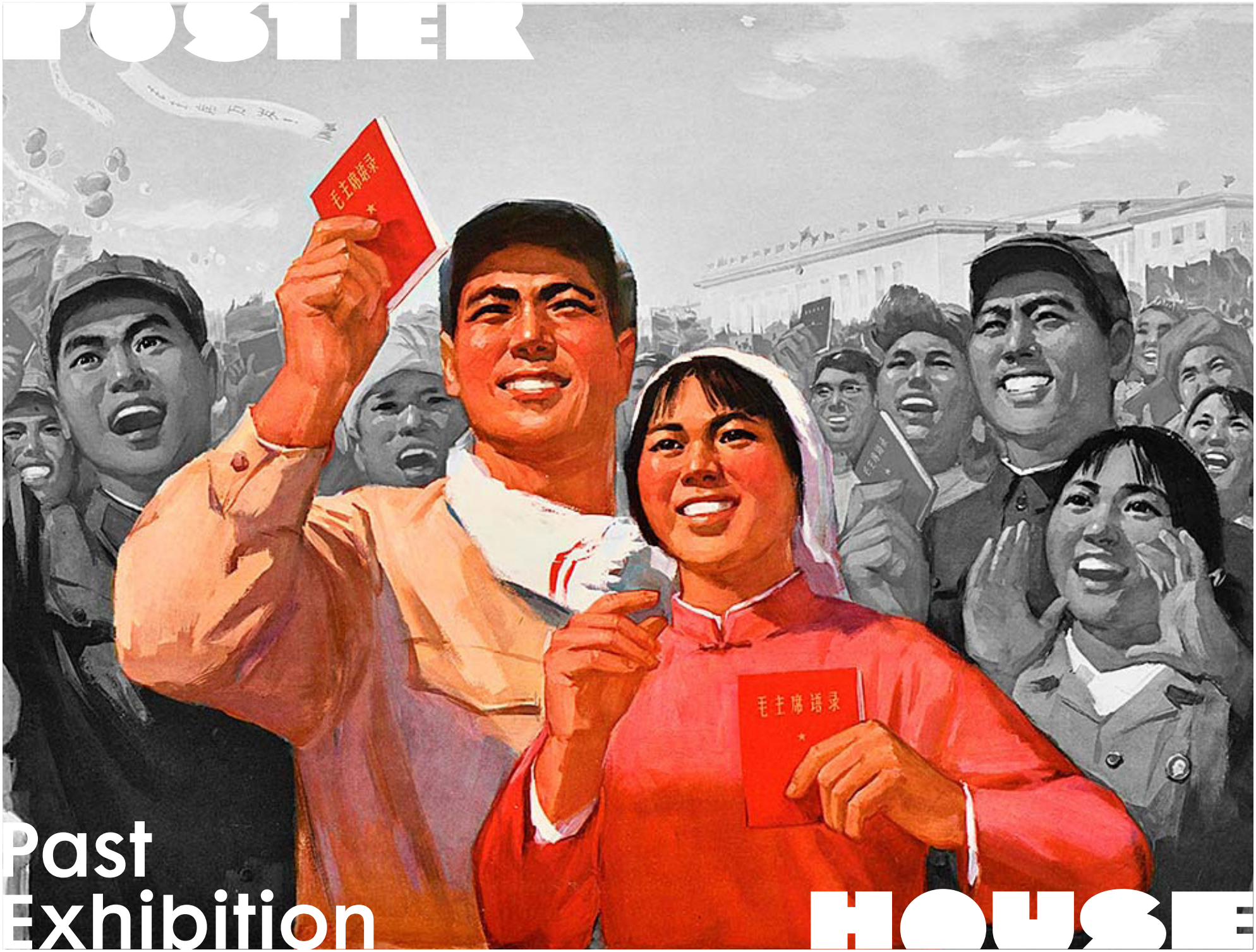
POSTER



Past Exhibition

HOUSE

The Sleeping Giant:
Posters & The Chinese Economy

February 27, 2020—February 14, 2021

Intro

China, rich in resources and historical innovations, flourished for a millennium as a largely self-contained civilization—a sleeping giant. Its economy was one of the largest in the ancient world, a position which both attracted and alarmed empires in the West. Once trade expanded between these two realms in the 18th century, the world was significantly changed.

The site of impressive imperial dynasties dating back to 221 BCE or even earlier, China's relative geographical isolation curtailed its in-depth interactions with Western global powers, which began colonizing the rest of the world in the late-15th century. Trade between East and West from the 7th to the 14th centuries was limited to missionaries and merchants like Marco Polo, who brought Chinese goods to Europe via the Silk Road in journeys that lasted years. In return, trade in the 16th century brought New World imports like peanuts, potatoes, tobacco, and squash, which were quickly assimilated into Chinese agriculture.

Nestlé Condensed Milk, 1931
Zhiying Studio
Courtesy of Oded Boldo

**"China is a sleeping giant.
Let her sleep, for when she wakes
she will move the world."**
—Napoleon Bonaparte

By the 19th century, China was a massive economic force, pulling in vast sums of money by exporting products abroad. European demand for tea, porcelain, silk, and spices grew, and the opening of trade relations with the predominantly insular empire became a priority for Western powers. So began the fight for economic dominance in China and with it the unraveling of China's long-established sovereignty and security. *The Sleeping Giant: Posters & The Chinese Economy* explores how China entered the modern era as an economically unstable and war-torn country deeply affected by foreign trade interests, transitioned to a seemingly insular Communist stronghold under Mao Zedong's leadership, and then became a world power on the global stage after Mao's death. Created during a century of extraordinary change, the posters on view reflect China's economic relationship with the world through visual culture.

Unless otherwise noted, these posters all come from the collection of Marc H. Choko.

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Special Thanks

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Philip Williams Posters
Oded Boldo

and other private collectors for lending their posters and providing invaluable guidance.

Exhibition Poster
The Graphics Office, 2020

1900–1949

Unequal Treaties: Surrendering Economic Control

China's economic relationship with the rest of the world changed drastically in the mid-19th century when China's Qing Dynasty, in power since 1644, battled Britain in the Opium Wars over forced foreign-run trade in this addictive narcotic (1839–60). Britain's army won out, initiating a series of deeply unfavorable trade agreements and an era of strong foreign economic influence in China.

Before Western powers forced their way into China, China's rulers firmly believed that it was "the Middle Kingdom," the epicenter of earth and civilization surrounded by "barbarians." When rulers of the Qing Dynasty refused Britain's trade proposals, they did so believing China would remain self-sustainable and undefeatable. But the weaker the Qing Dynasty became, the more Europeans, Americans, and later the Japanese, lobbied and gained. Among their gains were "concessions"—territories leased from China and governed by foreign law—as well as absolute British rule over Hong Kong and Portuguese rule over Macau. To many native people living near foreign concessions, working for foreign industries, and catering to foreign clients, China seemed to be rapidly losing its identity, and anti-foreign sentiment was strong.

Throughout the 1920s and '30s during China's Republican Period, both foreign and local companies rapidly expanded their commercial activities in China, bringing marketing ideas from abroad to test there. Early tactics included the use of branded woodblock packaging and logos, but mass produced commercial posters were a new phenomenon. Posters became a key tool to attract customers for everyday products, such as cigarettes, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals.

The most popular posters were *yuefenpai* (calendar posters), a combination of promotional calendars popular in the U.S. and traditional Chinese New Year calendars (*nianhua*), that listed lucky and unlucky days for that year. Chinese New Year calendars were woodblock printed, vertically orientated, displayed in the home, and replaced annually. Both foreign and domestic companies played on this familiar format with the *yuefenpai*, which remained popular until around 1949.

