

# A Powerful Tool: How Graphic Design Plays into Chinese Propaganda

Since China has the largest propaganda system in the world, how does graphic design play into that? Especially when considering the history and the graphical elements used.

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## Abstract

This thesis paper is intended to share insight and knowledge about the visual elements and historical eras that make up Chinese propaganda. This is important to uncover, as their strategically designed propaganda *greatly* affected their targeted audience.

The study takes on a western sentiment, looking at two specific era's; The Mao Cult era and the Chinese Revolution. Both of these eras had bold political messages and propaganda design was at its peak.

The selected visual elements to be analyzed have been categorized into four; style, graphics, colour, and text. These have been used as guidelines for reviewing propaganda pieces from those two era's. The style is seen as their most important, as it had a domino effect on the other elements. The study shows what was the most popular style used, which was the Soviet realism style in the Mao Cult era, and a Cartoon style from the Revolution era. The graphics mainly showed false imagery of the ideal outcome. The focal point image was important so the message could be understood for the illiterate people. For colour, red was consistent as it has a significant positive message in China. Text was placed boldly and they were quotes from worshipped political leaders that could be inspiring.

It is clear that the designers carefully considered the desired outcome of the eras's political messages, and catered it to the elements to make it work. The propaganda from the two era's are quite similar but different in a few ways, nevertheless, each being impactful in their own right. However, the pieces do not hold the test of time, as they are outdated. Based on these results, it is seen why those propaganda pieces were so infamously indoctrinating citizens of China.

## Introduction

China has established itself as a powerhouse of a country, as quoted by famous French military leader Napoleon Bonaparte, “*China is a sleeping giant. Let her sleep, for when she wakes, she will move the world.*” (Ishino, 2009). In this modern day and age, China has ascended as one of the greatest powers economically and politically - as many countries will follow suit based on China's decisions alone, as they believe it will greatly improve their own status.

Even within the country, there are certain political and philosophical ideologies pushed onto the citizens who will *blindly* follow suite, believing that no matter what China decides, the outcome will bring prosperity, success, and other gifts. This may or may not be true, however, this ties into one of the reasons as to why China is considered powerful; it is one of the few most prominent countries that have a strong hold on propaganda.

Their propaganda is very effective when pushing a desired message to the target audience, yet still being beautiful enough to be kept as decoration (Chinese Posters, n/d.). Their propaganda is so aesthetically pleasing and interesting, that it is considered a collectible around the world.

This thesis study delves into answering the following question in detail: Since China has the largest propaganda system in the world, how does graphic design play into that? Especially when considering the history and the graphical elements used.

The paper will also have a nuance perspective of someone who is not natively or ethnically Chinese. This paper will automatically take on a more western approach to the topic, in opposition to Old China's notions. This could be an interesting take, as it would be more *approachable* to learn for others who are unfamiliar with the eastern country's ways. Since propaganda has varying reactions from the audiences, personal thoughts will be given. However, the paper will remain unbiased when it comes to political ideologies such as communism - as that is not the point of the paper, it is simply an analysis of the design aspect.

The literature review, it will showcase research from scholarly articles about the graphical elements used in the propaganda and *how* it was utilized. It will only look into four types of graphical elements that are broad enough to cover as much information and help explain why it is used in the way it was.

The literature review will also explain the purpose of propaganda and the psychological effects it had on the audience. It will contain objective facts about the historical eras of Mao Cult from the 1940's and the Chinese revolution starting from the 1990's. The gap between the two eras, will also help show the progression of Chinese design throughout the years and compare and contrast the differences and similarities, all based on the messages pushed and graphical elements.

As for the research, four different propaganda pieces from each era will be observed and information will be inputted in a chart with four different categories; style, graphics, colour, and text. These categories are the universal elements used in graphic design, as it applies to every country - no matter the preference. However, graphical elements are not limited to only those four, but for simplicity's sake only those four were selected as they are the most *common* elements, and it will be easier to understand. The research methodology will also unveil the people who are responsible for the creation, taking in account that their background will explain why they chose the technique and the impact the actual propaganda piece made.

The results, discussion provide personal opinions, deciphering the decision choices behind the propaganda and conclude if some information was true or false.

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## Literature Review

### Introduction

The structure of literature review is thematic. It is basically a how-to construct the perfect piece Chinese propaganda with the four design elements. Four elements that will be looked at are style, graphics/imagery, colour, and text. The utilization of each element has to work harmoniously with the others, in order to evoke a feeling that resonates and impacts the targeted audience. The application of these elements can depend on many factors which are - but not limited to; the era, the issue, targeted audience, and politics.

