

Propaganda Posters in the Chinese Cultural Revolution

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Senior Division
Individual Exhibit
Process Paper: 499 words
Exhibit: 492 words

Last year, when I was in eighth grade, I read a book in my class called *Red Scarf Girl*. This book is a memoir by Ji-Li Jiang on her growing up during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. I was inspired by her story to choose Propaganda Posters in the Chinese Cultural Revolution as my topic for this year's National History Day competition. My topic for NHD had to be something I was passionate about and something that would keep my interest throughout the whole year. The history of the Cultural Revolution, through the art of propaganda posters was one that would keep my interest.

I started my research by going through Ji-Li's memoir and looking for references to propaganda, especially the specific Propaganda Wall she mentions in Shanghai. I read through the history of the Cultural Revolution in books and through online sources and searched the school's databases for newspaper articles and accounts of the event. Because my topic is quite visual, I looked for examples of propaganda posters that contained slogans as messages to the Chinese people. They feature men and women praising Chairman Mao Zedong and encouraging others to follow him and his ideas for the Cultural Revolution. I found quotes from Mao on how propaganda is a valuable tool that should be used and words from his successors, who offer their support for Mao's Cultural Revolution. It was fascinating to research this topic and learn about the dangers of political posters.

Since my topic about propaganda posters is so visual, I decided to choose the exhibit category for my project. I compiled the posters and slogans and displayed them on the board. I also have a deck of communist slogan cards I received from a friend who visited China, and I will lay them by my board as the visual object and also use mini close pins to make a banner of slogans in the middle of my board. I painted the background of my board black to display the propaganda posters, text, pictures, and quotes on. I mounted all of these elements onto red and

white matting and then I trimmed the audio of a phone interview with Ji-Li Jiang that I was so glad to have done with her. Along the process of the contest, I revised my project based on helpful feedback I received by rearranging the items, adding quotes and Chinese flags, and improving the text boxes.

My topic, which is Propaganda Posters in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, argues that the propaganda posters were crucial in spreading messages to the Chinese people about the Cultural Revolution. They were used as a tool by Mao and the Chinese Communist Party to remind people of their goals. It relates to the topic of this year's NHD theme of Communication: The Key to Understanding, because the posters and slogans were used in this way of communicating the message of the movement to the people, so that they would never forget the intention of the Cultural Revolution.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Boyle, Joe. "11 Slogans That Changed China." *BBC News*, BBC, 26 Dec. 2013, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-24923993, Accessed Oct 29.

This article contains multiple primary source slogans used during the Cultural Revolution, like "Smash the four olds." I used this slogan in my paper to provide a primary source that would bring the Revolution's history to life in a specific and helpful way.

Buckley, Chris, et al. "Voices From China's Cultural Revolution." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 16 May 2016, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/16/world/asia/17china-cultural-revolution-voices.html, Accessed January 19.

This extremely helpful article from the New York Times features several people talking about their experiences in the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Just hearing their personal accounts gives you a window into their lives at the time. I used some of their quotes for my textboxes.

"Chinese Propaganda Posters." *Chinese posters.net*, chineseposters.net/. Accessed October 28.

This website was one of my main resources for Chinese propaganda posters. It contains thousands of posters and slogans of the Cultural Revolution. I am going to use a few of their images to put in my NHD exhibit.

"Develop the 'Basket on the Back Spirit', Serve the People Wholeheartedly."
Chinese posters.net, chineseposters.net/posters/pc-1966-007, Accessed Oct 28.

This link brings you to a propaganda poster from 1960. It is a primary source image that depicts a man carrying a basket backpack with the slogan under him saying "Develop the 'Basket on the Back Spirit', Serve the People Wholeheartedly."

Feng, Jiayun. "Hilariously Aggressive Covid-19 Propaganda Banners in China." *SupChina*, 3 June 2020, supchina.com/2020/02/11/all-the-hilariously-aggressive-coronavirus-banners-found-in-china/ Accessed May 15.

This primary source contains slogans from China during the COVID-19 pandemic. I used not only an image, but also the slogan in the "Significance" part of my project. It was


helpful to see the impacts of propaganda and modern versions of it right before my eyes.

Jiang, Ji-Li. Personal Interview. 16 January 2021.

I was so privileged to have this interview with Ms. Jiang. Her book was the inspiration for my topic, and just hearing her explain the Cultural Revolution and the propaganda of the time helped me understand the topic better. She was able to walk me through the propaganda in her city in the Cultural Revolution and describe the looks of the posters on every wall. I used the audio of the interview in my exhibit.