“Once the colorful yuefenpai were firmly established, they became major factorsin effective advertising and were tremendously popular.”

— Ellen Johnston Laing, Historian

Light Up All Asiatic
Petroleum Products and Candles, 1926
Designer Unknown

Two Baby Cigarettes, 1928
Designer Unknown

Kwong Sang Hong Ltd, c. 1932

Zhiying Studio

- Many early *yuefenpai* artists were self-taught, copying illustrations from Western books and magazines. As demand for *yuefenpai* grew, artists could apply to company-run training programs that fed directly into that same business's art departments. This included the training program of the Commercial Press company, where many members of the Zhiying Studio developed their skills.
- Inside the thriving Zhiying Studio, the process of creating posters resembled an assembly line. One artist would specialize in lettering, another in faces, and another in dress. These assignments were based on each artist's particular strength as an illustrator.
- This cosmetics brand was known as "Two Girls" in English. The company, based in Hong Kong, still exists today.

Rolling Snow Cream, c. 1935
Designer Unknown

Brunner Mond & Co.
Ammonium Sulphate, c. 1930
Zhou Baisheng (1887–1955)
Courtesy of Oded Boldo

- British American Tobacco (BAT). BAT staffed its art departments with Chinese artists in an effort to appeal to local customers.

Cheng Hua Cigarettes, c. 1932
Jin Meisheng (1902–89)

Xiying Pharmacy Co., c. 1932
Designer Unknown

- *Yuefenpai* were often used to decorate private spaces inside the homes. Posters like this one depicted idealized images of family life and were directed at mothers.

Niigata Seihyo Co. Ltd, c. 1935
Designer Unknown

DuPont de Nemours/Fabric Dye, 1927
Xie Zhiguang (1900–76)

Shanghai Soap, c. 1932
Zhiying Studio

Qidong Tobacco Co./Gold Bar and Hataman Cigarettes, c. 1928
Zhiying Studio

- The cigarettes featured on this poster were produced by British American Tobacco (BAT). BAT staffed its art departments with Chinese artists in an effort to appeal to local customers.
- *Yuefenpai* like this were used as decorations for the home and given away as customer rewards, thus dispersing the posters throughout the countryside.
- Foreign companies like BAT relied on experienced Chinese merchants whose families had traded on the same routes long before BAT's arrival. These posters were given to such merchants and traveled wherever they did.

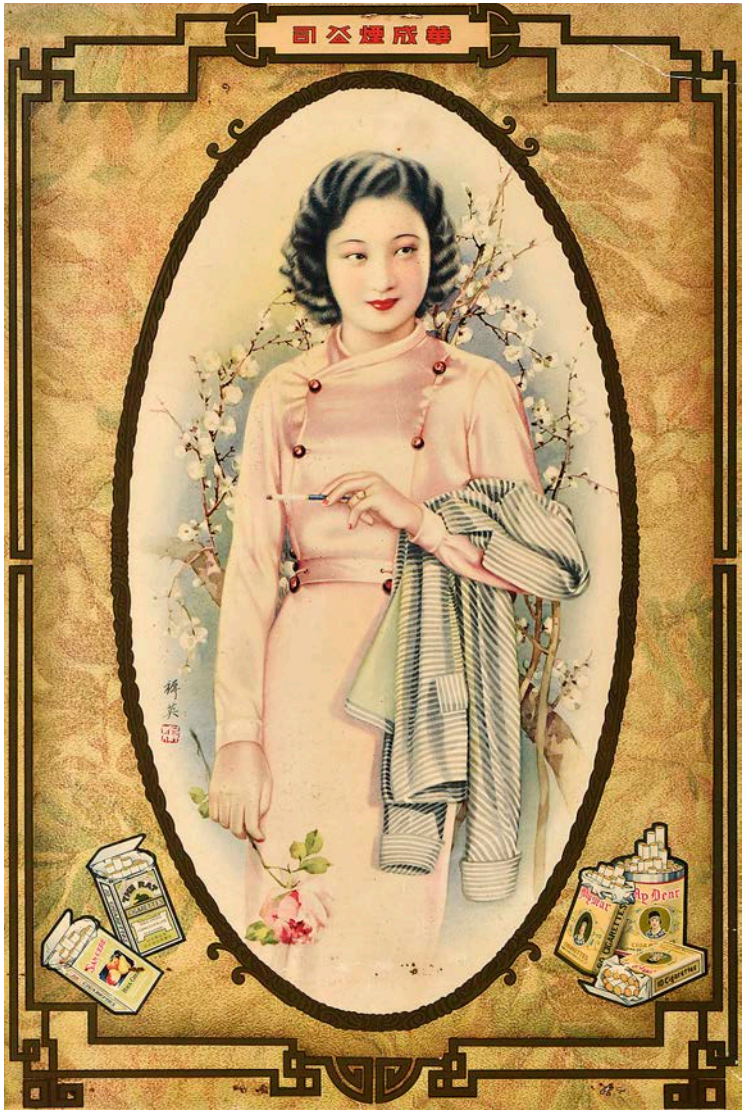
Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Co., c. 1930
Zhiying Studio
Courtesy of Oded Boldo

- The Zhiying Studio was one of the most popular producers of *yuefenpai* in the 1920s and '30s.
- This Chinese-run studio created advertisements for both foreign and domestic tobacco brands based in Shanghai.
- While foreign-owned BAT was the most profitable tobacco company during this period, domestically-owned Nanyang Brothers was the second-most popular and a formidable rival.

Qidong Tobacco Co., 1938
Ni Gengye (1900–65)

- Qidong Tobacco Company was the Manchurian arm of British American Tobacco (BAT), and became its own in dependent company after Japan invaded the region in the lead-up to the Second Sino-Japanese War.
- In practice, Qidong answered to the same CEO and main office as Chinese-based BAT. During Japan's occupation of Manchuria, Qidong Tobacco paid Japanese-imposed taxes and even offered the occupying government a chance to invest in the business.

