey. The political posters can be treated as a set, with little effort to divide them by period, but a more sophisticated analysis is possible when students understand key stages in the political history of the People's Republic of China, at least in terms of before the Cultural Revolution, during the Cultural Revolution, and since the death of Mao.

Students will probably be struck by the contrast between the advertisements and posters in this unit and the paintings in other units. One way to make this material more challenging would be to ask students to identify not the changes but the continuities. Is there anything distinctively Chinese about contemporary graphic arts?

**WHEN TO TEACH:** All of the material in this unit is from the twentieth century. The commercial section focuses roughly on period 1910-40, the political posters on 1930-76, and the contemporary scene covers the period since the death of Mao in 1976.



The invention of printing in China during the Tang dynasty led to the development of a new art form, woodblock prints. These included both single sheet pictures intended to be pasted on a door or wall or given away to advertise a product, as well as illustrations in books. Many book illustrations have been shown here, especially in the units on Military Technology, Homes, and Gardens. Throughout the late imperial period, these traditional graphic arts flourished. There were even illustrated manuals on how to paint and illustrated catalogues on where to buy art materials.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the graphic arts underwent rapid changes in order to adapt to new political and commercial needs. Chinese artists, exposed to Western art and design, incorporated elements of foreign styles into their work. At the same time, with a growing awareness of China's identity in the world, artists also sought to reinterpret traditional art forms and apply them to new themes. The gradual transformation of Chinese visual culture had an impact on almost everyone in the population, as periodicals reached larger and larger audiences and posters were distributed throughout the country.

While looking through this unit, keep the following questions in mind:

- *In what ways did graphic art combine foreign and Chinese art forms and styles?*
- *What are some changes you observe in women's images over the course of the twentieth century? What forces might have triggered such changes?*
- *How do the form and content of political posters reflect ideology? How do they change with changes in official policy and political leadership?*
- *How are issues of class reflected in both commercial and political imagery? How are the different classes in Chinese society portrayed and how does that change over the course of the century?*
- *What similarities or differences do you see between the work of commercial artists and that of government artists assigned propaganda work?*



**Commercial**

### Suggested Reading



**Political**

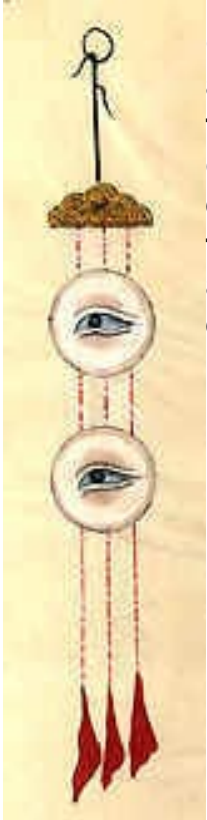


**Contemporary**

## FURTHER READING FOR GRAPHIC ARTS

- Andrews, Julia F. *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994.
- Andrews, Julia F. and Kuiyi Shen. *A Century in Crisis: Tradition and Modernity in the Art of Twentieth-Century China*. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1998.
- Berliner, Nancy Zeng. *Chinese Folk Art: The Small Skills of Carving Insects*. Boston: Little & Brown, 1986.
- Cohen, Joan Lebold. *The New Chinese Painting, 1949-1986*. New York : H.N. Abrams, 1987.
- Evans, Harriet and Stephanie Donald, eds. *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Galikowski, Maria. *Art and Politics in China: 1949-1984*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998.
- Laing, Ellen Johnston. *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*. Berkeley, CA : University of California Press, 1988.
- Landsberger, Stephan. *Chinese Propaganda Posters: From Revolution to Modernization*. Amsterdam and Singapore: The Peppin Press, 1995.
- Minick, Scott and Jiao Ping. *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1990.
- Powell, Patricia. *Mao's Graphic Voice: Pictorial Posters from the Cultural Revolution*. Madison, WI: Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin, 1996.

# Commercial Advertisement



Commercial advertising has a long history in China. As commerce developed and competition increased, resourceful merchants had to think of various ways to promote their goods. One of the simplest and earliest methods was to hawk one's wares by shouting in the market. Another possibility was to sponsor entertainment that would grab potential customers' attention. From very early times, vendors also hung wooden signs or colorful flags outside of their stalls as a form of advertisement. For those who were not able to read, such signs were easy indicators of the nature of the shop.

*What kind of shop do you think the banner on the left advertised?*

**SOURCE:** H.K.Fung, *Yan du shang bang tu*, (preface dated 1931, no other publication information available).

**ANSWER:** Eye medicine shop.

The Song dynasty (960-1276) saw important developments in the commercial arts. To the right is one of the first advertising handbills that were printed. It included a trademark -- a white rabbit holding a sewing needle -- appropriate for a needle shop.

*Compare the banner above with the handbill. Can you think of some of the advantages and disadvantages of each?*



Page advertisement from Jinan Liu's Fine Needle Shop, Shandong Province, Song Dynasty.

**SOME THOUGHTS:** Handbills can be distributed to a larger number of people. However, colorful banners have the advantage of drawing people in off the street. Furthermore, for those who can't read, the banners might be more effective.

**SOURCE:** Zhongguo lishi bowu guan, ed., *Zhongguo godai shi cankao tulu: Song Yuan shiqi* (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), p. 109.

This section focuses on the commercial advertisements of the Republican Period (1911-1949). This was a time of great social and economic change in China. By the early 20th century many of China's cities had become major commercial, industrial, and trade centers. Wooden placards and flags were still very common in front of shops during this time. The photo below shows a busy commercial district in Beijing in the early 20th century.