However, prior to getting into the *actual creation* of the pieces, the importance of pre-work needs to be emphasised. Pre-work will be about learning about what propaganda is and the significance of the two era's selected for their unique propaganda. The Mao Cult era wanted to push a communist regime, and one of the main points from the Chinese Revolution was to reject anything western and push nationalism. There are also laws and the target audience - being the citizens of China - to consider. This is important to understand as the graphical elements would be rendered useless or even used unwisely if not understanding the cultural context behind it, and when understood it could only be used creatively. Scholarly articles and textbooks related to graphic design, chinese propaganda, and Chinese history have thoroughly been researched to achieve the desired outcome of this structure.

### Understanding the Definition of Propaganda and the Target Audience

It is important to be knowledgeable about propaganda *as a whole* - prior to actually designing it. The definition of propaganda needs to be understood and how it psychologically affects the targeted audience. (Heller and Poyner, 2014). In Steven Heller and Rick Poyner's textbook "*The Fundamentals of Graphic Design*," they cover all the basics in graphic design and the rules that apply to propaganda. The textbook is especially useful as there is a whole section dedicated to propaganda; giving various examples of propaganda pieces from countries, and explaining the graphical choices behind it and why it is so effective.

The authors explain that propaganda is a powerful persuasive tool to push an agenda, rumour, argument, half-truth or a complete lie to the targeted audience. It is widely used within politics. However, In order to push the agenda, certain visual decisions have to be made by

knowing the targeted audience and catering the graphical elements to them. For example, political leader Mao Zedong from the Mao cult era wanted China to purrley be a communist country, please refer to Appendix A. for a picture of him. He just needed to portray his agenda effectively through propaganda, and they did so by showcasing *why* communism is right and the amazing *outcomes* of it. Chinese citizens during this time were already desperately finding a way for a happier life, so visually communicating a message to them about the amazing outcomes (Heller et al, 2014). In another article by Cassidy George, called "a Visual History of Chinese Propaganda from the 1920's to today," make notes that propaganda posters were made from designers of varying backgrounds, such as teachers, students, traditional chinese painters, folk artists - thus showing that propaganda affected everyone (George, 2020).

A Similar situation is Russia, which is also pro-communism and the case of World War II. Both these countries and time periods were stuck with a nihilistic situation, where there was little hope and lack of self, as it was a time of desperation as there was war, famine, massacres, and more. Propaganda prayed on the weak and was perfect for speaking to vulnerable people. It goes to show how important it is to know your audience and what to actually include in the propaganda to reel them (Heller, et al, 2014).

#### Prework: Looking into China's History and Cultural Way of Life

Now that the definition of propaganda and importance of knowing the target audience is established and understood, it is important to look into specifics of the country that the propaganda is being made for, and understand the true impact of it. Since this paper is specifically about China, the country's history, political ideologies, and graphic design style is important to consider. The type of research could be classified as preliminary work in the work process.

China was or can still be classified as anti-westernization and pro-communism. These two ideologies were established during two significant time periods: the Mao Cult Era (1949 - 1976) and the Anti-western sentiment (specifically looking at the uprising in 1990 - and on going) (Xiu Zhong Xu, 2019). It needs to be seen as why these eras were significant for the citizens of China and how graphic design played into that.

In a research paper written and conducted by Catherine Jo Ishino, she tries to answer the question: "does modernization [in China] equals westernization?" She noted that China didn't



show any western professional design until the 2008 Beijing Olympic games (Jo Ishino, 2009). She actually explains it through her western perspective and gives insight on China's graphic design from 1998 to 2008. The answer of if modernization equals westernization is quite subjective, however, Ishino points out how narcissistic it would be to correlate the two, alluding to the thought that China could be modern on its own and it has to adapt to western ideas and designs to progress in the world. It is not like new China - after communist party was abolished - only make cheap imitations of western country's designs.

China is also just a place where propaganda appears everywhere - due to the heavy political message. In another article written by Javier Hernandez titled "Propaganda Posters Dot the Chinese Capital," he documents his time living in Downtown Beijing, China - working as a journalist for the New York Times. He described how whenever he stepped outside his house he would see approximately 70 pieces of propaganda from his commute to the New York Times Bureau. All the pieces glorified President Xi Jinping. The pieces had quotes of Jinping's would include "*Chasing a dream*" that ties with the president's promises of making China the number one power in the world. It gives me the impression that China can be considered expert at creating propaganda as they have been doing it for *years*, and so *casually*. They already have the knowledge about what works and evolved over time to cater each message and audience.

In another study done by Ashley Esarey in her article called "*Support for Propaganda: Chinese perceptions of public service advertising*," she actually explains that as the world creeps more into the modern ages, physical visuals forms of propaganda started to die out and televised or announced propaganda became more of an efficient way to share a message and it reached out to China's urban population more (Esarey, 2016).