Hwa Ching Tobacco Co., c. 1932
Zhiying Studio

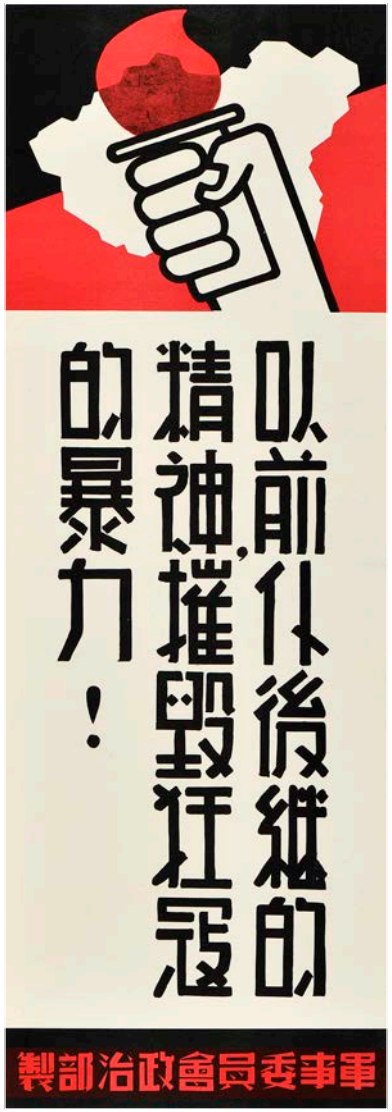


Hwa Ching Tobacco Co., c. 1930
Zhiying Studio

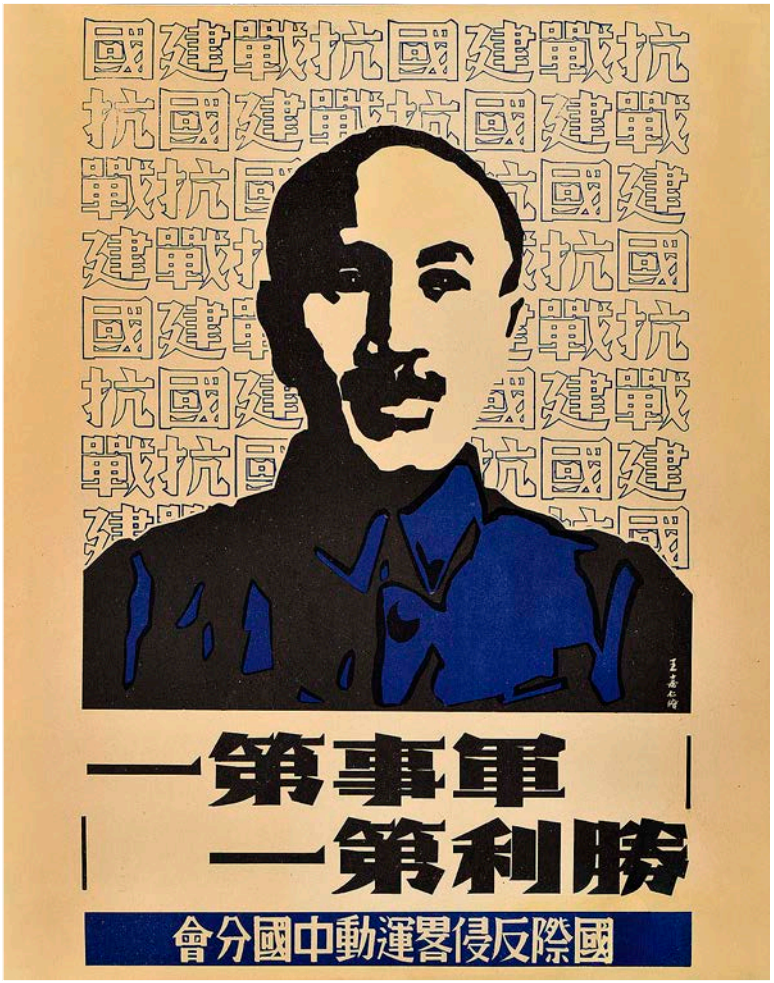
- Hwa Ching Tobacco was a domestic tobacco company. Its brands included “Beauty” and “My Dear” cigarettes, and advertisements often featured glamorous women, including opera and film stars.

Outstanding Youth, Join the Air Force!, c. 1940
Designer Unknown
Courtesy of Phillip Williams Posters

- This is an air force recruitment poster for the Second Sino-Japanese War.
- It was produced by the GMD government whose emblem appears on the airplane's fin.



The Spirit of the Past has Destroyed the Violent Gangsters!, c. 1945
Designer Unknown
Courtesy of Phillip Williams Posters



Military First—Victory First, c. 1939

Wang Jiaren (Dates Unknown)

Courtesy of Collection Merrill C. Berman

- Wang Jiaren was an editor for the *Xinhua Daily News*, published by the Chinese Communist Party beginning in 1938, and the only CCP newspaper issued in a GMD-controlled area.
- While the CCP and GMD were on opposite sides of the Chinese Civil War, their forces united during the Second Sino-Japanese War (WWII) to fight against Japan.
- At the center of this poster is the image of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, president of the Republic of China and leader of the ruling GMD party. 1932
- Below the image are the words “Military First—Victory First.” This poster could be interpreted as a reminder to CCP members that the struggle against the Generalissimo was not over—but first they must win the war and ensure China’s survival.
- Like many Communist artists at the time, Wang was inspired by German Expressionist woodcut prints from the first half of the 20th century. While woodblock printing had actually been invented in China, during the 1930s and ‘40s German Expressionism provided Chinese artists with new ideas in a familiar medium.

The More I Fight, the Stronger I Become—The More the Enemy Fights, the Weaker He Becomes, 1938

Xin Ke (Dates Unknown)

Courtesy of Collection Merrill C. Berman

- Few posters from the CCP side of the Chinese Civil War survive, but those that remain were made during the GMD-CCP United Front during the Second Sino-Japanese War (WWII). This particular poster exploits anti-foreign sentiment, a cornerstone of the CCP's campaign to win over China.
- This poster features a Chinese soldier with factories and airplanes operating behind him. In front of him, the Japanese flag and caricatures of Japanese soldiers are engulfed in flames.Set in Akzidenz Grotesk, this poster was printed through linoleum linocut for the main body
and metal type for the smaller text at the bottom.