Jiang, Ji-Li. *Red Scarf Girl*. HarperCollins Publishers Inc. , 1997.

This book is Ji-Li Jiang's memoir of her experience as a twelve-year-old during the Cultural Revolution. This primary source helped me understand the perspective of one growing up during this time on a deeper level. Her book was the reason I was inspired to pick this topic of Propaganda Posters in the Chinese Cultural Revolution and was how I learned of Propaganda walls. It is from where I pull the most information for my paper and I certainly recommend the book.

Lab, King's Digital. “Image Big-Character Poster: Hong Kong Ta Kung Pao Article.” *Big-Character Poster: Hong Kong Ta Kung Pao Article | Mao Era in Objects*, maoeraobjects.ac.uk/sources/big-character-poster-hong-kong-ta-kung-pao-article/.

This primary source contains an image of a newspaper article from the 1960s. It is slightly different from the topic of the Cultural Revolution, but it showed me how the Chinese at that time used propaganda so frequently. I was able to see the time through the eyes of a reporter alive during the events.

“Purge, Related Crises Hint China Reshaping (May 1966).” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, documents.latimes.com/purge-related-crises-hint-china-reshaping-may-1966/, Accessed January 19.

I was fortunate to find these newspaper articles through the school's databases. This particular one is about the Chinese Communist Party wanting to purge China of any capitalist ideas. It is helpful to have articles written at the time that paint a picture of what was going on in China.

“Surviving China's Cultural Revolution.” *Asian American Writers' Workshop*, 14 June 2017, aaw

w.org/surviving-chinas-cultural-revolution/, Accessed January 19.

This is a personal account of a witness from the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Qijian Wang describes his life and scarring experience at the time. He also includes two propaganda posters to further explain the era. I used his experience to get a deeper look and a personal account of one affected by the socialist revolution in China.

“Quotations: the Cultural Revolution.” *Chinese Revolution*, 13 June 2019, alphahistory.com/chinese-revolution/quotations-cultural-revolution/.

This website contains various quotes from the Cultural Revolution. Some are quotes from Mao Zedong and other leaders and the other quotes come from witnesses of the Revolution. I used a few of them in my exhibit as first-hand witnesses of the event.

Secondary Sources

“Cultural Revolution.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/event/Cultural-Revolution, Accessed Oct 1.

This article helped me to gather basic facts concerning the Chinese Cultural Revolution and provided me with a thorough overview. It is a secondary source and I used it to see the progression of the Revolution from beginning to end.

George, Cassidy. “A Visual History of Chinese Propaganda.” *Huck Magazine*, 2 Apr. 2020, www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/art-2/coronavirus-communism-posters-history-chinese-propaganda/, Accessed January 19.

This secondary source article, true to its title, is a visual look into the Cultural Revolution and includes several propaganda posters. I used it to look into the history of the Revolution, specifically with the posters.

Kort, Michael. *China Under Communism*. Millbrook Press, 1994.

This book contains the growth of communism through China's history. I used this secondary source only for its section on the Cultural Revolution and it is where I acquired the quote from Premier Zhou Enlai on the beginning of the Revolution.

Landín, César. "MAO'S CULT OF PERSONALITY AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION." *share.nanjing-School.com/*, May 2013, cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/share.nanjing-school.com/dist/d/75/files/2013/06/Extended-Essay_February_Cesar-Landin-2403vg5.pdf, Accessed January 21.

This was a pdf of an essay I found on an investigation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution written by a student named César Landín. It was helpful to read someone's take on the revolution and read about the history of the time, as I have mostly been focusing on the propaganda side. However, I mostly read the parts in the essay about propaganda posters.

"Mao Zedong." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 22 Dec. 2020, www.britannica.com/biography/Mao-Zedong, Accessed October 1.

This is a straight-forward article from Encyclopædia Britannica about Mao Zedong, the former Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party. It talks about his life growing up as a peasant, and the tremendous role he played in the Chinese Cultural Revolution as the one who started it all. I was able to learn about basic facts about him from this article.

Mittler, Barbara. "Popular Propaganda? Art and Culture in Revolutionary China." *www.jstor.org/*, American Philosophical Society, Dec. 2008, www.jstor.org/stable/40541604?seq=5#meta_data_info_tab_contents, Accessed January 19.