#### Pework Continued: Laws and Consequences

It has already been established that propaganda isn't just art, it is a visual form of communication. Heller and Poyner's textbook explains the general legality of graphic design, any art piece made for the public eye has limitations, rules, and consequences to consider if handled poorly. In the case of Chinese propaganda, it is a *huge* ordeal as any wrong doing could lead to serious consequences such as incarceration and torture (Heller, et al. 2014).

For example, during Mao's regime, laws were strict. The only propaganda that could be put out should only be about *his* agenda. So, the designers or publishing companies could face

jail time or even heinous acts of torture, if the propaganda came or wrong *or* they published propaganda that was *against* Mao's agenda (George, 2020). However, once Mao passed away in 1976, this was a huge shift for China as when Deng Xiaoping came into power, there were major reforms that could be subjectively positive. There was more openness to western ideas, allowing a general sense of creativity and free speech to peek through and take in more styles (George, 2020). All of this is important to keep in mind, as laws are constantly changing and without thorough research, there would be heavy life or death consequences.

### Graphical Element #1: Choosing the Right Style

Style is an important factor that connects to other design elements such as being, image, colours, text. These are universal elements that everyone uses when designing - but in their own unique way, which China does. Throughout years starting from the 20's in China - styles have changed then, depending on the social issue, as explained and exemplified further in Cassidy George's article "A Visual History of Chinese Propaganda, from the 1920's to today." Her article breaks down the factors and styles that make Chinese propaganda so impactful and relevant, as the title suggests she starts from the 20's and makes her way up to this modern day - explaining how styles and imagery have changed throughout, taking influences from other communist countries and how impactful China's country is in a whole, which ties everything in together.

The style in all Chinese propaganda pieces, whether it be brochures, posters, and more - should be consistent depending on the time period. China in the 30's and 70's, had a more colourful approach - which mimicked the Soviet realism style, used in other Soviet Union country's propaganda. Soviet realism consists of bold red texts of a message or quote, framed with a white border, and illustration of communist leaders in a semi-realism style, please refer to Appendix B. for an example of Russia's Soviet-realism posters (George, 2020).

After the law that hindered creative freedom was abolished, posters became more experimental in style, going into Scandinavian design, surrealism, cartoon-ish, and even western styles which was ironic due to China's anti-west stance. Styles will pertain to certain era's, different cultures or areas within China - and even outside of the country. For example, China could also send propaganda to any country such as Korea, and they may have to follow

Korea's style to subliminally get their message across Any change in style creates a domino effect of changes in other areas, such as colour, image, text, and more. (George, 2020).

### Graphical Element #2: Graphics/Imagery and Visual Hierarchy

Looking more into images or illustrations are one of the most important elements to consider when creating propaganda, up from the 1920 - till now - all the images and drawings capture the essence of the time period, only highlighting what was the relevant issue and what prosperity it could bring as an aftermath. Designers will often ask themselves various questions before or during designing, try to get in the head of the target audience, in order to showcase something enchanting and resonating that could manifest into the desired impact (Heller et al, 2014).

To analyze this further, Cassidy Goerge's article analyzing Chinese propaganda designs will be referred back to, along with the incorporation of a similar article written by Amy Jane Barnes titled "Chinese Propaganda posters at the British Library." In Barne's article, she goes into more depth about imagery in the propaganda.

For Mao cult era imagery, Mao Zedeng - who led the communist revolution was often put in the propaganda. He was displayed and sometimes *exaggerated* as this noble, brave, and God-like figure, which people can look up to and worship. China's pro-communist posters also had semi-realistic illustrations of handsome and brawny men holding red books or doing physical labour- which was associated with bravery and dominance, which could be considered inspiring (George, 2020). Propaganda would also include images of landscapes, mythological creatures called *Doaist immortals*, cartoon strips, or hand-painted flowers around images of workers, peasants, and soldiers (Barnes, 2020).

Some people liked to hang up their propaganda pieces, whether it be posters or brochures as home or room decor - so it was made that all the items be aesthetically pleasing, and by doing so, citizens would put it in homes, schools, factories, state buildings. It was so popular that more prints had to be made, luckily this was easy as it was cheap to produce (Barnes, 2020)

Visual hierarchy in imagery is important to consider as well, like what the main focal point is in the image, this is a question designers often ask themselves; *what should stand out?* The important piece of graphic would often be bigger than the rest of the graphics, placed in the centre, will be brighter or darker in colour than the rest. It is about where eyes *should* naturally

be drawn to (Barnes, 2020). For example, for the Mao Cult era - evidently Mao should be the focal point of the propaganda piece, please refer to Appendix C to see an example of this.