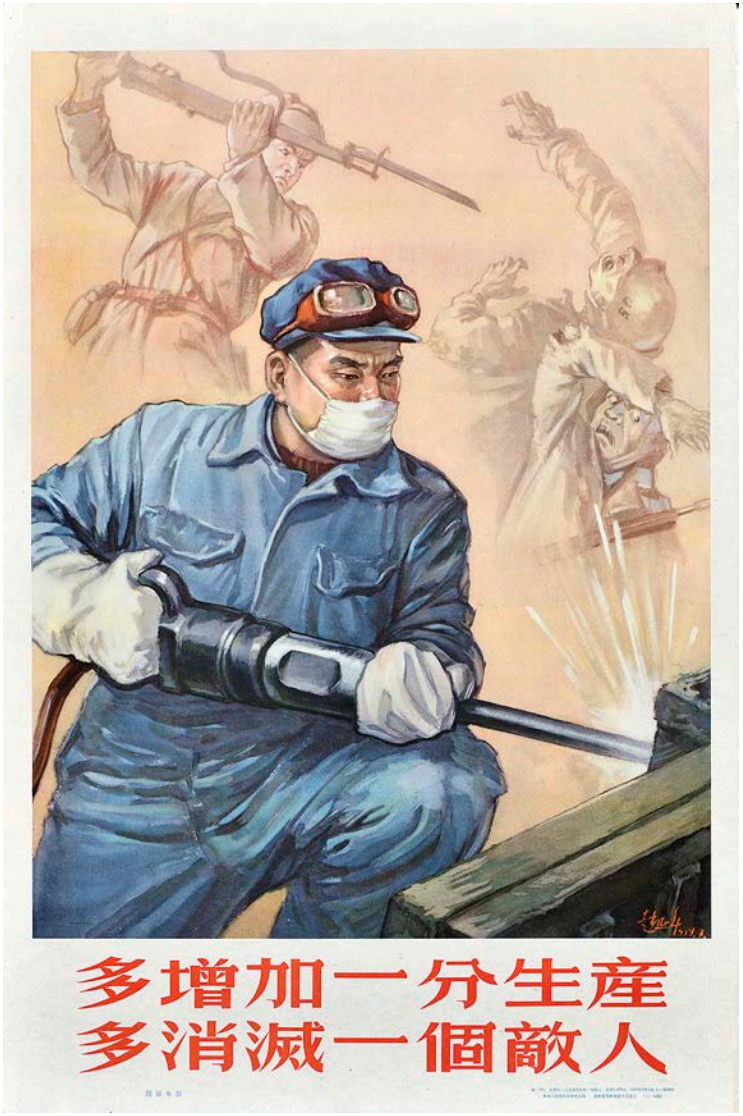
1949–1978

In Service for the People: Chinese Posters Under a Planned Economy

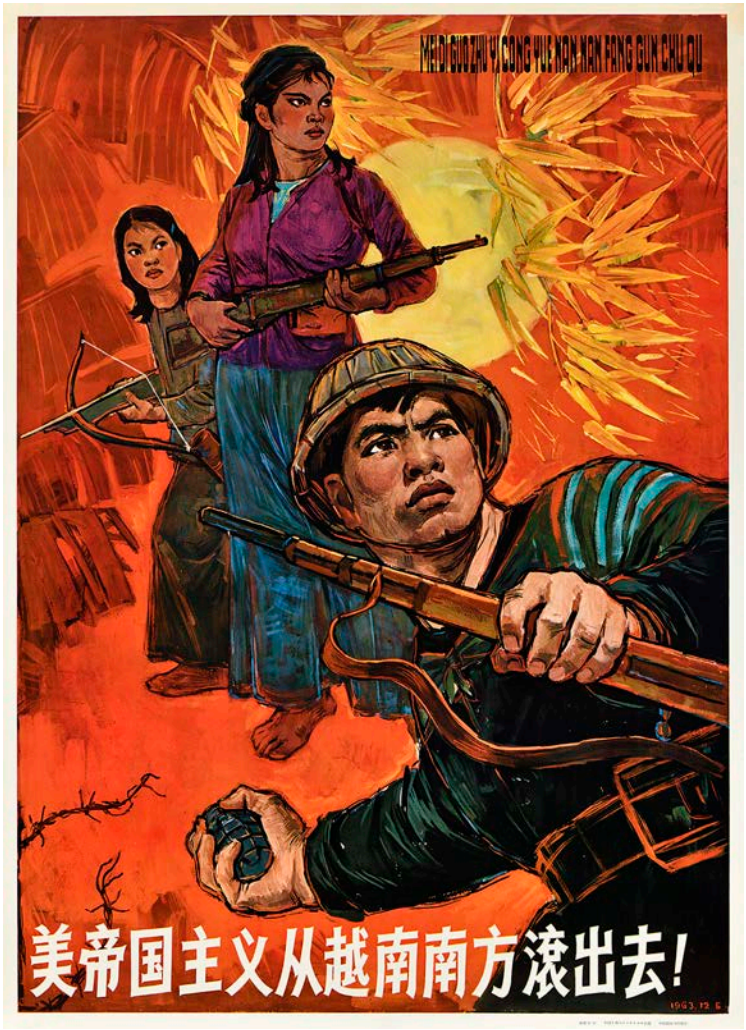
In 1949, after decades of civil war and foreign occupation, Mao Zedong, the longtime chairman of the Communist Party of China (CCP), declared the birth of the People's Republic of China (PRC). While many variables led to the CCP's victory against Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his Guomindang government in the struggle for domestic control, key among them was the CCP's ability to capitalize on the anti-foreign sentiments that had reached new heights after the May Fourth Movement in 1919. The nation turned inward and embraced Communist propaganda posters like *Industry Destroys the Enemy* (c. 1953).

With the creation of the PRC in 1949, posters became instrumental for government communication for the Communist Party. In China's new planned economy—wherein manufacturing targets, new investments, and incomes were all determined by the state—the need for commercial advertising disappeared. Instead of selling products, the state sold a new nation on its political ideologies. Posters spread approving educational, civic, social, and moral messages and were circulated through all branches of the government. An essential topic for propaganda was promoting the government's domestic economic campaigns at the village level with posters like *Guarantee the Grain Harvest* (c. 1961) and *Everyone According to Their Work* (1962). Posters were everywhere—displayed on streets, railway stations, classrooms, and inside homes. Smaller posters for classrooms and homes could be purchased for a nominal fee at *Xinhua* (New China) Bookshops, a government-owned chain with nationwide distribution.

Beginning in 1949, the PRC shifted its focus to internal economic policies and became increasingly isolated from former free-market allies. Meanwhile, its relationship with fellow Communists in the Soviet Union grew stronger. The PRC and U.S.S.R. signed a formal alliance in 1950. In it, the U.S.S.R. provided the PRC with badly needed loans to purchase agricultural and industrial products, as well as political advisors to aid in China's economic recovery and transition to a socialist economy. In turn, the PRC began a poster campaign celebrating the U.S.S.R.'s achievements using its benefactor's own visual language—Soviet Realism.



Industry Destroys the Enemy, c. 1953
Designer Unknown
Courtesy of Battledore Ltd Gallery

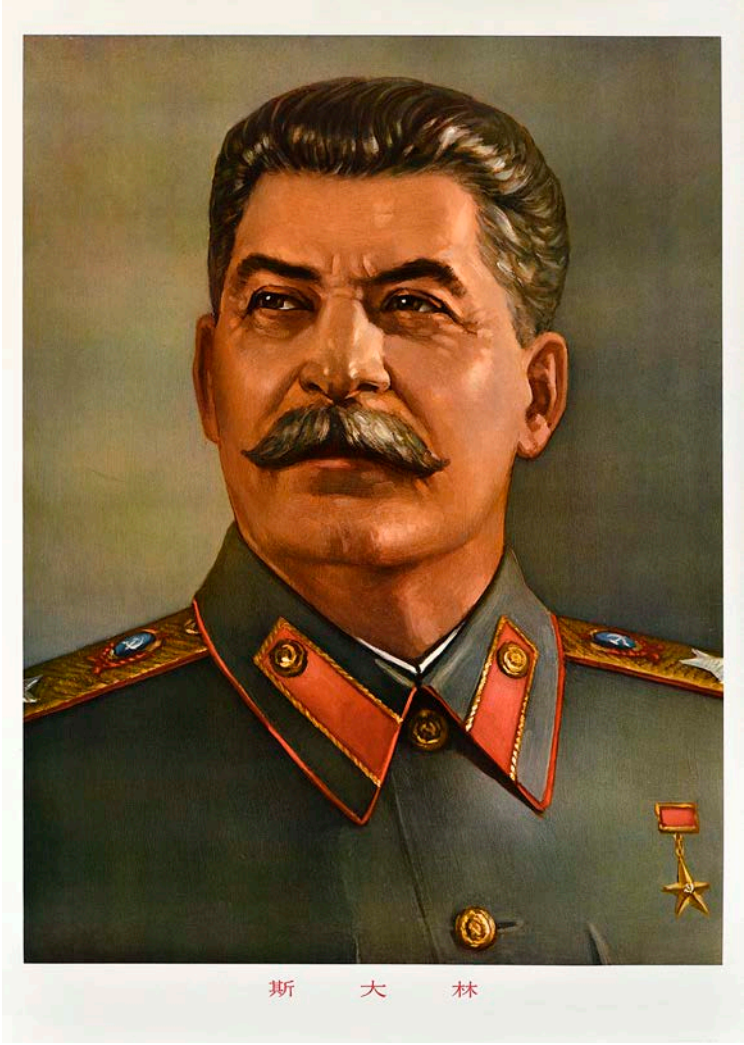


American Imperialism Must be Driven Out of Southern Vietnam!, c. 1963

Ha Qiongwen (1925–2012)

Courtesy of Chisholm Larsson Gallery, NYC

- This poster was produced during the Second Indochina War (also called the Vietnam War). At its center is a Vietcong soldier throwing a grenade at unseen Americans. Behind him are armed Vietnamese women.
- The outbreak of the Second Indochina War sparked widespread protest in the streets of Beijing. Demonstrators marched in solidarity with their fellow Communists in North Vietnam. The PRC government also provided financial and military aid during this war to support North Vietnam and the Vietcong.



The Five Greats: Joseph Stalin, 1969
Designer Unknown
Courtesy of Chisholm Larsson Gallery, NYC

- This image belongs to "The Five Greats," a poster series celebrating Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong. It was printed during the Cultural Revolution, and implied that Mao Zedong was on an equal level with his fellow Communist pioneers.
- The inclusion of Stalin, who had died in 1953, points to Mao's great regard for the U.S.S.R.'s late premier, especially because the poster was printed after 1966 when the Sino-Soviet alliance ended.