At the same time, with more and more foreign companies in China looking for markets for their goods, merchants sought new ways to reach a mass audience. This was particularly true in the bustling urban areas along the eastern coast. Advertising agencies in cities such as Shanghai responded to the increase in foreign clientele by demanding artists who had been trained in Western methods. Many Chinese artists went abroad to study Western art and design and returned to apply new ideas to ads for foreign products.



SOURCE: Wang Xinggong, *Zhongguo Chuantong shizhao* (Taipei: Yishujia chubanshe, 1994), p.19.



Calendar Posters



Magazine Ads



Book Covers

# Calendar Posters

**A new form of advertising that developed early in the 20th century was the calendar poster. Major companies would present these calendars as gifts to their clients at the beginning of the Chinese New Year. These posters usually had a large glossy image in the middle with calendars for one or two years on the sides. While strikingly different in content and style, this method of marketing does have its roots in the tradition of Chinese folk prints [in the guide, below], colorful pictures exchanged at the New Year. The subject matter of such prints usually drew from a body of popular folklore and auspicious symbols. In contrast, calendar posters presented new cosmopolitan images targeted at the growing urban middle class.**

**As you look at some of the examples of advertising posters below, think about the intended audience of these ads.**

***Why do you think images of women were so frequently used in advertising? How do these calendars compare with western advertising strategies?***





Colorful calendars such as this were hung in Chinese homes during the New Year celebrations. This calendar shows the zodiac symbols that served as the traditional year names. During the Lunar Year people in North China would offer sacrifices to the gods of the constellations (symbols for which are pictured here) in order to ensure prosperity during the coming year.

*How many animals can you recognize on the calendar?*

Calendar with zodiac symbols

SOURCE: *Zhonghua minzu banshu* (Taipei: China National Museum of History, 1977), p. 18

ANSWER: There are twelve animals: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig.

司公限有份股烟弟兄洋南



辛酉年陽曆對照表 (小月四) 十四日

陽	陰	陽	陰	陽	陰
一月一日	一月二日	一月三日	一月四日	一月五日	一月六日
一月七日	一月八日	一月九日	一月十日	一月十一日	一月十二日
一月十三日	一月十四日	一月十五日	一月十六日	一月十七日	一月十八日
一月十九日	一月二十日	一月二十一日	一月二十二日	一月二十三日	一月二十四日
一月二十五日	一月二十六日	一月二十七日	一月二十八日	一月二十九年	一月三十日

相香等上牌域長



相香航飛用請



The majority of advertising revenue in the 1920s came from pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and tobacco companies. To the left is an advertisement calendar for the Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company from 1921.

This image draws from Chinese landscape and portrait painting traditions, as well as new ingredients from Western art.

Can you identify elements that reflect these sources?

Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company Calendar Poster, 1921

SOURCE: Yi Bin et. al., *Lao Shanghai guanggao* (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao she, 1995), p. 84.

Compare the calendar for "Three Cats" cigarettes below (1930s) with the BAT ad above.

What are some of the associations smoking might have for a female consumer? What kind of social changes in these years that might be reflected in the differences between these two ads?



"Three Cats" cigarettes advertisement calendar

SOURCE: Yi Bin et. al., *Lao Shanghai guanggao* (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao she, 1995), p. 66.

**SOME THOUGHTS:** The popularity of foreign cigarettes and cosmetics might be partly due to the associations they carried. As in the West, smoking and wearing makeup was taken as an expression of independence in women.



To the left is a poster for Eveready Batteries from 1931.

*Looking at the technique, the pose, the style of the foliage, the architectural details, and the composition, which aspects strike you as more Chinese or more Western?*

Poster for Eveready Batteries

**SOURCE:** Postcard, copyrighted by Dal Housie Enterprises, Orchard P. O. Box 0248, Singapore 9123.

In the advertisement for Coca Cola to the right, the name "Coca Cola" was translated into four Chinese characters that sound similar and mean "delicious and fun."

Compare this image with the cigarette poster above.

*What might account for the change in dress and pose?*

Compare this calendar to the folk print [above in the teachers guide].

*What differences do you see in their color and tone?*

**MORE:** The style of calendars changed due to artistic innovations such as the rub and paint method. The technique involves the application of a thin layer of carbon powder on the image. The shadowy sections of the image are then carefully rubbed to take on the contours of a faint sketch. Watercolors are then applied. The result is a fair and unblemished tone with a slightly rosy tint.



**Coca Cola poster from the 1920s**

SOURCE: Yi Bin et. al., *Lao Shanghai guanggao* (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao she, 1995), p. 72.



To the left is an advertisement for Grande, Price, & Co. from 1934.

According to a 1930 article in the magazine *The Modern Lady*, it is improper for a lady to sit with her legs crossed.

Look carefully at the picture.

What are some other signs of "un-ladylike" behavior? How can we tell she is not alone?

ANSWER: There are *two* glasses.

### Poster advertising liquor

SOURCE: Yi Bin et. al., *Lao Shanghai guanggao* (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao she, 1995), p. 90.

Move on to [Magazine Advertisements](#)

# Magazine Advertisements

The commercial publication of magazines and newspapers exploded during the early decades of the twentieth century, partly due to the wave of reforms that was taking place in Chinese society. In the aftermath of the failed Boxer Rebellion, students, intellectuals, government leaders and the wider public were convinced that China must become stronger as a nation in order to face the threat of foreign imperialism. Educational, military, and constitutional reforms were instituted as a result. Chinese society changed even more with the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Begun originally with student demonstrations against a peace treaty that was perceived to be unfair to China's territorial rights, the movement eventually grew into a nation-wide call for change. Periodicals, seen as an excellent forum for publicizing new ideas, grew in numbers and circulation.



Cover of *The Ladies Journal*

SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*, Vol. 11  
No. 8, 1925. Magazine cover.

