

Curriculum Project
Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar 2013
China

**Critical Analysis and Appropriation of Compositional
Strategies Utilized in Chinese Cultural Revolution
Propaganda Posters from 1966 to 1976**

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Introduction and overview of project

Project title: Critical Analysis and Appropriation of Compositional Strategies Used in Chinese Cultural Revolution Propaganda Posters from 1966 to 1976

Targeted audience: This project is designed for students in a college level 2-Dimensional Design or Digital Art course. However, the project can be modified to become applicable to students in a college level art appreciation or art history course by excluding the artwork creation component.

Project overview:

Students will become familiar with propaganda posters used in China from 1966 to 1976. This investigation will focus on the role of propaganda art as a political device, which has the power to influence society towards the ruling party's ideological and political stance. This project will focus on the period of the Cultural Revolution in China from 1966 to 1976. Through this inquiry, students will become aware of the major political, economic and societal shifts that occurred during this era and why. This investigation will reinforce the role of art as a tool but also how art is a reflection of society and that the idea of its shape is often not divorced from the factors that define each era. It is essential for students to become informed about Chinese history so as to aid in the decoding of visual iconography within the artwork. The propaganda posters will be broken into 2 major groups based on stylistic approaches and subject matter present. These two categories, which I've broadly classified, are:

1. Power
2. Benevolence

Alongside identifying subject matter present within the images, students will analyze the compositional strategies utilized in the works of art and will evaluate their effectiveness in relation to the assumed goal of the artworks. Upon completion of the former, students will be introduced to contemporary Chinese culture, concerns, shifting ideals and realities. Through this introduction, students will isolate a topic of contemporary Chinese culture that interests them and which will become the focus of their uniquely designed propaganda artwork. Students will research their selected contemporary Chinese topic and create a propaganda artwork in response. Through their previously executed critical analysis of compositional strategies used in propaganda posters from the Cultural Revolution, students will appropriate similar techniques, while also focusing attention on contemporary aesthetic values and media choices in an effort to increase relevancy to modern society.

1. Power



Designer unknown

1968

The 3 July and 24 July proclamations are Chairman Mao's great strategic plans! Unite with forces that can be united with to strike surely, accurately and relentlessly at the handful of class enemies

Publisher unknown

Size: 105.5x75.5.

Call number: BG E13/856 (Landsberger collection)

<http://www.chinese-posters.net/posters/e13-856.php>

2. Benevolence



Designer: Suh Guocheng

1974

Reporting to Chairman Mao

Xiang Mao zhuxi huibao

Publisher: Shanghai renmin chubanshe

Size: 53x77 cm.

Call number: BG E13/451 (Landsberger collection)

<http://www.chinese posters.net/posters/e13-451.php>

Learning outcomes:

- To learn about propaganda art and its use as a powerful political mechanism.
- To become familiar with major historical events and periods in contemporary Chinese history.
- To become familiar with Chinese culture and Chinese artistic practices.
- To become familiar with contemporary China and its varied challenges, ideals, contrasts, and changes.
- To practice critical thinking through:
 - Analysis of 2-dimensional compositional strategies
 - Decoding of visual iconography to discern content
 - Investigation of visual communication
 - Studying the role and impact of propaganda art to affect change, thinking, and/or the masses
 - Evaluating the impetus and purpose for creating artworks used for political gain within a specific historical context
 - The distillation of major societal concepts into image based art: static or temporal.
 - Utilizing research methodologies as a way of informing the creation of artwork.
- To marry “old” with “new”

<u>Old</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Styles-Ideals-Societal concerns/realities-Media (printmaking)-Compositional techniques	<u>New</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-formats (temporal versus static)-shifting ideals-societal concerns/realities-media (digital media, new methods)-contemporary issues
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Project implementation:

Project Modules

1. Discussion of propaganda art

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/propaganda

Discussion questions:

- What is propaganda art?
- What is the purpose of propaganda art?
- Who often commissions propaganda art?
- Who is the audience for propaganda art?
- What is the impact of effective propaganda art?
- Is art with a political agenda equal in value to more traditional art formats and/or standard subject matter in art?
- What is soft power?
- What is the role of art in a political arena?

2. Historical Context: Introduction and discussion of contemporary Chinese history: the period of the Cultural Revolution.

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Revolution

www.modernhistoryofchina.com

Discussion questions:

- When did the Cultural Revolution occur?
- Why did the Cultural Revolution occur?
- Who was the ruling party during this period?
- Who were the major leaders during the Cultural Revolution?
- What changes were occurring in Chinese society during this period?
 - Politically
 - Economically
 - Spiritually/religiously
 - Technologically
 - Agriculturally
- Why were these changes occurring?

3. Introduction and discussion of 2 styles of propaganda posters created during the Cultural Revolution: Power and Benevolence

www.shanghaipropagandaart.com

www.chinese posters.net

Discussion questions:

Power

- How is power reflected in art? Themes? Subject matter?
- Why would the ruling party and its leaders want to communicate power?
- What design strategies are used in this style of propaganda of artwork?
 - Coloration: saturated primary colors, particularly red (red-art style)
 - Bold and graphic imagery
 - High contrast
 - Exaggerated proportions and subtle abstraction
 - Dynamic emphasis through diagonals and implied motion
 - Hierarchical scale
 - Font style
 - Placement of figures within picture plane
- How do these design strategies align with the subject matter present?

Benevolence

- How is benevolence reflected in art? Themes? Subject matter?
- Why would the ruling party want to communicate benevolence?
- What design strategies are used in this style of propaganda artwork?
 - Coloration: soft, gentle, "romantic" palette
 - Humanistic/realistic proportions and features
 - Idealism
 - Lush settings
 - Father/shepherd role depicted
 - Little/no font utilized
- How do these design strategies align with the subject matter present?