### Graphical Element #3: The Importance of Colour Theory

A key part of graphic design is colour theory, there is a lot to learn such as: complimentary, analogous, monochromatic colors scheme and choosing the right colour for the graphic, will help convey the overall message clearly and amplify its effect. Each colour sets a mood, as Chinese propaganda was often hung in office buildings, it inspired those who worked in corporate jobs as that type of job could be labelled as mundane and drab, the bright colours of the poster with a powerful message kept people motivated and brightened up their day.

In order to use colour for propaganda *correctly* to reach a certain audience, it is important to do research as certain colours are associated with different emotions and different cultures. Specifically looking at China, an example about the correlation between colour and country is given from referring back to Steven Heller and Rick Poynor's book about understanding the fundamentals of Graphic design. The book explains that in China, red symbolizes good fortune and joy - so red is a colour that is very much used in their posters and banners (Heller et al, 2014). So when wanting to portray a positive message, red is ideal. Red is also good for persuading people into ideologies that may not be morally good, but give the illusion that it is. This persuades the citizens of China into thinking that since it is red, the message they follow will eventually bring them good fortune.

However, using the wrong colour in a certain country, to convey a meaning will not give the desired effect but more so the opposite. As some colours may have a different meaning from one country to another, for example white represents purity, although in China it correlates with death. With a simple mistake of not thoroughly researching, it is more than just a casual lesson of colour theory it goes back to the law and it being a life or death situation if handled poorly.

### Graphical Element #4: The Power of Words/Text

Text may indirectly not be a graphical element - as it could be classified more so as writing. However it certainly is a vital part to include in the poster that could bring it to the next level. Simply by applying a powerful statement or quote from a leader or dictator, definitely helps make an impact on the target audiences who could potentially resonate with the text or be

curious enough to learn more. Referring back to Barners article, called "Chinese propaganda Posters at the British Library," she explains how during Mao Zedeng's regime, Mao was the voice of reason, and any of his words could be used for a slogan. His most popular slogan is "*Serve the People*" or "*Service of Present*," so those quoted were printed on a lot of propaganda pieces(Barners, 2020). However, She explains how posters with a lot of text did not click with the illiterate and rural parts of China, therefore it hindered the message getting across. The text had to be simple enough to understand or graphics had to be pushed in order for the illiterate to visually understand the message.

### **Conclusion**

Realizing the impact the propaganda is going to make before and after it is created, is key. The piece needs to show the effect of how it affected the audience or what could have been done. For the Mao Cult era from the 40's - they followed suit with the Soviet realism style, and used mainly graphics of Mao as God. This portrayed this era of China as suffering from a lack-of self and nihilism. During the Chinese revolution, the citizens of no matter what age, gender, or occupation, wanted China to have the upperhand - hence there being a high sense of nationalism. However, they needed to follow the ways of other countries before they got to know who they were as a country, for example copying styles, or movements, for example China following communism from other Soviet countries.

There were strict rules placed that hindered creative freedom and if any propaganda was published against the message that was being pushed, it could lead to severe life-threatening consequences. Fortunately, after the abolition of Mao Cult led to strict design rules being changed and there was more creative freedom interarms of style that would be experimented with over the years, hence the variety of styles in the Chinese revolution posters starting in the 90's. Even though there was more experimentation with styles, there were some consistency that undoubtedly worked, such as the continuous use of the colour red colour, symbolizing a lot of optimistic feelings. In combination with that, impactful graphics and illustrations depicting the aftermath of the message being pushed, was always in a positive light. Quotes from well-liked leaders or statements relevant to the times were often bolded, however due to illiteracy rates - graphics were definitely favoured as the element that would stand out and help those understand the message.

Overall, A lot was learned from these scholarly sources. They definitely helped in terms of finding technical information about China's specific choice of style, colour, graphics and text, as well as historical and political information about China during the two eras. The way China used these graphical elements helped make an emotional connection between the audience and the piece. They did so by sticking to a specific style, staying consistent with the colour red, and only showed positive imagery about the message being pushed, and inspiring from political leaders text.

## Methodology

For the research portion for this paper it was immediately known that data needed to be collected to confirm the research from the literature review. This approach will be qualitative, as the research will be done by analyzing propaganda by these four elements: style, colour, text, visuals. The elements were inputted in a chart on the left column and on the right columns, points and observations were written down on it - pertaining to each element. Doing this confirmed any design inconsistencies and vice versa. For example, it revealed how many times this style or colour was used; proving how well this design worked and if this style should be continued.