These new publications, ranging from women's magazines to literary journals, helped to usher in a new era of mass popular culture. Companies saw the potential to reach a wider audience and began to advertise their goods in them. As competition increased, so too did the number and quality of advertisements.

*What kind of lifestyle is being endorsed in the journal cover to the left?*

In this Pond's Cream ad, why show a woman peering in a mirror?

券贈品樣

姓名  
住址

贈下此券所換取凡分寄在上海  
物院洋行各埠均有出售  
初本上標當一小票

(婦女十二號)

使粉衣日存在 顏色格外艷麗

他眉兒是淺淺描  
他臉兒是淡淡搽  
他粉香膩玉搵咽項  
薛錄西廂記借扇三無句

上 怡  
海 昌  
行 理

愛氏白玉霜

1

Magazine advertisement for Pond's cream

SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*, Vol. 11 No. 12, 1925.



*In what ways would the family in this appeal to Chinese consumers? What kind of product do you think the ad is for?*

**ANSWER:** According to the text of the ad, Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People could be used to cure various female ailments. The ad is based on a testimonial letter from the family in the picture. The wife was vomiting after meals and becoming weak and sickly. After taking the pills, however, she regained her appetite and good health. The ad also claims that the pills can be taken for any number of other male and female afflictions.

業廉士醫生藥劑之出品在美國製造種係英國其

請觀在江蘇省有家庭如何得獲康慶士大醫  
生紅色補丸之喜樂

是丸能使 家庭喜樂

楊天佑君之 夫人玉燕

貧血、神經衰弱、消化不良、頭暈、眼花、心跳、失眠、腰酸、背痛、手足麻木、食慾不振、體弱多病、產後失血、經期不調、白帶過多、小兒疳積、老人衰弱、一切虛弱之症、服此丸無不立見奇效。

請參閱內封及藥單說明書

Magazine advertisement

SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*, Vol. 12 No. 11, 1926.

To the right is an advertisement for a hot drink popular in the West.

What new ways of using characters do you see here?

**ANSWER:** During this period characters were often incorporated into the design itself, rather than being used just to convey information.



Advertisement for Ovaltine

**SOURCE:** *Funu zazhi*, Vol. 17  
No. 11, 1931.

Swimming and other recreational sports became increasingly popular among middle class Chinese in these years. Below left is an ad from the 1940's for a Chinese-made bathing suit. Below right is an ad for English roller skates from about the same time.

*Do you think the people depicted in the ads below are supposed to look Chinese or Western?*



Ad for bathing suit

SOURCE: *Bainian Shanghai* (Hong Kong: Guangming wenhua shiye gongsi, 1942), no page number available.



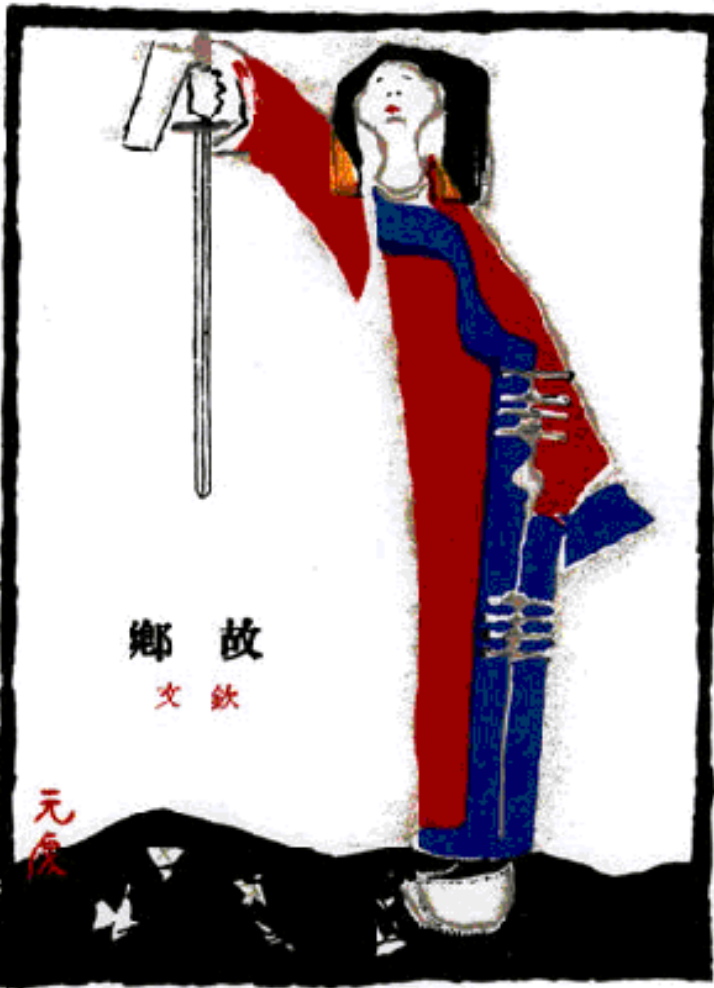
Ad for roller skates

SOURCE: *Bainian Shanghai* (Hong Kong: Guangming wenhua shiye gongsi, 1942), no page number available.

Move on to [Book Covers](#)

# Book Covers

Books have a long history in China. The earliest surviving books date to the Tang dynasty, and by the tenth century Chinese printing was already a flourishing trade. Traditional Chinese book covers were usually string-bound with a plain cloth cover. Decoration consisted primarily of a title inscription by a calligrapher. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Western style books with glued or stapled bindings were common in China. The change to Western book formats was an important step in the development of book design.



The great boom in Chinese publishing in the early decades of the 20th century was due in part to a general increase in literacy, but also to a growing middle class in search of leisure pursuits. In response to the demand, publishing houses began to employ full-time designers. Advertising and book design was no longer done primarily by classically-trained painters and illustrators. Now, graphic artists began to explore the creative potential of book design as the field began to be recognized in its own right. Book covers exhibited great stylistic diversity during this period of experimentation.