Soviet Realism

When the PRC adopted the Soviet Realist style in the early 1950s, it carried specific ideological and economic messages. Engrained with the idea that art should serve politics, the Soviet Realist movement is defined by highly idealized representations of Communist life. Students could learn about Soviet art by becoming members of their local Sino-Soviet Friendship Association (SSFA) or reading issues of the Central Academy of Fine Arts' *Meishu zuotan* featuring Russian posters. Art academies in Russia and China hosted exchange students from the other's country, and posters frequently showed Chinese and Soviet men standing side-by-side or shaking hands. The key message was that under Socialism, the U.S.S.R.'s current "success would also be in China's future.

The Soviet Realist style persisted in posters long after U.S.S.R. Premier Nikita Khrushchev pulled Soviet advisors from China. The style's influence remained visible during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), a period when more propaganda posters were produced in China than ever before. While poster production was decentralized to local publishers, across China the message they carried was largely the same. Posters like *Mao Says the Hope is on Your Shoulders* (c. 1967) and *Long Live Chairman Mao!* (1971) served to reinforce Mao's cult of personality. The aging chairman remained in power until his death in 1976.

Long Live the Friendship Between the Peoples and the Armies of China and the Soviet Union, c. 1950

Designer Unknown

Private Collection

- Here, a Russian and a Chinese sailor stand side-by-side. Such images of Sino-Soviet friendship were meant to reassure the Chinese people. They reminded viewers that China had a powerful new ally—a world power—and implied that together the two nations could take on the capitalist world.
- The image also shows a Sino-Soviet logo in which the PRC and U.S.S.R. flags are intertwined and crowned by a dove representing peace.

Long live Chairman Mao!
Long, Long Live!, 1971
Revolutionary Committee and Propaganda Team
of the Workers of the Shanghai Fine Arts School

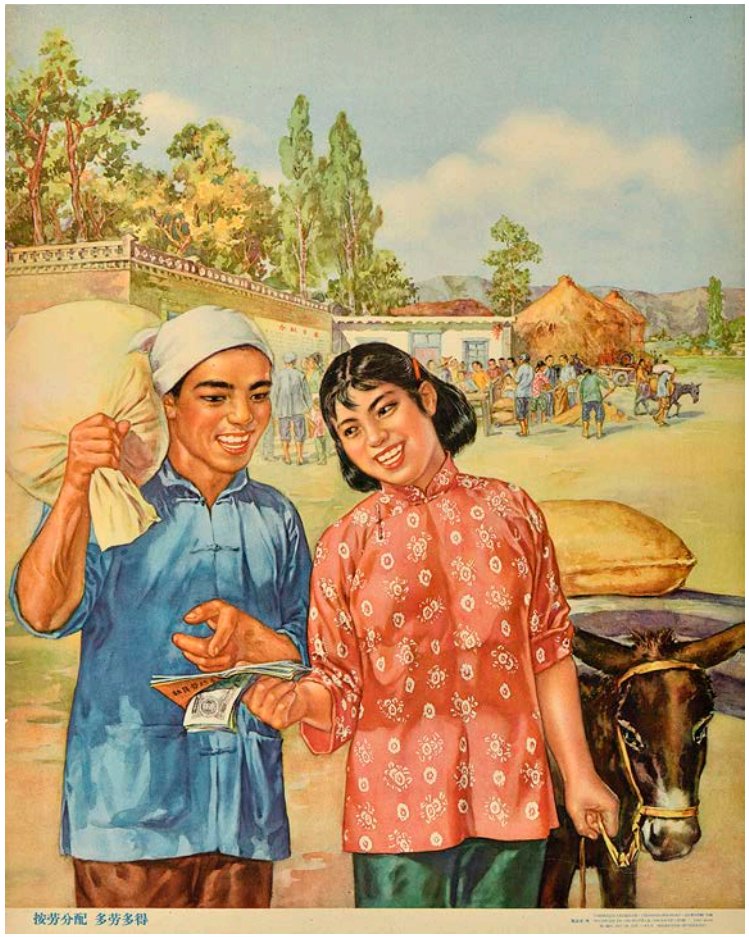
Mao Says the Hope is on Your Shoulders, c. 1967
Designer Unknown
Poster House Collection

100 Seeds, 1963
Li Jiaba (Dates Unknown)

- In China, Pomegranates were viewed as symbols of fertility. This connection was based on the Chinese character for “seed,” which is the same character for “offspring.” Thus, the offering of a pomegranate—a fruit containing many seeds—to a newly married couple was also a way of wishing them many offspring.

"Sisters" Meeting of all Regions for the National Heroes Conference, 1964
Li Mubai (1913–91)
Jin Xuechen (1904–96)

- In 1928, Lin Mubai and Jin Xuechen began working together as young *yuefenpai* artists for Zhiying Studio in Shanghai.
- Along with artist Jin Meisheng, they successfully transitioned from creating *yuefenpai* advertisements to PRC propaganda posters for the Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, a government-owned organization. Jin Meisheng's poster for Cheng Hua cigarettes is on display in the "Unequal Treaties" section.



To Everyone According to Their Work; The One Who Works More Earns More, 1962
Gao Rufa (b. 1934)

The American Nuclear Bomb is Nothing but a Paper Tiger, 1972
Designer Unknown

A Hundred Times Vigilant, 1973
You Longgu (1923–95)

Unite to Fight and Accelerate the Construction of Districts on the Dazhai Model, c. 1976
Collective of Jin Xian Worker-Peasants' Propaganda Team & Yan Chengfu

"What I regret most is that I didn't get an education...There is a best age for studying, and we missed it."

— Ellen Johnston Laing, Historian

Hard Work and Innovation are Rooted in the Countryside, 1977

Feng Xiangjie (Dates Unknown)

- Mao, himself the son of a former peasant, placed great importance on the role of peasants, soldiers, and workers in China's Communist society. Posters like this one connected rural farming with the triumphs of the People's Liberation Army.
- In 1977, Mao's handpicked successor, Chairman Hua Guofeng, continued the "Down to the Countryside Movement." However, Hua provided a loophole by reopening China's universities. Well-connected youths could be nominated by their village officials to attend these institutions, thereby escaping from rural resettlement. However, most sent-down youths did not receive this opportunity.

Willing to Contribute to the Development of Agriculture, 1958
Zhang Jinghua (Dates Unknown)

- This poster was made during the final years of the "Down to the Countryside Movement" or "Rustication Movement." Between 1958 and 1978, more than 17 million educated young people in China were officially transferred from urban centers to rural communities. They were forced to work labor-intensive jobs in agrarian communes and were unable to rejoin their families.
- By 1978, these "sent-down youths" had begun leading protests against this government policy. Many in this generation had lost the chance to attend university and lived in poverty. They have thus sometimes been described as China's "lost generation."
- The Rustication Movement ended on March 8, 1980, four years after Mao's death. Sent-down youths were allowed to return to their families and bring a spouse if they had married. Some sent-down youths left behind their country spouses and offspring, creating entirely new lives for themselves in their old home cities.
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Carry Out People's War Against Lin Biao and Confucius, 1974
Zhang Ruji (b. 1931)
Wang Jiao (b. 1937)

- This poster features Lin Biao, an important CCP commander who rose to prominence during the Chinese Civil War. He fought alongside Mao, becoming the Chairman's most trusted ally. He later masterminded the *Little Red Book*.
- During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), Lin Biao was named Mao's sole successor.
- In 1971, Lin Biao and his family died in a mysterious plane crash in Mongolia. In the aftermath, Lin Biao was derided as a "counter-revolutionary," and accused of plotting a coup against Mao.
- Posters like this began appearing in 1974, linking Lin Biao with Confucianism—the core philosophy during China's Imperial period. Many of these posters were actually subtle attacks on Zhou Enlai, Biao's successor. They were engineered by Jiang Qing, Mao's third wife, who saw Zhou as a threat to her hold on power.