This is a journal article from Barbara Mittler on Chinese propaganda. She describes the manipulation of propaganda and the way Mao Zedong used the tool to brainwash his people from 1966-1976. I used her knowledge on the subject to learn about the time better.

"Red Guards." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/Red-Guards, Accessed October 1.

This short article on the Red Guard movement gave me basic information to understand the political movement. It is a secondary source and contains a little background information, as well as the essential facts.

"Seeing Red: The Propaganda Art of China's Cultural Revolution." *BBC Arts*, BBC, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/44hl41NY7Mb4Jx4tPJpzwtly/seeing-red-the-propaganda-art-of-china-s-cultural-revolution, Accessed January 19.

This article contains propaganda posters from the Cultural Revolution, as well as a short rundown on the history of the revolution. I was able to once again visually walk through

the time and under the influence of propaganda posters in everyone's life.

Strauss, Valerie, and Daniel Southerl. "HOW MANY DIED? NEW EVIDENCE SUGGESTS FAR HIGHER NUMBERS FOR THE VICTIMS OF MAO ZEDONG'S ERA." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 17 July 1994, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/07/17/how-many-died-new-evidence-suggests-far-higher-numbers-for-the-victims-of-mao-zedongs-era/01044df5-03dd-49f4-a453-a033c5287bce/, Accessed November 3.

This secondary source article from *The Washington Post* solely helped me see the brutality of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. It contains estimates of the death count due to violence in the time of the Revolution.

Yuan, Li. "With Selective Coronavirus Coverage, China Builds a Culture of Hate." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 22 Apr. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/business/china-coronavirus-propaganda.html, Accessed January 19.

This article, which includes an image of modern propaganda that I am using for my exhibit, talks about China today during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The author writes of how propaganda and slogans are still alive in China. I was able to see the long-term impact that the Cultural Revolution has had on China.

Images

Boyle, Joe. "11 Slogans That Changed China." *BBC News*, BBC, 26 Dec. 2013, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-24923993, Accessed October 29.

This photo really helped me visualize the propaganda walls in the Cultural Revolution. It shows a young girl standing at a wall completely covered with dazibao or big-character posters. It will be featured in my exhibit as a visual for one of the means by which the Cultural Revolution was communicated.

Feng, Jiayun. "Hilariously Aggressive Covid-19 Propaganda Banners in China." *SupChina*, 3 June 2020, supchina.com/2020/02/11/all-the-hilariously-aggressive-coronavirus-banners-found-in-china/, Accessed May 15.

This article contains multiple pictures of modern propaganda slogans in China today. They are all about the COVID-19 pandemic and address the reader to adhere closely to any restrictions. The one I chose says that anyone who does not speak up about their sickness is a class enemy. It shows that the Chinese Communist Party and government

still utilizes propaganda today as a way to communicate to their people so that they never forget the agendas of those in charge of them.

Hernández, Javier C. "The Propaganda I See on My Morning Commute." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 28 Jan. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/01/28/world/asia/beijing-propaganda-xi-jinping.html, Accessed January 19.

This is an image that shows the significance of propaganda posters in China. A woman on a bike stands in front of a large propaganda poster. It shows you the normality of propaganda each day and I hope to use it in my project to also show the large-term impact it had on China.

"It Was the Worst of Times." *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, www.economist.com/china/2016/05/14/it-was-the-worst-of-times, Accessed January 21.

This image specifically focuses on the propaganda being a tool for brainwashing. It depicts three people: one person covering their eyes, one covering their ears, and the last covering their mouth. In the background is Mao Zedong, the puppet-master of their brainwash. This shows that he would let them see, hear, or speak anything for themselves- the government would tell them how to think. I am using this image to show the impact propaganda and ultimately the Cultural Revolution had on the Chinese people.

"Long Live Chairman Mao! Long, Long Live!" *Chinese posters.net*, chinese posters.net/posters/13-701.

This is a propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution that illustrates a crowd of Chinese people praising Mao Zedong and holding his book of slogans. The slogan on the poster was a saying Ji-Li Jiang explained was all over China in the 1960s and I will be using the poster as an example of the propaganda of the time.

Oliver, Mark. "44 Photos Of China's Anti-Capitalist Purge That Saw Millions Tortured And Killed." *All That's Interesting*, All That's Interesting, 6 Mar. 2019, allthatsinteresting.com/cultural-revolution#11, Accessed January 19.