*What are some possible Chinese and foreign influences in the figure on the 1926 cover to the left?*

**Cover for Xu Jinwen's novel *Hometown* (1926)**

**SOURCE:** Tao Yuanqing, design for Xu Jinwen's novel *Hometown* (1926), from *Lu Xun yu shu ji zhuang zheng* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 72.



**Cover for Lu Xun, *Sprout* (1930)**

**SOURCE:** Lu Xun, *Sprout* (January, 1930), from *Lu Xun yu shu ji zhuang zheng* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 55.

How do you see artists experimenting with the graphic potential of Chinese characters in these two covers?

What do you notice about the spatial organization of the cover on the right?



**Cover for Lu Xun, *Literature and Art Study Quarterly* (1930)**

**SOURCE:** Lu Xun, *Literature and Art Study Quarterly* (February, 1930), from *Lu Xun yu shu ji zhuang zheng* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 73.

Decoration on traditional Chinese book covers, if any, was usually unrelated to the story. An important change in the twentieth century was that covers began to be thought of as an integral part of the book. Designs were conceived to complement content.

*Would you have been able to guess from this cover that the book is about depression?*



Cover for Lu Xun's translation of *Symbol of Depression* (1924)

SOURCE: Tao Yuanqing's design for Lu Xun's translation of *Symbol of Depression* (1924), from *Lu Xun yu shu ji zhuang zheng* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 37.



Graphic artists were inspired by European and American trends, but also by traditional Chinese design motifs. Patterns were frequently based on those found in Chinese pottery, bronzes, and stone carvings.

*Does the cover on the left remind you of any traditional Chinese forms?*

HINT: Think of Chinese architecture.

The title in red reads *The Experience of Creation*.

*How is the meaning of the title expressed through the cover design?*

**Cover for Lu Xun, *Experience of Creation*  
(1933)**

**SOURCE:** Chen Zhifo, with calligraphy by Lu Xun, *Experience of Creation* (1933), from *Lu Xun yu shu ji zhuang zheng* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 40.

Move on to [Political Propaganda](#)

# Political Propaganda

Much of the graphic arts produced in China in the twentieth century is politically motivated and needs to be seen in the context of the tumultuous events of the century. The following is a quick recap of these decades.

By the beginning of the 1900s many people felt that it was necessary to completely do away with the old order. In 1912 the last Manchu ruler was forced to abdicate and the Republic of China was established by the Nationalist Party, thus putting an end to the 2000-year-old imperial system. The new republic, however, was plagued with problems. The political leadership was unstable and powerful regional warlords posed a constant threat to unity. By the 1930s, the fledgling Communist Party was gaining in size and strength in Yan'an after being forced to flee there by the Nationalists. The two parties joined forces to fight the Japanese invasion in 1937, but civil war resumed after World War II ended in 1945. By 1949 the Nationalists had fled to Taiwan. On October 1<sup>st</sup> of that year Mao Zedong declared the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Tianenmen Square. The establishment of the PRC would profoundly change the arts in China.



Woodcuts of the 30s and 40s



The PRC under Mao (1949-76)



**In this section we will examine how political activists made use of the graphic arts to convey their messages. We will look at woodcuts from the 1930s and 40s, as well as political propaganda in the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong.**

# Woodcuts

The New Woodcut Movement of the 1930s and 40s was begun by the writer and scholar Lu Xun.

Although initially trained as a doctor, Lu Xun came to believe that the plight of the Chinese masses could be improved only through the widespread dissemination of socially aware art and literature. In the woodblock print, especially as developed by the German Expressionists, Lu Xun saw an effective tool for exposing the social ills of China. Artists influenced by Lu Xun focused on the inequities suffered by the lower classes. Due in part to this redirection in subject matter, the woodcut medium was perceived to be Western and modern although woodblock printing had been invented in China and had been widely used since the Tang dynasty.

*What is the weapon of protest associated with Lu Xun in the woodcut portrait on the right?*



Lu Xun (1881-1936)

ANSWER: His writing brush.

SOURCE: *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), no. 32.



“Roar, China!”

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji*  
(Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), no. 34.

From the time of the May Fourth protests in 1919, Japan was seen as the greatest threat to China's sovereignty. By the 1930s Japan had taken over most of Manchuria and set up a puppet state there. In 1932 the Japanese attacked Shanghai directly to retaliate against anti-Japanese protests. Anger at Japanese aggression heightened Chinese nationalism. In the woodcuts of this period patriotic young artists called for resistance to the invaders and criticized the Nationalist government for not taking decisive action.

*Does the woodcut medium enhance the emotional impact of the image to the left? Is so, how?*

In the early twentieth century, assumptions about women's place in society that had gone unquestioned for centuries came under attack.

*What do you think are some of the practices being criticized in this woodcut print?*

*Do you see similarities to the print above?*

**MORE:** Early in the century the key issues that reformers focused on were footbinding and women's education. Female infanticide, arranged marriages, wife-beating, and the cult of widow chastity also came under attack. The plight of rural women was also of particular concern, as social change came about much more slowly in the countryside.



"Women of China"

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), no. 44.

Although Lu Xun was never an official member of the Communist Party, his emphasis on the exploitation of peasants and the working class fit well with the revolutionary message of the CCP. In 1937, after Lu Xun's death, the Lu Xun Academy of Arts was established at the Communist base of Yan'an to instruct artists in the art of propaganda. Woodblock prints were particularly suited for this purpose because they were relatively cheap and easy to copy. By the 1940s there were artists traveling through the countryside distributing prints with ideological messages.