1978—2000
Open for Business

The death of Chairman Mao in 1976 brought an end to his tumultuous Cultural Revolution. The violence of this period had an enormous impact on China's economy, and that year its GDP growth rate was -1.57%. Mao's successors began implementing economic reforms and looking outside the country for potential solutions. This progressive wave culminated in 1978, when China's new leader, Deng Xiaoping, established his "Opening Up and Reform" policies that reintroduced the country to foreign business.

China's initial step toward re-establishing relationships with the West was politically motivated and showed how tense relations had become with the U.S.S.R. In 1972, an aging Mao invited U.S. President Richard Nixon for a state visit. Nixon's arrival marked the first time any U.S. President had set foot on the PRC, and ended 25 years of American diplomatic isolation. Both leaders hoped this first visit would rattle their mutual enemy, the powerful U.S.S.R.

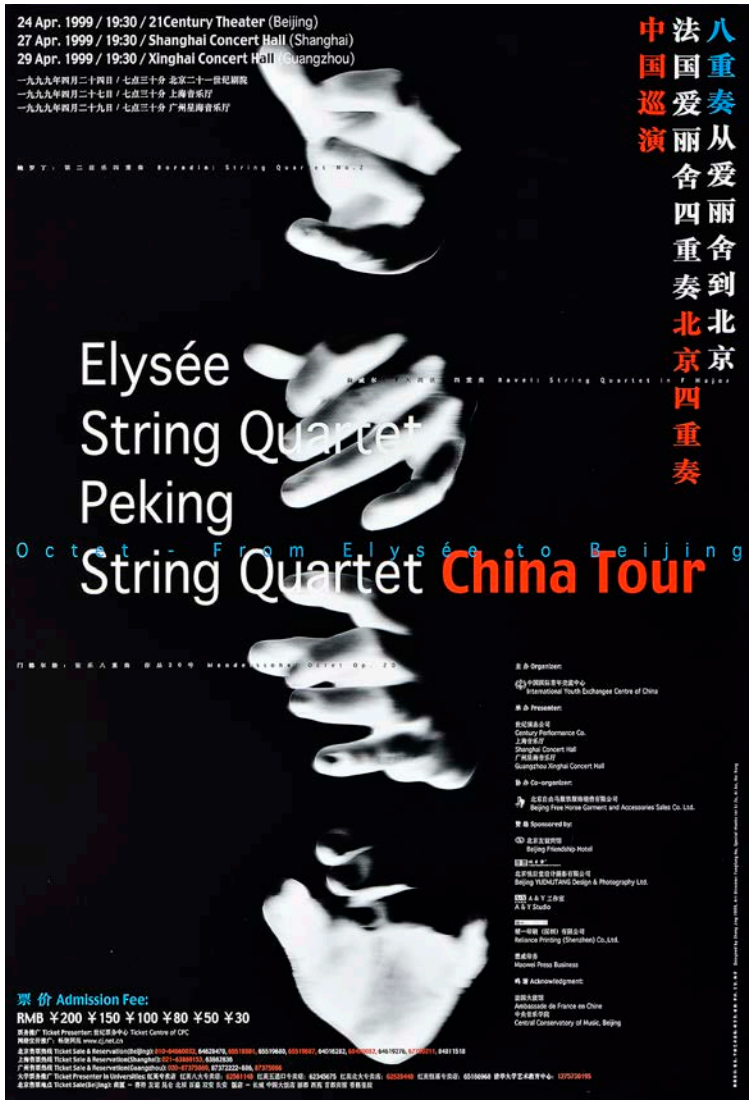
In order for China to participate in the new global economy while remaining a Communist nation, design and city planning played an important role. In the early 1980s, the PRC established four "Special Economic Zones" (SEZs) on the South China Sea. Foreign investors could now open outposts in these SEZs as long as they partnered with a domestic Chinese business. China's SEZs were located near the free-market economies of Macau and Hong Kong—European colonies at that time.

As part of his 1979 reforms, Deng also lifted a government ban on international and domestic product advertising. This opened the door for a new profession of graphic design and marketing outside of the state's propaganda system. While the government continued to produce propaganda posters during this period, companies in the SEZs employed different marketing tactics that spurred a new era of innovation in graphic design throughout China. China placed promising young designers in domestic export-orientated companies and in state-owned "window companies" abroad. Employees of these window companies, located in free-market areas like Hong Kong, were responsible for gathering data and relaying it back to colleagues inside China. They used their findings to create new ways to display and advertise products, giving real import to the design field. Designers like Chen Shaohua even left their positions at fine arts academies to work for international advertisers. Increased global exposure brought with it information about the history of graphic design, and the graphic arts slowly began growing as a profession.

Thanks to its SEZ status, Shenzhen became a hotbed of design in the 1980s and the source of much graphic design talent. Designers explored international styles and their own creativity by making ads for China's new domestic products, marketing global brands to local audiences, and launching their own competitions and exhibitions. These exhibitions served to create a community of contemporary design in China and propelled the evolution of the medium. Graphic talent could easily be seen in posters made for concerts and exhibitions like *Élysée String Quartet* (1999) and *20th Century Chinese Design Exhibition* (c. 1998). At the same time, global marketing campaigns filled China's city streets with the universal language of logos from companies like Coca-Cola and Nike. The Chinese market was no longer a stranger to the West. Ready to shake the world and wield its significant economic power, the sleeping giant was now wide awake.

'98 The Year of Tiger, 1998
Wang Xu (b. 1955)

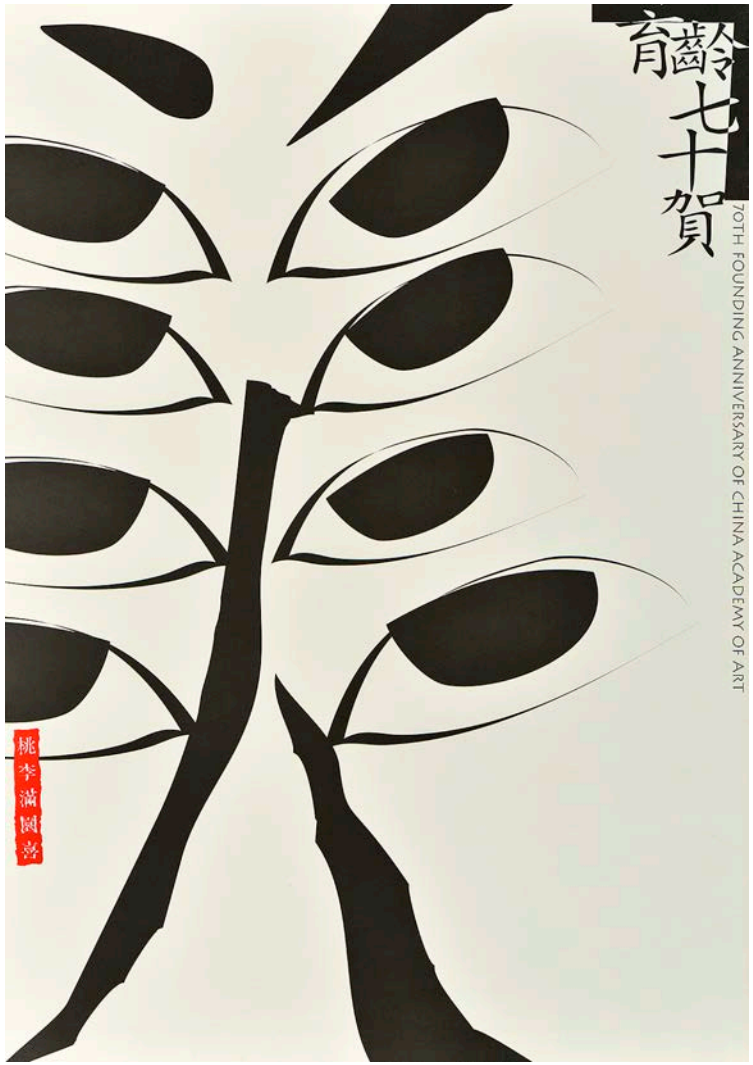
- Wang was based in Hong Kong between 1986 and 1995, during which time he worked for a "window company" owned by Guangdong province. His job was to communicate business developments in Hong Kong to Guangdong, information that would then be widely circulated inside China.
- While in Hong Kong, he was the sole editor and designer for *Design Exchange*, the only magazine at the time reporting on international graphic design in mainland China.
- Wang designed this annual poster for a paper company in Guangdong. The tiger is a reference to the Chinese zodiac, while the tiger's tail is made up of the 12 months of the Gregorian calendar. In 1977, Mao's handpicked successor, Chairman Hua Guofeng, continued the "Down to the Countryside Movement." However, Hua provided a loophole by reopening China's universities. Well-connected youths could be nominated by their village officials to attend these institutions, thereby escaping from rural resettlement. However, most sent-down youths did not receive this opportunity.