The posters to be analyzed are from the two eras selected; The Mao Cult and the Chinese Revolution, but specifically looking at the Revolution posters about anti-westernization. The two eras were selected because the propaganda is widely-known and there was a lot of information about it. The posters are memorable due to the way the graphical elements were used, which makes it stand out more. This is in opposition to looking at *modern* Chinese propaganda, which is the time where propaganda does not even look like traditional propaganda. The message that needs to be shared is portrayed more subtly, and the propaganda piece just looks like any other day item. It is certainly interesting to look at, but a lot harder to obtain information; which was not ideal for this paper.

The propaganda posters will serve as the primary sources of information, the posters were founded in the Shanghai Propaganda Art Centre. However, secondary sources about notable artists behind the propaganda piece were looked at. Looking at the artist's education and approach to design is considered important, as it explains why they chose this specific style or message. Additional information about the relevance of the piece and background knowledge has been looked into as well, for any key points that should be noted. All of this additional information about the artist and impact, was found in the scholarly text from the ryerson database and other various websites online.

The ultimate goal is to see why those posters were so relevantly impactful, by analyzing it into different elements in a chart, and learning about the artist and history behind it. Since the

Literature review already uncovered information about how China applied these graphical elements, it will be seen when analyzing those posters if there is any consistency and even compare the propaganda from the two eras to show any progression or major changes that look like what needed to be made.

Something that had to be considered when doing research are ethics in propaganda. This can be considered an obstacle because propaganda is a dangerous tool and it can easily be misconstrued. There also needed to be respect for China's ideologies, by not stating if it was right or wrong. Being politically correct is *not* the purpose of this paper, the paper needed to stay on track by *only* focusing on the impact of the poster based on the specific visual elements and design choices. In order to stay on track, most of the analysis about the text, quotes, and message behind the poster had to be based purely off objective information. Any criticism that had to be made, will be for the *design* aspect, not the politics.

Unfortunately, there was not enough time to contact many Chinese Graphic designers and journalists who have covered the topic of Chinese propaganda, and ones who were already contacted' a response never came about. It was believed that an interview from someone who is knowledgeable about the topic could be vital, as their knowledge and thoughts would add an interesting layer to this paper and provide more insight. However, due to lack of time this did not happen.

To compensate, more focus was put on finding more articles from the Ryerson database and web browsers. Various sources were visited such as chinese posters.net and Shanghai propaganda art, and an intriguing article written by Frank Langfitt called "The Art of Chinese Propaganda", and another article by Alex Shashkevich called "New Stanford exhibit showcases propaganda posters made during China's Cultural Revolution." The reason as to why these articles were *especially* useful was due to the fact that they showcased *many* examples of Chinese propaganda. Fortunately, they also linked the sources of those propaganda pieces; which lead to other articles of Propaganda. For example, looking at Langfitt's article, he linked sources of the images he used and found, and therefore led to finding Shanghaiposterartcenter.com. Each website linked to another displayed more pieces of propaganda and every useful information. Posters that were created by the same artist were used a lot as there was already a lot of information given about their design styles.



It was made sure that each propaganda piece analyzed showcased a different story or an idea, and not just look at posters of political leaders standing giant and proud with crowds cheering for them. Personally, that type of poster is very overdone and states the obvious. Propaganda pieces with the same political message can still be unique by having different images, style, colour and text, and gives more to analyze.

## Results

### Chinese Revolution Posters Analyzed

#### Exhibit A



Image source: [Shanghaipropagandaart.com](http://Shanghaipropagandaart.com)

#### Context

This is an anti-western war poster that was created in 1951. The creator behind the piece is unknown. This poster shows how strong the Chinese and Korean army soldiers are, and how they can overcome and defeat the west .

Visual Elements	Explanation
Style	Similar to Soviet realism style, however, it is its own style of realism.

Colours	Strong red colours, depicting joy and victory - appreciate colour as it shows the eastern countries winning
Graphics	The graphics are very interesting, a Chinese and Korean soldier are drawn as <i>giants</i> - representing the upper hand they have. The US soldiers are small and blue - almost like smurfs or aliens. Which goes with the notion that western ideology or anything western related is foreign and <i>odd</i> . The US soldier is holding the flag and running away in fea, all bloody and bruised. There’s also blatant <i>racism</i> , because in the poster an African American man is drawn in a stereotypical caricature, who’s also smushed underneath military vehicles - symbolizing how he's the weakest of the bunch.
Text	<i>“Long Live Victory of Korean People’s Army.”</i>

Impact

Inspiring to those to join the army, targeting the average Chinese and Korean man - no matter what occupation. This would hit hard for extreme nationalists and for those who were poor famrers, it has this misleading message that China could win and everything will come out fine and dandy, with zero repercussions. However, that is not the reality of it. Yes, China and Korean would plausibly come out superior, however the poster glorifies war and shadows all the repercussions of being a soldier, like all the trauma, physical injuries, and having sheer blindness to reality.