4. Introduction and Discussion of Modern China: post 1976

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lqdV5EfByg>

- What impact has the Cultural Revolution had on contemporary China?
- What societal changes are occurring in today's China?
 - Politically
 - Economically
 - Ecologically

- Socially
- Agriculturally

Possible topics to research:

- Urbanization
- Environmental destruction
- Single child policy
- Shift from community to individual
- Filial piety
- Censorship
- Growing middle class
- Migrant workers
- Marriage
- Gender inequality
- Spirituality
- Pressure for success

5. Introduction and discussion of personal research and artwork creation

- On what theme of contemporary China do you want to concentrate?
- What methodologies will be utilized to research this topic?
- How can these issues be communicated through visual art?
- What type of effect do you want your artwork to provoke?
- What materials will best communicate your ideas and/or what materials will have the most impact?
- What compositional strategies will you appropriate from Chinese propaganda posters from the Cultural Revolution to create your artwork, which addresses a contemporary Chinese theme?

Artwork limitations:

- Must be 2-Dimensional in format
- Static images must be approximately 14" x 17" in dimension or equivalent
- Must utilize compositional strategies from Cultural Revolution propaganda posters
- Must address a specific aspect of contemporary China
- Must display good craftsmanship
- Must display thoughtful and well conceived commentary on the topic
- Must display thorough research and analysis through sketchbook ideation exercises and usage

6. Critique and discussion

-Utilizing the Feldman Method of art criticism, address the following topics in the public presentation of the artwork

<http://itismath.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Feldmans-method.pdf>

- Description
- Analysis
- Interpretation
- Judgment

-Included in the public presentation will be a description of the research methodologies utilized along with how the research impacted opinion and commentary reflected in the artwork.

-Each student will publicly present their artwork to the class, after which each member of the class will respond with commentary based on the Feldman method.

Project description

Critical Analysis and Appropriation of Compositional Strategies Utilized in Chinese Cultural Revolution Propaganda Posters from 1966 to 1976.

Based on the investigation into the role, methods, techniques of propaganda poster art from the Cultural Revolution in China, create your own form of propaganda art that addresses a current issue in contemporary China (post 1976). Reference the list below for a starting point of what topic you might be interested in researching.

- Urbanization
- Environmental destruction
- Single child policy
- Shift from community to individual
- Filial piety
- Censorship
- Growing middle class
- Migrant workers
- Marriage
- Gender inequality
- Spirituality
- Pressure for success

Isolate a contemporary topic facing today's Chinese society and research it. This research will assist in the formulation of one's own opinion or commentary surrounding the topic. It is important to select a topic in which one is genuinely interested so that one's artwork conveys the sincerity and thoughtfulness expected.

Any media or combination of media may be utilized so long as the finished composition is 2-Dimensional. Think about the relationship of the materials to the concept and the compositional strategies used in the posters from the Cultural Revolution.

Scale: 14" x 17" or equivalent

Along with the completed projects, students are required to display their research methodologies in their sketchbook accompanied with a series of thoughtful compositional investigations in sketch format.

Completed compositions will be presented in a formal critique session where peers and the Professor will have the opportunity to verbally analyze and discuss the artwork and concepts shaping the finished piece.

Evaluation

Research

- Topic well investigated
- Display of research
 - Articles provided
 - Links provided
 - Notes provided
 - Images provided
- Display of opinion/stance regarding issue and informed by research

Sketches

- Quantity
- Quality
- Display of explorative investigation

Composition

- Displays appropriation of compositional strategies used in propaganda posters during the Cultural Revolution
- Addresses a specific aspect of contemporary China
- Displays good craftsmanship
- Displays thoughtful and well conceived commentary on the topic
- Meets required scale and format
- Relevancy of compositional choices and coloration
- Concept is apparent based on iconography present
- Perceived effort and commitment

Critique and discussion

- The artwork was professionally presented
- The fundamental concepts were clearly explained
- Thoughtful remarks were offered and accepted

Resources

Chinese History and Culture

Chinafaqs

<http://chinafaqs.org/>

Chinaculture.org

<http://chinaculture.org/>

Cultural Revolution information

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Revolution

History of China information

www.modernhistoryofchina.com

Modern China history timeline

www.faculty.washington.edu/stevehar/timeframe.html

China Profile

www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13017882

Chinese art

Propaganda in the People's Republic of China

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda_in_the_People's_Republic_of_China

Chinese Propaganda - Mao's Impact on Contemporary Art

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2Ep14tNj4U>

The Art Of Chinese Propaganda

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/pictureshow/2012/11/16/164785930/the-art-of-chinese-propaganda>

Chinese Revolutionary Art

<http://chineserevolutionaryart.blogspot.com/>

Propaganda art museum

www.shanghaipropagandaart.com

Chinese propaganda posters
www.chinese posters.net

Modern China

Looking for Love-China
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGTfjtyVUCw>

Introduction to China in 10 minutes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lqdV5EfByg>

Critical Analysis of Art

Feldman Method of Art Criticism
<http://itismath.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Feldmans-method.pdf>

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following institutions and individuals for making the Fulbright-Hays Seminar Study trip to China a success.

U.S. Department of Education

National Committee on United States-China Relations

Ms. Carly Borgmeier

Ms. Hu Di

Ms. Margot Landman

Dr. Stanley Rosen

Mr. Guanjun Zhai

My colleagues in the Fulbright-Hays Seminar group