*In the 1943 woodcut below, what do you think is happening?*

*What role do you think the man in the long robe is playing?*

**HINT:** The title of the woodcut is "Rent Reduction."



1943 woodcut print by a Yanan artist

SOURCE: *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), no. 89.

Move on to [PRC under Mao](#)

# PRC Under Mao



“Art comes from a life of struggle; the working people are the masters.”

SOURCE: Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.

Committed to a more egalitarian social and economic order, Mao Zedong and other leaders of the Communist Party set about fashioning a new China, one that would empower peasants and workers and limit the influence of landlords, capitalists, intellectuals, and foreigners. Spreading these ideas was the mission of the propaganda departments and teams. Political posters, reproduced from paintings, woodcuts, and other media, were displayed prominently in classrooms, offices, and homes. The artists who produced these works had to follow the guidelines set by Mao Zedong at the 1942 Yanan Forum for Literature and Art. Art was to serve politics and further the revolutionary cause. Toward that end, it must be appealing and accessible to the masses. Artists, previously fairly independent from politics, were now a key component in the revolutionary machine. “Cultural workers” were sent out to villages and factories to study folk art and learn from real life. In addition, workers and peasants were encouraged to attend art schools and create artwork of their own.



Leaders and Role Models



Science and Technology



Youth and Education



Cultural Revolution

# Leaders and Role Models

The idea of perfecting oneself through emulation of an admired model has a long tradition in China. One of the fundamental premises of Confucian teaching is that setting a good example is a more effective way of instilling proper values than punishment. Role models also feature prominently in much of the political propaganda from the People's Republic of China. The ultimate model was, of course, Chairman Mao himself. A virtual cult of personality was created around him; a portrait of him hung in every home and his image was to be seen everywhere in public.



The woodcut to the left is titled "Never Get Rusty."

What are some possible meanings of the title in this context?

*How does the artist tell you who the main figure is here?*



## "Never Get Rusty"

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun disanjie meishu zuopin zhanlanhui banhua xuanji* (Shanghai: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1965), plate 1.

During the 1950s, the period of consolidation for the Communist regime, China looked to the example of the Soviets as a successful socialist model. Accordingly, Socialist Realism was adopted as the official style. This realism was later combined with what Mao called "Revolutionary Romanticism." The combination was to result in works of art that, while taking their cues from everyday life, often imbued their subject matter with a romantic aura. Compositions usually focused on figures and were colorful and detailed.

The oil painting below is entitled "Chairman Mao Has Come to Our Factory." The slogan hung from the roof reads "March Down Chairman Mao's Revolutionary Road."

*How are colors and forms used in this painting to emphasize its theme? Why do you think some parts are more idealized when others seem simply realistic?*



**"The Chairman Has Come to Our Factory"**

**SOURCE:** *Graphic Art by Workers of Shanghai, Yangchuan, and Luta* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), p. 1.

**Under Communist rule people were divided into four classes: peasants, workers, bourgeois, and capitalists. These four were lead by the CCP. Virtuous members of the working class were also extolled in posters as fitting models.**



In the background of the picture to the left is Lei Feng, an orphaned peasant raised by the Communist Party. He went on to become a soldier and died at the age of twenty-two. Lei Feng was imagined as being extremely loyal to the country and loving the people in earnest. In the early 60s he was promoted as a role model for the army and the people. In the little girl's hands is Lei Feng's journal, which was published after his death and became very popular.

*How does the artist use visual means to draw a connection between the little girl and Lei Feng?*

**Lei Feng and a little girl**

**SOURCE:** *Meishu xuanchuanyuan shouce* (Tianjin: Tianjin enmin meishu chuban she, 1976), p. 65.

**Mao believed that the People's Liberation Army should be closely involved in the lives of the masses.**

**MORE:** In addition to being a fighting force, soldiers worked in the fields and factories alongside civilians. Ultimately Mao wanted a bond to be created between the army and the people, who would then join the revolutionary struggle against the bourgeois class.

*Do you think that this poster is aimed more at soldiers or more at farmers?*



**A soldier helping a peasant**

SOURCE: *Meishu xuanchuanyuan shouce* (Tianjin: Tianjin enmin meishu chuban she, 1976), p. 54.

**Billboards, seen everywhere in cities and towns, are often designed to teach appropriate public behavior. The billboard below is about riding bicycles, the major means of transportation for millions of Chinese.**

***What kinds of behavior are specifically endorsed by this image?***



**Billboard of bicycles**

**SOURCE:** Photo courtesy of James C. Schneider, Beijing, 1997.

Move on to [Science and Technology](#)

# Science and Technology

A major goal of the Communist government was to develop an advanced, industrial economy. When the Communists took power in 1949, many of the country's resources had been depleted by years of war. The new government promised to rebuild China. Technical and scientific developments that would improve production were promoted. Woodcuts and posters expressed the optimism of the new administration in images of scientific progress.



Mao believed firmly in the potential of human beings. He thought that, once mobilized, they could transform both themselves and the world through the power of their wills.

*How would you describe the relationship between people and nature in this woodblock print? How does it reflect Mao's ideas about human potential?*

## Bridge building on the Yellow River

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), no. 206.

The Communist Party taught the peasants that the old order of social and economic inequality was not natural, but a perversion caused by the institution of private property. To replace that “feudal” order, the party brought a vision of communal order where all would work together unselfishly for common goals. In 1964 Mao chose Dazhai, a poor village in Shanxi province, to become a model of new collective farming methods. In a few years Dazhai was transformed into a prosperous community. “Learn from Dazhai” became a popular motto.

**How does the style of the poster to the right fit with Mao’s utopian vision?**

**What features has the artist made the most legible?**

**Why do you think the artist chose an aerial point of view?**



**Dazhai**

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), no. 206.