Exhibit B



Image source: Shanghaipropagandaart.com

Context

This poster was created in 1970, and it is actually an ad for a Modern revolutionary ballet. It was a way of making profit, for the ballet and spreading a political message, essentially killing two birds with one stone.

Visual Elements	Explanation
Style	Mix of photography and realism
Colours	Bright colours, of course the staple red is a must. There's blues and greens as well, nothing dark. Blue is a colour of wisdom and inspiration, while the green symbolizes growth and harmony (Color Meaning, n.d.).
Graphics	Propaganda depicts ballet dancers elegantly in

	<p>stance, holding a gun. The images give a serenity type of feeling despite the guns, which in contrast, guns give more of an intense type feeling. The dancers are in daytime with pretty trees.</p>
<p>Text</p>	<p><i>"The Red Detachment of Women."</i></p>

Impact

This is a notion of encouraging the female audience to join the fight, and brainwash people into seeing war as an artistic art form.

Exhibit C



Image source: Huckmag.com



Context

This poster was created in 1961. The designer and the dimensions of the piece is unknown

Visual Elements	Explanation
Style	Cartoon style
Colours	Warm tones, consistening or red, yellow, and orange. Makes posters for inviting, and evokes a joyful feeling.
Graphics	Depicts farmers, male and females, harvesting crops. They’re carrying crops and blocks of steel in a brave manner, showing courage and dignity.
Text	“Guarantee the Grain Harvest”

Impact

This poster seemed to be targeted mainly for farmers or those to help out with farming. Since they portray the workers in the poster with god-like power, carrying heavy crops, they’re making it seem like the job is very easy to do.

Exhibit D



Image source: Shanghaipropagandart.com

Context

This poster was created in 1967, is 79.5x53.5 cm in dimensions and is a part of the IISH collection, it was published in Wuhan. This poster is about the overthrow of Dadao Peng Dehuai, Lao Ruiqing, Chen Zaidao, Liao Laotan. Peng was the Marshal of the People’s Liberation Army and fought against Mao Lauo was the chief of Staff of the PLA, and he attempted suicide after being accused of various crimes (Chinese Posters, n.d.).

Visual Elements	Explanation
Style	Line Art, Cartoon style, and simplistic
Colours	The interesting thing about this poster is the red is the single colour used. The red serves a highlighter for the graphics that are the most important. Such as the soldiars being the only people covered in red, then the people getting prosecuted.
Graphics	<p>Depicts soldiers/policemen/higher authority, one of them is clutching all four of those men. They’re depicted as perpetrators, very small and vulnerable. The second soldier is also pointing the rifle at the men also.</p> <p>One of the soldiers is holding a white book which consists of laws, that the four men have seemingly broken. Even though they might or might have not done such crimes.</p>
Text	<i>“Overthrow Peng Dehuai, Lao Ruiqing, Chen Zaidao, Liao Laotan!”</i>

Impact

The purpose of the poster was to basically turn the masses' side against those four men, depicting them as cowards. Justifying that’s a good thing they are being prosecuted by the army, who are bigger and more powerful - seen as the true leaders who can help the country.

## Mao Cult Posters

### Exhibit A



Image source: [chinese posters.com](http://chinese posters.com), Mao Cult Posters

#### Context

Created in 1970 and the publisher is Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe. The exact designer or number of designers is known. The height is 53x77 cm, and this piece is from the Landsberger collection. Stefan R. Landsberger (1955), was a trained sinologist at a university, and he was greatly fascinated with Chinese propaganda. He decided to start a collection, which ended up being the biggest propaganda collection in the world. He used those posters for his own Ph.D research. This poster is a part of his collection, on which he did extensive research on (Chinese Posters, n.d.).



Visual Elements	Explanation
Style	Soviet realism
Colours	A lot of red
Graphics	<p>People cheering on the Tiananmen Square in Beijing, it could most likely be assumed that they're cheering for Mao.</p> <p>An interesting thing to note is that the first few people are holding little red books. These red books are called "The Quotations from Chairman Mao, the Mao Zhuxi Yulu" The title of the book speaks for itself, Mao simply quotes Marxist ideologies which the public took as words of wisdom.</p>
Text	<i>"Love live chairman Mao! Long, long live!"</i>

#### Impact

This poster is the most straight-forward and simplistic of the bunch. It just depicts Mao and Stalin as giant God-like figures, with the flags waving in front of them.