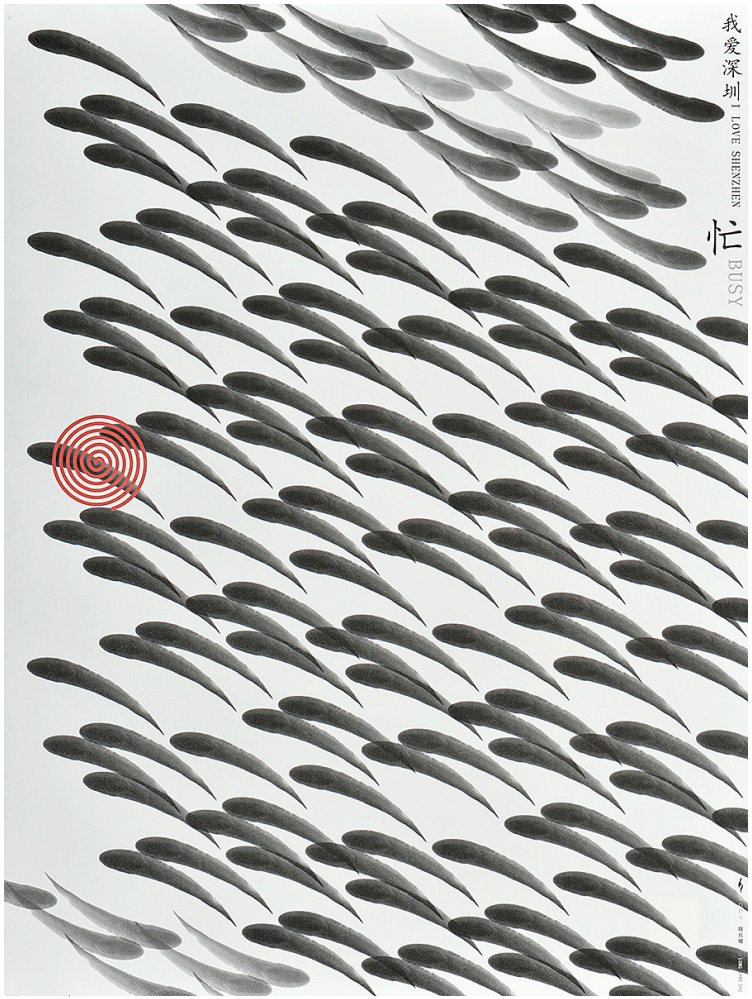
Élysée String Quartet/Peking String Quartet/China Tour, 1999
Zhang Jing (b. 20th century)

The Danish Wave: An Exhibition of Modern Danish Design and Architecture, 2000
Designer Unknown

20th Century Chinese Design Exhibition/Past and Future, c. 1998
Zhang Qing (b. 20th century)

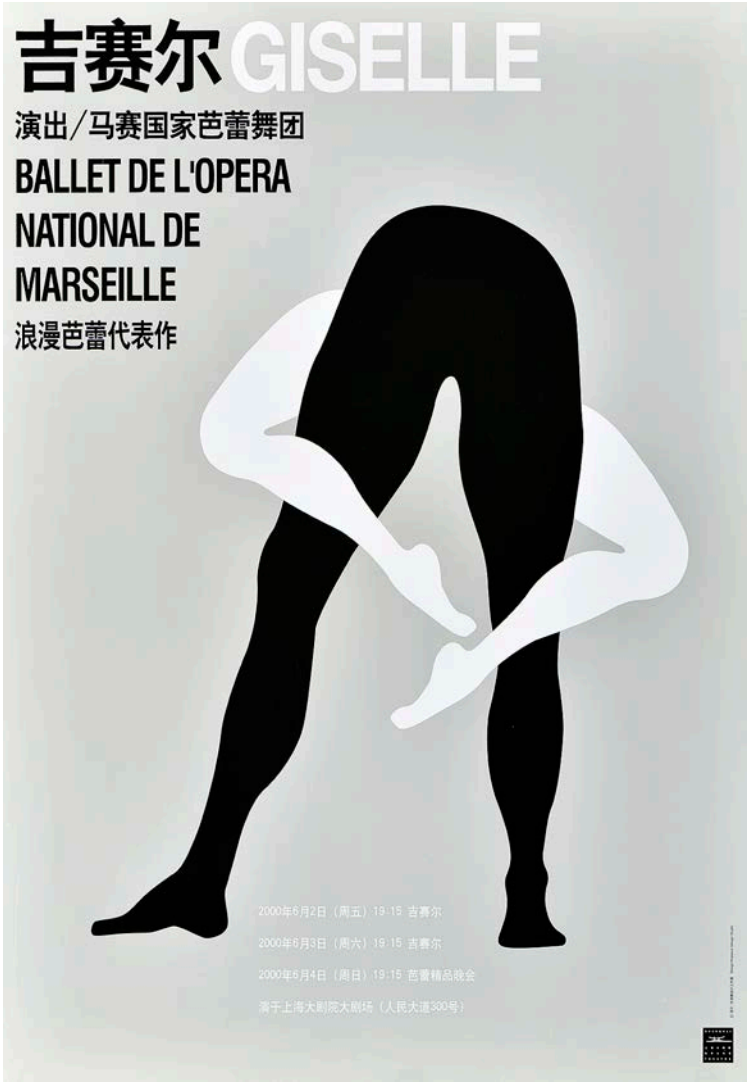


70th Founding Anniversary of China Academy of Art, 1998
Chen Shaohua (b. 1954)