This image from *All That's Interesting* depicts a young Red Guard soldier with her fist in the air. She is surrounded with a crowd equally rejoicing in the efforts of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party. I am using the image to show Mao's impact on the younger generation of Chinese in the 1960s.

Oliver, Mark. "44 Photos Of China's Anti-Capitalist Purge That Saw Millions Tortured And Killed." *All That's Interesting*, All That's Interesting, 6 Mar. 2019, allthatsinteresting.com/cultural-revolution#1, Accessed January 19.

This is the second image I am using from this article at *All That's Interesting*. It features a building almost entirely covered with propaganda posters. I am using this photo to show the frequency of propaganda in the cities and the reality of everyday life in the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

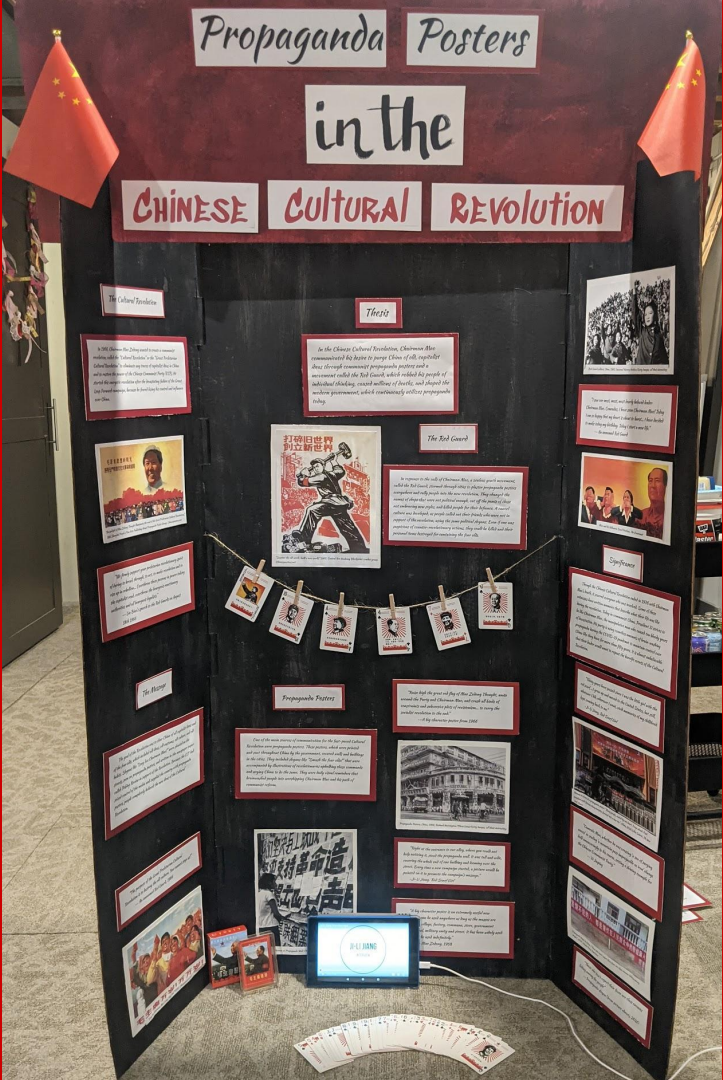
"Scatter the Old World, Build a New World." *Chinese posters.net*, chinese posters.net/gallery/d29-184, Accessed January 26.

This propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution depicts a man holding a hammer, ready to crush all of the capitalist and old ideas in China. I am using this image as one of the examples for propaganda posters that were so frequently seen in the time.

"The Sunlight of Mao Zedong Thought Illuminates the Road of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." *Chinese posters.net*, chinese posters.net/posters/e13-644, Accessed January 19.

This propaganda poster from *Chinese posters.net* of Mao Zedong shining over the Chinese people explains the glorification of the Chairman during the Cultural Revolution. I am using this image for the Context section of my exhibit.

Full Exhibit



Left Top Panel Photo

The Cultural Revolution

In 1966, Chairman Mao Zedong wanted to create a communist revolution, called the "Cultural Revolution" or the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" to eliminate any traces of capitalist ideas in China and to restore the power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He started this energetic revolution after the devastating failure of the Great Leap Forward campaign, because he feared losing his control and influence over China.