## Exhibit B



Image source: chinese-posters.com, Mao Cult Posters

### Context

This was created in 1954, designed by Ding Hao, Zhao Yannian, and Cai Zhenhua. This poster was published by Huadong Renmin Meishu Chubanshe. It is 76x53.5 cm tall. Ding Hao taught at the Shanghai Art Training school, and he became the head of designing propaganda images for the publishing company called Shanghai people's Fine Arts Publishing House. Zhao Yannian also studied art, a notable thing about him is that he studied *both* western and Chinese art, which is quite interesting as it is established that China is anti-western, so he since he studied both ways, he was probably cautious and education on the the impact of western art and Westernization in general. Zhao also taught art, being a professor of Central Academy of Fine

arts, he was also a member of the council of the Chinese Artists Association. Lastly, Cai Zhenhua was always interested in American techniques in art and enrolled in Hangzhou Xihu College and worked as an independent designer after. After 1949, he did some work for the Chinese-Soviet friendship Hall in Shanghai. Those three designers often collaborated together, as it worked well together (Chinese Posters, n.d.).

Visual Elements	Explanation
Style	Soviet-realism
Colours	There are tons of colors, especially coming from the fruits. The text this time is not read, but in front of a red banner.
Graphics	Shows Mao surrounded by construction machines, industrial plants, and a row of vegetables and fruits right in front of him. The things around Mao could represent what he could bring when he is elected and one follows him.
Text	<p><i>“Turn China into a prosperous, rich and powerful industrialized socialist country under the leadership of the Communist party and Chairman Mao!”</i></p> <p>It is important to note that not all Chinese scripture, or specifically “Shanghai Hua” a dialect spoken in Shanghai (Chinahighlights, n.d.). Words will not be translated verbatim, but this is the appropriate translation that makes sense in the English language. Some words could mean something else.</p>

Impact

As mentioned before, this poster simply represents what Mao promises to deliver, like more fresh produce would be available, innovative technology and more places to live. This visual graphic helps convince people, and possibly manifest it into reality if more people believe in him and follow.

Exhibit C



Image source: Stanford.edu

Context

This poster was created in 1951, depicting the celebration of the Chinese communist party. This is *one of the 50* posters created to depict colourful scenes of celebration that denounces capitalism, as well as having images of Mao in it. The technical information about this poster is unknown, like who made it and the dimensions.

Visual Elements	Explanation
Style	It is a hybrid between cartoon-ish style and semi-realism. Not classified as traditional Soviet realism. This is more of a unique style that China adhered to.
Colours	There is a range of colours, very bright. Ranging from red, blues, greens, and yellow. In China yellow corresponds with royalty, green also represents wealth in Chin. These colours harmoniously and all the meanings

	goes to show how much joy there comes if communism is followed.
Graphics	Depicts a large crowd cheering for pro-communist political leaders, Mao of course being in there as one of the key figures. He and other political leaders stand in a stadium. The crowds are cheering loudly looking above and everyone is happy and joyous.
Text	<p><i>“Celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Birth of the Chinese Communist Party.”</i></p> <p>This same caption was written on the other 50 posters.</p>

#### Impact

Showcases a sense of togetherness, how a whole country could come together and be successful into pushing a political theory. Which is the whole point of propaganda, bringing in a lot of people together.

### Exhibit E



Image source: chinese posters.com, Mao Cult Posters

#### Context

This was created by Xin Liliang in 1954, it is from IISH collection and it is 78x53 cm tall. Xin Liliang designed commercial adverts for Shanghai Shengsheng Fine Arts Company, he also made film posters, he joined Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House in 1959.

Visual Elements	Explanation
Style	Soviet realism
Colours	There seems to be consistent use of green, blues and yellow.
Graphics	Depicts a happy family, in a spacious house

	<p>eating good food together. Everyone is enjoying eachothers company and are healthy. The imagery evokes a sense of happiness. There’s also an uncanny image of Mao hanging on their wall, as if he’s a part of the family.</p>
Text	<p><i>“Chairman Mao gives us a happy life”</i></p>

Impact

This poster projects an image that could be manifested into reality if families follow suite with the political ideology of communism. Just like the way the families are smiling in the poster, families in real life could feel the same and be braced with prosperity.



## Discussion

### Interpretation

There are several things to note from these poster assessments and the charts, most posters were designed by actual graphic designers who have studied the fine arts, some of them are knowledgeable about western-art which is useful. This only makes sense, since propaganda is a professional piece of graphic and it requires a lot of visual and technical skill. Most of it is made in Shanghai as well, as it shows that most of the artists have studied there.

Chinese revolution posters have a variety of styles, moreso cartoon-ish as they exaggerate certain characters. For example, the designated enemies - whether it be western enemies such as the American Soldiers in exhibit A, or political leaders from Exhibit D, the enemy is always portrayed as small, vulnerable and alien-like. It almost sets a humorous tone, which is perfect for grabbing the attention of children. The winning team, usually the Chinese soldiers are depicted as giant, very strong with muscles, and always attacking the opponent. This gives an illusion for the audience, projecting their biased views onto the audience and getting them onto the winning team, whether they're actually winning or not.