**ANSWER:** Some of the famous features of Dazhai visible in this poster are: New blocks of housing, a large hotel, terraced fields, and an electric hoist up into the mountains. There were also fruit and nut orchards, a piggery, a noodle plant, and a machine repair shop. These generated enough income to support a school, a health clinic, and a cultural center.

The words on the poster below read: “A new flowering of village culture: the use of scientific farming methods will result in great fruits.”

*What are some objects indicating scientific progress in the poster? What form of folk art is this based on? Compared to the black and white woodcuts, why do you think the peasant class would find this more appealing?*

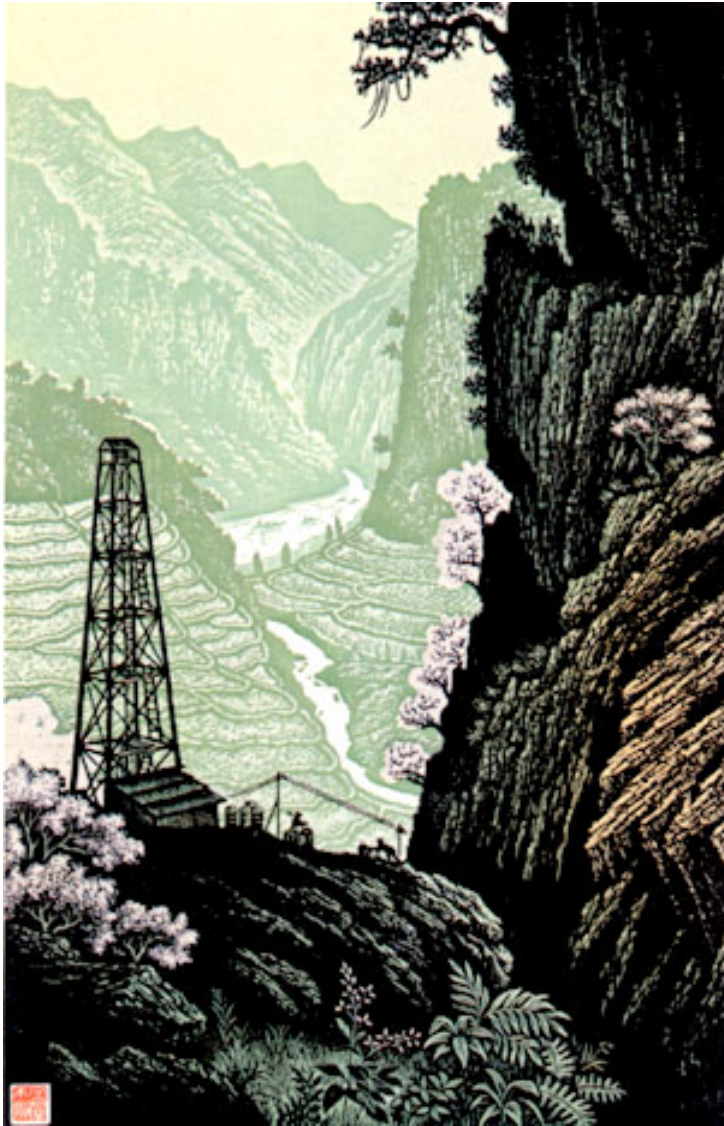


**Scientific farming**

**SOURCE:** Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.

**ANSWER:** This poster is based on traditional New Year's prints, which greatly appealed to the peasantry. However, this poster was probably produced with a new method of stone plates and offset lithography, resulting in a clearer image.





Traditional Chinese landscape painting fell into disfavor in the People's Republic of China due to its historical association with an intellectual elite. However, woodcut artists attempted to apply new themes to landscape views.

*What are some elements of the old and new artistic styles in this scene of a mountain valley?*

Modern landscape poster

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), no. 301.

Move on to [Youth and Education](#)

# Youth and Education

One of the central goals of the new administration was to reform the educational system and bring it in line with socialist thought. Schools and colleges were put under Party supervision, with a Soviet-style Ministry of Education issuing directives. Even outside official institutions, however, people were encouraged to better themselves through study.

*What two groups are being targeted in the images below?*

*What do the paraphernalia in the room tell about the woman? Is she a teacher preparing the next day's lesson? Or a working mom studying in her spare time?*