Source Credit: "The sunlight of Mao Zedong Thought illuminates the road of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," 1966, Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House Propaganda Poster Group, Chinese posters.net

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Left Center Panel Photo

"We firmly support your proletarian revolutionary spirit of daring to break through, to act, to make revolution and to rise up in rebellion... Overthrow those persons in power taking the capitalist road, overthrow the bourgeois reactionary authorities and all bourgeois loyalists."

-- Lin Biao's speech to the Red Guards on August 18th 1966

The Message

The goal of the Revolution was to clear China of all capitalist ideas and of the four olds, which included old ideas, old customs, old culture, and old habits. Slogans like "Long live Chairman Mao!" were shouted on the streets, seen on propaganda posters, and written in the newspaper paper called Peking Review in support of the Revolution. Because the CCP had seized control of the media and supplied the country with propaganda posters, people completely believed the new ideas of the Cultural Revolution.

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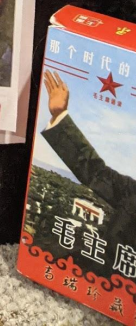
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Left Bottom Panel Photo

"The purpose of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is to destroy the old culture. You cannot stop us!"

-- An unnamed Red Guard, 1966



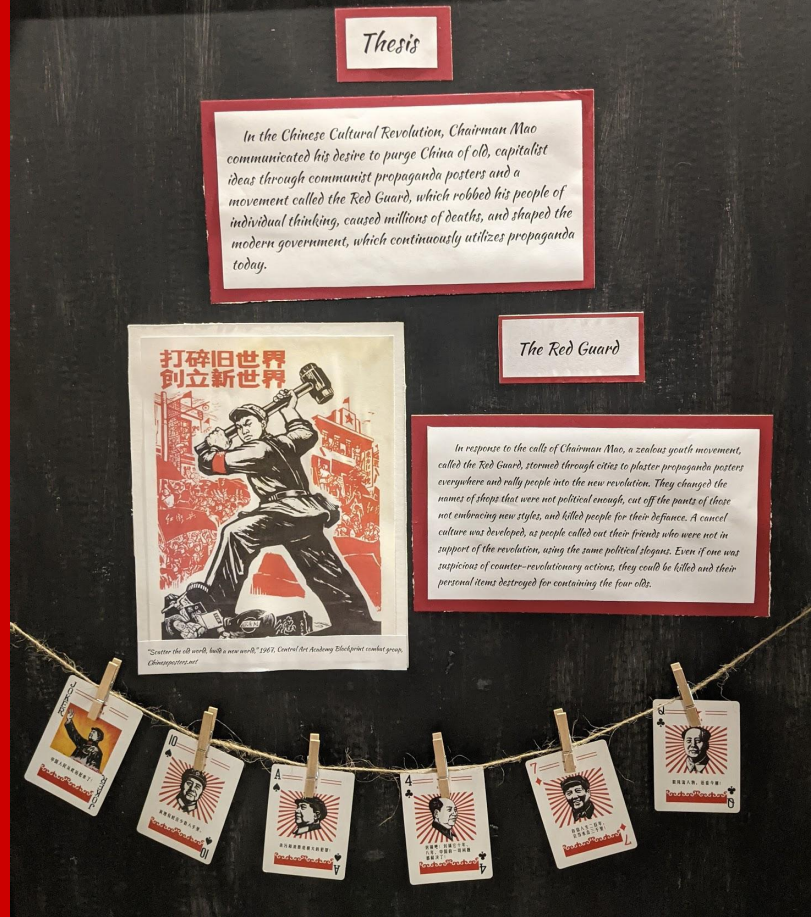
Source Credit: "Long live chairman Mao! Long, long live!" 1970, ChinesePosters.net

Left Bottom Panel Text

"The purpose of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is to destroy the old culture.
You cannot stop us!"

-- An unnamed Red Guard, 1966

Center Top Panel Photo



Source Credit: "Scatter the old world, build a new world," 1967, Central Art Academy Blockprint combat group, Chineseposters.net

Center Top Panel Text

Thesis

In the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao communicated his desire to purge China of old, capitalist ideas through communist propaganda posters and a movement, called the Red Guard, which robbed his people of individual thinking, caused millions of deaths, and shaped the modern government, which continuously utilizes propaganda today.