Mao posters consistently used the Soviet-realism style, which only confirms that it was the staple style for all communist parties. It was easy to tell what is a communism poster and what is not. It also mainly had graphics depicting the aftermath of Mao being followed or why he *should* be followed, for example the poster with the family was the most prominent. Personally, graphics from the Revolution era were much more interesting, eye catching and experimental. Using the same style all the time is redundant and not as eye catching anymore - which is definitely ineffective when wanting to grab attention.

The same thing could be said about color. At this point it is known that red is the most prominent colour but again could be repetitious. In this modern day, red is a dead giveaway that the piece displayed is in fact propaganda, due to how the colour is used so much Modern propaganda today is subtle in message, even if it is bright in colours, there is more variety to make the message or agenda less explicit.

Text, even though written boldly in Chinese characters - it is never too overbearing, it is commendable that the graphics are the focal point of any poster so it is more inclusive for those who cannot read or young children who do not understand the text yet. Of course, text is important too, however, considering some people in China - such as the farmers, visit Exhibit C



in Chinese revolution part - were illiterate, so the message would come across clearly through graphics, as anyone would universally understand a visual message.

### Implications

Overall, the results do correlate with the research that has been done. Especially when it comes to the impact of propaganda. This information is crucial as this propaganda has swayed people into joining sides and even devoting their whole life to it. It is quite unnerving and almost sinister that someone like Mao was once worshipped so much, like a God. He affected the lives of many families and generations to come, referring back to Exhibit E to the Mao Cult posters. Propaganda just shows very powerfully how a piece of paper with a graphic and some text can impact a whole society - let alone a country - like that. Of course, there goes a lot of thought into making propaganda, it is a manipulative intent which can be cunning and needed to make my people intelligent in that graphic and psychological field, going back to the artists who studied art in Shanghai.

### Limitations

Unfortunately while looking for propaganda pieces, posters were mainly found in opposition to other mediums such as brochures, billboards, and more - except for the one ad which exhibited B for the Chinese Revolution posters. This is an issue because other mediums have the ability to display new kinds of information in different ways, but due to limited time and resources, this could not get looked into more. It also would have been nice to see how graphic design styles are applied differently to different materials. For example, which type of paper did they use? What would happen to the posters if it rained and the ink bled? Was there a special ink they used? All these things are considered important in terms of design as well. These questions remain unanswered due to these limitations. Also some of the data came out redundant - it certainly confirmed the research from the literature review, however there were not much new insights given.

### Recommendations

Further research on modern Chinese propaganda starting from the 21st century, is needed to showcase the progression in the country's graphic design, furthering the impact of the propaganda and what visual elements still hold the test of time. It is aware that the Mao Cult era

and vintage Chinese Revolution propaganda are the face of all Chinese propaganda - however, there should be more information on the current time period. It needs to be seen how China currently showcases their propaganda and what were the actual lessons learned to improve the designs.

## Conclusion

China is definitely in its own power, the country knows what works and what doesn't when persuading people with propaganda. The design aspect of propaganda in general is very overlooked, it is important to understand why. Chinese propaganda is so impactful through their visuals which implement specific styles, colours, graphics, texts have been consistently used for years; because it *works*. That does not mean there is no progression, as China grew as a country, their design styles were a lot more open and experimented. They know what they wanted to *show* and *say* based on the illustrations and text showcased. It was clear the designers knew what to do based on their educational background and the significant events of China. All these factors helped make the right decision choices when capturing the target audiences attention.

It is almost horrific how much thought went into it to push a potential lie, and possibly put everyone's lives in danger. But the time and thought that goes into propaganda can't help but be commendable. The study of the design of propaganda - not just Chinese propaganda, but propaganda as a *whole*, should be pushed. This will allow the world to learn and reflect for any major life-changing events in the future.

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## Appendix



Appendix A. Mao Zedong, Face of the Chinese communist revolution and founder of the People's Republic of China. His face appeared in a lot of Propaganda, showing him surrounded by adoring crowds, almost depicting him as a god-like figure. Image courtesy: Alphahistory.com



Appendix B. This is an example of a Soviet Realism Poster, a common style pro-communist countries used. This picture showcases Joseph Stalin, with a quote in bold red texts surrounded by adoring people. Posters of Mao Zedong are depicted like this too. Image Courtesy: Flickerriver.com



我們偉大勝利的旗幟毛澤東和斯大林

Appendix C. Image depicts Mao and Stalin standing tall, leading the future of communism. The image has a lot of red, especially through the flags - the communist one and the China one. Even the text is most notably red, as it has a symbolic meaning and is the most eye catching. Image Courtesy: npr.org