**SOURCE:** *Meishu xuanchuanyuan shouce* (Tianjin: Tianjin enmin meishu chubanshe, 1976), p. 41.

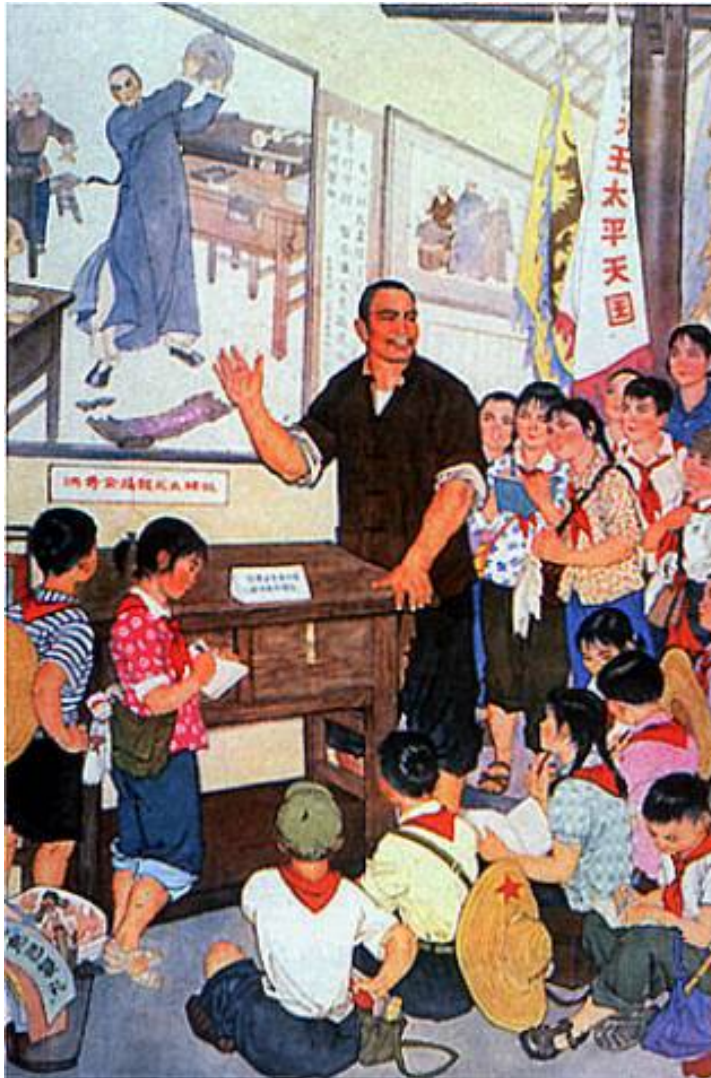
**SOME THOUGHTS:** In the 1940s, one out of every six people in the world was a Chinese peasant. Improved literacy for the peasantry was a major concern of the Communist Party, as they were believed to form the foundation of the revolution. The Party also endorsed women's equality and maintained that women were capable of doing the same tasks as men. The hat in the picture on the right suggests that the woman might work during the day.



**"Awake Late into the Night"**

**SOURCE:** Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.

The building blocks of society are naturally its children. Traditionally, it was believed that children must be socialized in Confucian values and morals before they could become productive members of society. Under Communist rule, however, children were inculcated with socialist rather than Confucian beliefs. Children unburdened by feudal or capitalist notions could acquire the socialist vision from the beginning.



"The Main Lesson"

SOURCE: Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.

*Can you infer what content of the lesson in this poster?*

*What ideals are being promoted, and how?*

**SOME THOUGHTS:** The poster on the wall appears to depict a traditional Confucian classroom. The young scholar in long robes seems to have realized the error of his ways and has set about destroying the old order, represented by what appears to be an old ceramic pot.

Perhaps because of the importance of children for the future of the socialist state, they are featured in many political posters.

The poster on the right is titled “Every Generation Is Red.”

*How are ideals of continuity and history expressed in this poster?*

*Does it effectively convey Mao’s concept of “continuous revolution?”*



"Every Generation Is Red"

SOURCE: Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.



The new China proclaimed itself to be a multi-ethnic state. Officially, at least, China was supposed to be composed of a number of distinct but equal ethnic groups joined in a collaborative state. The model provided justification for dominion over Tibet and Xinjiang, which had been attached to the Qing but had broken away after the collapse of the dynasty in 1911. Artwork featuring national minority themes were encouraged. Images of children and women were particularly popular in this regard.

*How would you describe her the way this Tibetan girl is portrayed?*

*In what ways would she appear “exotic” or “foreign” by Chinese standards?”*

## Tibetan girl

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), no.245.

Move on to [Cultural Revolution](#)

# Cultural Revolution

The failure of the Great Leap Forward (1958-62) weakened Mao's position considerably in the Communist Party as factions began to form against him. His sense that the party was shunting him aside probably lies behind his call for a Great Revolution to Create a Proletarian Culture, or Cultural Revolution for short. But Mao also genuinely feared that China was slipping in an inegalitarian direction and he would not stand by while a new elite took over the party and subverted the revolution. To Mao the revolution had to be a permanent process, constantly kept alive through unending class struggle. Hidden enemies in the party and intellectual circles had to be identified and removed. Conceived of as a "revolution to touch people's souls," the aim of the Cultural Revolution was to attack the Four Olds – old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits – in order to bring the areas of education, art and literature in line with Communist ideology. Anything that was suspected of being feudal or bourgeois was to be destroyed.

Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, dominated cultural productions during this period. The ideas she espoused through eight "Model Operas" were applied to all areas of the arts. These operas were performed continuously, and attendance was mandatory. Proletarian heroes and heroines were the main characters in each.



To the left is an advertisement for the opera, "The Red Women's Army," a story about women from south China being organized to fight for a new and equal China. Note the use of ballet shoes and postures.

Jiang Qing emphasized "Three Stresses" as the guiding principle behind these operas.

*Based on the way that the figures are arranged, can you guess what the "Three Stresses" refer to?*

**ANSWER:** The Three Stresses: Of all the characters stress the positive ones, of the positive ones stress the heroes, of the heroes stress the great hero.

Poster for "The Red Women's Army"

**SOURCE:** Collection of Helen May Schneider.

During the Cultural Revolution, millions of educated youths were sent to rural areas to work in the countryside and learn from the peasantry. Mao believed that this would ultimately create a new society where there was no gap between urban and rural, laborers and intellectuals.

*What are some of the groups represented by the figures in the poster below? Can you guess what is happening in this scene?*



**Youths in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution**

**SOURCE:** Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.

One of Mao's famous quotes was "Women hold up half the sky."

*How has the artist differentiated between men and women in this poster?*



**Poster titled "Proletarian revolutionary rebels unite"**

**SOURCE:** Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.



**MORE:** As early as the mid-40s women were encouraged to take part in the Communist army. Mao had openly welcomed women to the Communist headquarters at Yan'an and praised them for demonstrating their capabilities. After the PRC was established, the state continued to endorse the goal of women's equality. In rural areas, the nature of women's work was also profoundly impacted by the collectivization of agriculture and the mobilization of labor. More and more women participated in farm labor.