The Red Guard

In response to the calls of Chairman Mao, a zealous youth movement, called the Red Guard, stormed through cities to plaster propaganda posters everywhere and rally people into the new revolution. They changed the names of shops that were not political enough, cut off the pants of those not embracing new styles, and killed people for their defiance. This created a cancel culture, as people called out their friends who were not in support of the revolution, using the same political slogans. Even if one was suspicious of counter-revolutionary actions, they could be killed and their personal items destroyed for containing the four olds.

Center Center Panel Photo

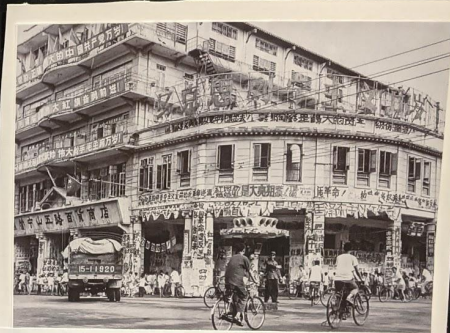
Propaganda Posters

One of the main sources of communication for the fast-paced Cultural Revolution were propaganda posters. These posters, which were printed and sent throughout China by the government, covered walls and buildings in the cities. They included slogans like "Smash the four olds!" that were accompanied by illustrations of revolutionaries upholding these commands and urging China to do the same. They were daily visual reminders that brainwashed people into worshipping Chairman Mao and his path of communist reform.



"Raise high the great red flag of Mao Zedong Thought, unite around the Party and Chairman Mao, and crush all kinds of constraints and subversive plots of revisionism... to carry the socialist revolution to the end."

--A big character poster from 1966



Propaganda Posters, China, 1966, Richard Harrington/Three Lions/Getty Images, all thats interesting

"Right at the entrance to our alley, where you could not help noticing it, stood the propaganda wall. It was tall and wide, covering the whole end of one building and looming over the street. Every time a new campaign started, a picture would be painted on it to promote the campaign's message."

-Ji-Li Jiang, Red Scarf Girl

Center Center Panel Photo



Source Credit: Propaganda Posters, China, 1966, Richard Harrington/Three Lions/Getty Images, *all thats interesting*

Center Center Panel Text

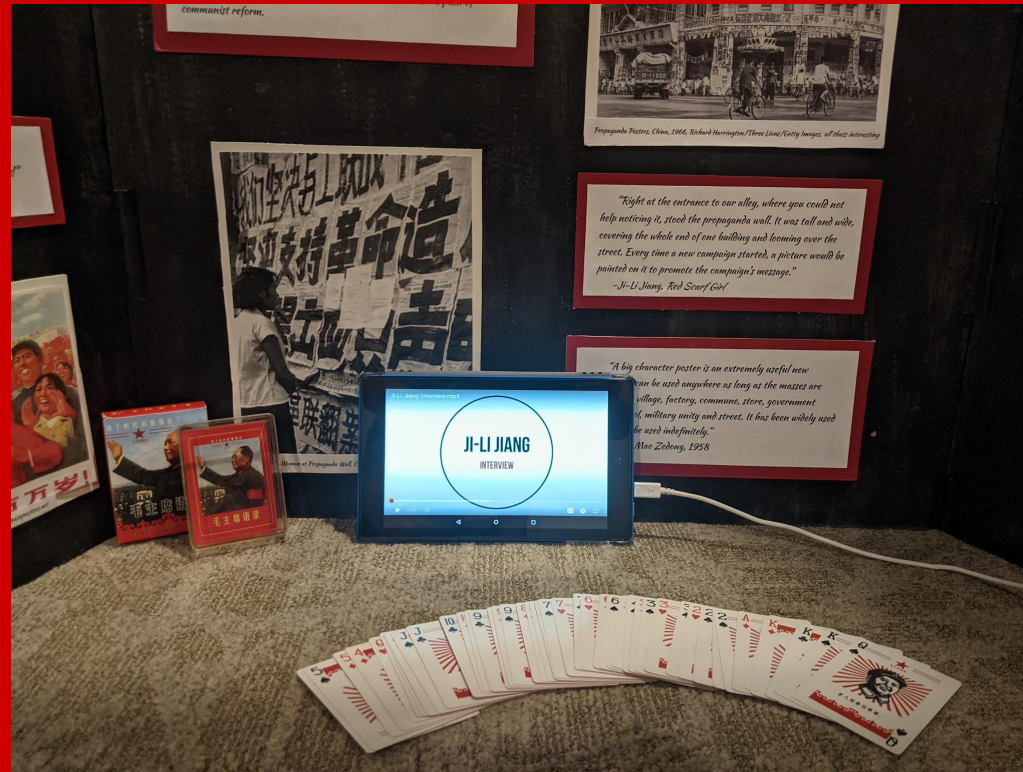
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Center Bottom Panel Photo



My Interview with Ji-Li Jiang:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BBckjYx_fOOJLRFIS3cDuObOyke-pqH/view?resourcekey

Source Credit: Woman at Propaganda Wall, China, 1966, Getty Images, BBC

Center Bottom Panel Photo



Source Credit: Woman at Propaganda Wall, China, 1966, Getty Images, BBC

Center Bottom Panel Text

"A big character poster is an extremely useful new weapon. It can be used anywhere as long as the masses are there: city, village, factory, commune, store, government office, school, military unit and street. It has been widely used and should be used indefinitely."

-- Mao Zedong, 1958

"Right at the entrance to our alley, where you could not help noticing it, stood the propaganda wall. It was tall and wide, covering the whole end of one building and looming over the street. Every time a new campaign started, a picture would be painted on it to promote the campaign's message."

-- Ji-Li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl*

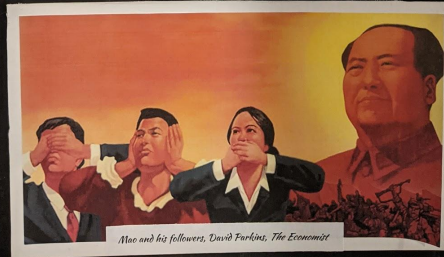
My Interview with Ji-Li Jiang:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BBckjYx_fOOJLRFIS3cDuObOyke-pqhH/view?resourcekey

Right Top Panel Photo



*"I saw our most, most, most dearly beloved leader
Chairman Mao. Comrades, I have seen Chairman Mao! Today
I am so happy that my heart is about to burst... I have decided
to make today my birthday. Today I start a new life."
-- An unnamed Red Guard*



Source Credit: Red Guard soldiers, China, 1966, Universal History Archive/Getty Images, all thats interesting

Mao and his followers, David Parkins, *The Economist*

Right Top Panel Text

"I saw our most, most, most dearly beloved leader Chairman Mao. Comrades, I have seen Chairman Mao! Today I am so happy that my heart is about to burst... I have decided to make today my birthday. Today I start a new life."

-- An unnamed Red Guard

Right Center Panel Photo

Significance

Though the Chinese Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 with Chairman Mao's death, it scarred everyone who was involved. Some of these witnesses have written memoirs that describe what their life was like during the revolution. Today in communist China, President Xi strives to be like Chairman Mao, the manipulative man who caused ten bloody years of devastation. His party is using countless amounts of brain-washing propaganda during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain control over China like they have for more than fifty years. It is almost unbelievable that their leader would want to repeat the horrific events of the Cultural Revolution.

"Thirty years have passed since I was the little girl with the red scarf...I grew up and moved to the United States, but still, whatever I did, wherever I went, vivid memories of my childhood kept coming back to me."

- Ji-Li Jiang, Red Scarf Girl



Woman in front of a propaganda poster: "Many people, united by one heart. Forge ahead. Push socialism with Chinese characteristics forward into a new era", China, 2018. Gilles Sabrier, The New York Times

Right Center Panel Photo



Source Credit: Woman in front of a propaganda poster: "Many people, united by one heart. Forge ahead. Push socialism with Chinese characteristics forward into a new era", China, 2018, Gilles Sabrié, *The New York Times*

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-- Ji-Li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl*

Right Bottom Panel Photo

Woman in front of a propaganda poster: "Many people, united by one heart, Forge ahead. Push socialism with Chinese characteristics forward into a new era", China, 2018, Gilles Sabrier, *The New York Times*

"Comrade Mao, whether he was crossing 'a sea of surging waves' or scaling 'a mountain pass impregnable as iron' always held unwaveringly to his course, setting a shining example for the Chinese Communist Party."

-- Xi Jinping



Propaganda slogan in China, "Those who don't report their fever are class enemies hiding among people.", 2020, Jiayun Feng, *SupChina*

"Those who don't report their fever are class enemies hiding among the people"

-- Propaganda slogan (from picture above), 2020

Source Credit: Propaganda slogan in China, "Those who don't report their fever are class enemies hiding among people.", 2020, Jiayun Feng, *SupChina*

Right Bottom Panel Photo



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