In June 1966 middle schools and universities throughout the country closed down as students devoted all their time to Red Guard activities. Millions of these young students were encouraged to attack "counterrevolutionaries" and criticize those in the party who appeared to have deviated from Maoist thought.

Below is a painting of a young "Red Guard" participating in the campaign. The big characters on the board read "Field for Criticism." The head of Mao Zedong appears in the upper left corner.

*Why do you think the artist chose to include Mao's image in this poster?*

*Why do you think the artist chose this particular color scheme?*



## Young Red Guard

**SOURCE: "Hong Xiao Bing" by Huang Jinzeng, collection of Helen May Schneider.**

Move on to [Contemporary Graphic Arts](#)

# Contemporary Graphic Arts

The Cultural Revolution came to an end with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. The responsibility for the decade of chaos was officially placed on the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing and three of her supporters), who were arrested and imprisoned. The Communist Party now turned to the task of repairing its image and encouraging economic growth. Hua Guofeng was made the chair of the Communist Party as Mao's successor, but it soon became clear that real power lay with the vice-chair Deng Xiaoping, well-known for his pragmatic approach toward politics. In December of 1978, at the historical Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Central Committee, Deng announced that China would embark on the program of the "Four Modernizations" with the aim of becoming a powerful socialist nation in the forefront of the world. Deng's policies set in motion an economic boom that continues to transform the face of Chinese society. In the post-Mao era, the increase in wealth and the availability of new consumer goods is reflected in the variety of contemporary advertising.



Four Modernizations Era



Contemporary Advertising

# Four Modernizations Era

The goal of the “Four Modernizations” was to strengthen the sectors of agriculture, industry, technology and defense. Class struggle was no longer the central focus as it had been under Mao. The change in political climate was reflected in the propaganda posters of the 70s and 80s, which now promoted the creation of a society of civilized and productive citizens all working toward the welfare of the country and contributing to the modernization effort. Although there were still periodic campaigns against “bourgeois liberalization” or “spiritual pollution,” overall the government relaxed its hold over cultural affairs.



SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Patricia Ebrey, 1978.



An important aspect of modernization was education. Educational institutions had been dismantled during the Cultural Revolution, and now it was necessary to rebuild them. Propaganda posters that encouraged study were frequently targeted at urban youth.

To the left is a poster titled “The Future Summons.”

*What do you notice in the background? What do you think the young girl is imagining?*

SOURCE: Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.

Another major change in the subject matter of propaganda from the 70s and 80s was the return of the intellectuals, a group that had frequently been suspected of being “bourgeois” under Mao. Workers, peasants, and soldiers, while still portrayed, were no longer the only role models. Intellectuals had been elevated to the status of “mental workers” and were now shown as responsible and productive members of society.

In the billboard below, the scientific development of the oil industry is promoted.

*How does the artist convey the notion of science?*



Billboard from Gansu province

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of James C. Schneider, Gansu, 1997.

Although the government loosened its control over the people, it could still exert considerable coercive force when it deemed it necessary. Although Mao did not believe that it was necessary to control the Chinese population, since his death the government has worked hard to promote the one-child policy.

*What attitude is this poster trying to encourage?*

**ANSWER:** Translated, the characters at the bottom read, “The sprouts are fat, the flowers big too, one plump baby’s enough for you; girls are tough, boys are strong, it doesn’t matter which you have.”



**SOURCE:** Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.

Move on to [Contemporary Advertising](#)

# Contemporary Advertising

As a result of economic reforms and economic growth, the quality of life in China has improved steadily for many, especially in the cities. In the early 90s Deng Xiaoping reaffirmed his support for market reforms when he declared that it did not matter whether policies were capitalist or socialist as long as they made China prosperous. Many Chinese responded enthusiastically to Deng's call to make money by plunging into private enterprise. The new entrepreneurs included both well-connected Party officials and young people who migrated into the cities in search for new opportunities.

One result is that disparities in wealth have increased enormously--especially between remote areas of the countryside and the major cities on the coast. Another result has been the creation of a generation gap between those who grew up in austere times and the younger generation with access to new wealth, new consumer products, and changing fashions.

*Even state run buses often have advertisements painted on them.*



Bus with painted advertisement for alcohol, Xian 2001

Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy, 2001



Magazine kiosk in Beijing, 2000

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Patricia Ebrey, 2000.

As a result of Deng's Open Door policy China also had much greater contact with foreign countries in the 80s and 90s. The growing number of televisions in Chinese homes brought knowledge of what was happening in the outside world. Such knowledge was enhanced by travel abroad and by encounters with foreigners who came to China for business, travel, and study. More and more the Chinese began to participate in global trends.



Magazines on display, 2001

Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy, 2001

MORE: According to a 1997 Gallup Poll that surveyed over 3700 households across China, half of the twenty best-known foreign brands are Japanese, but three of the top five are American. Nine in ten homes have televisions, and nearly three-quarters of urban women under age thirty wear lipstick.

Look at the magazine covers on the left. What kinds of things are being endorsed? How do these compare with magazines of the 1930s?

Compare the two Pond's ads below.

What are some similarities and differences?





Pond's cream ads, 1925 and 1991

SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*, Vol. 11 No. 12, 1925; April 1991.



What is being advertised in the product on the left?  
What do you think is the woman's occupation?

ANSWER: Fashion designer.

## 1994 magazine ad

SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*, May 1994.

Billboards are an ubiquitous sight in China and are used to advertise a variety of products.

*What do you notice about the text on the billboards below?*



Billboards in Beijing, 2000

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Patricia Ebrey, 2000.



*Does the use of images of women in the billboards below reflect western influence? Would similar ads appear in the US today?*



Billboards in Shanghai, 2001

Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy, 2001



Billboard claiming that its product "brings about change as soon as it is put on" and evoking "a beautiful body and an improved shape"

Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy, 2001