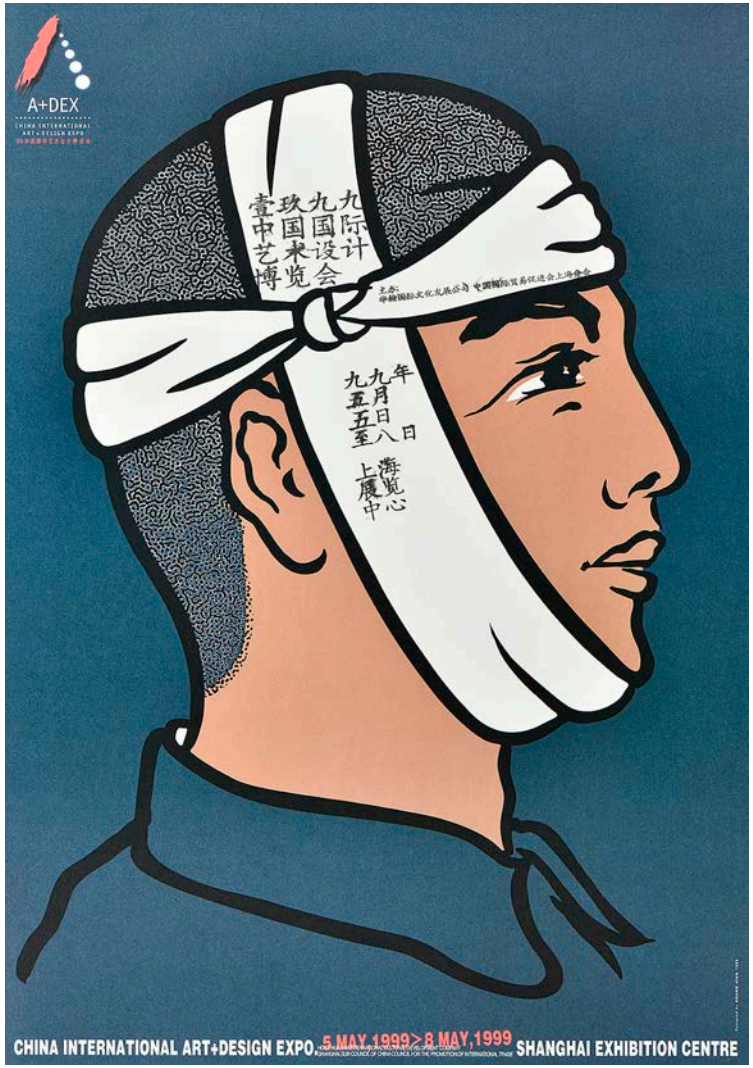


I Love Shenzhen Busy, c. 1999
Long Zhaoshu (b. 20th century)

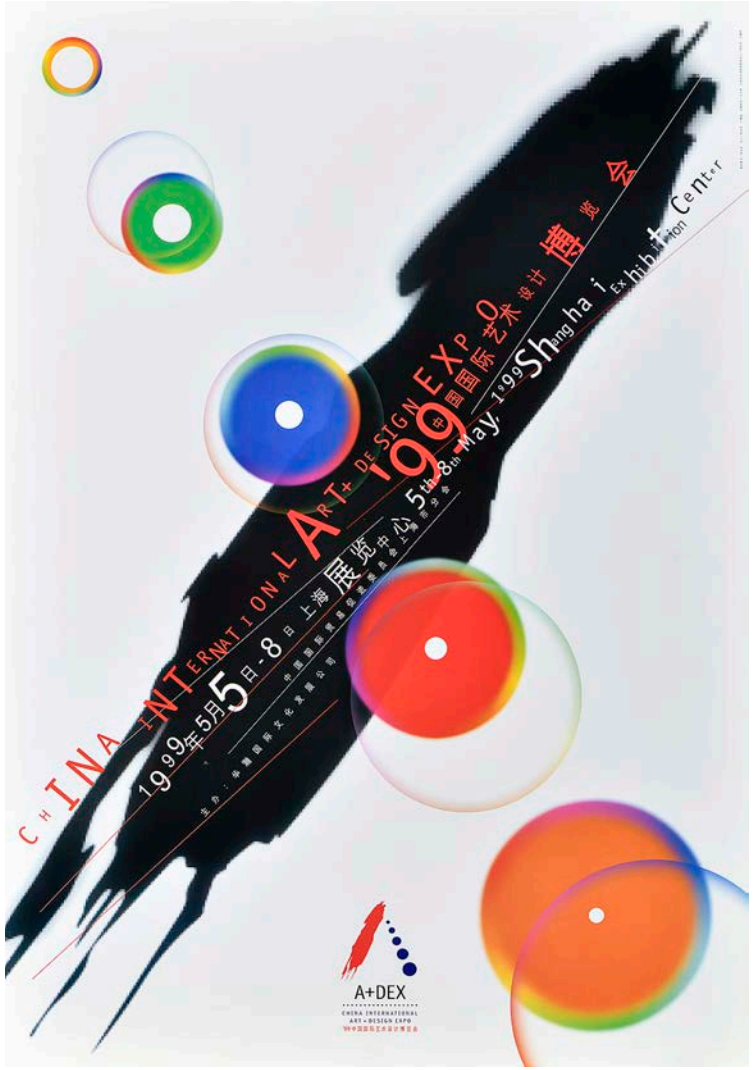
The Ungrateful Husband, 1998
Shen Haopeng (b. 1959)



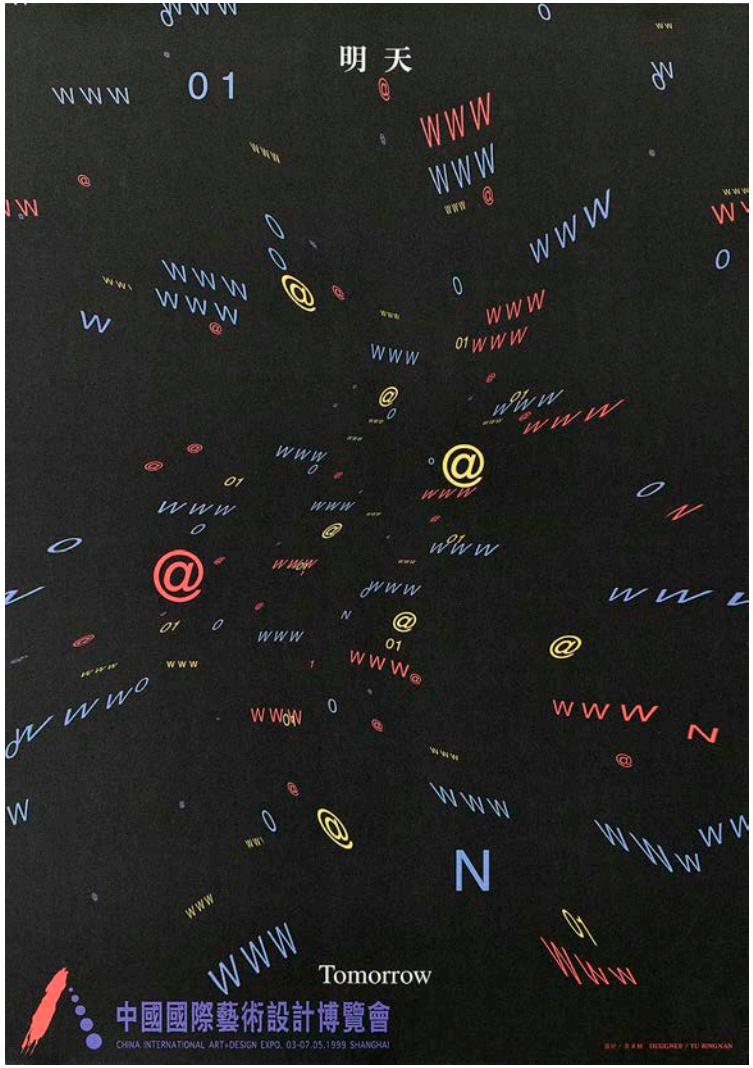
Giselle, 2000
Shen Haopeng (b. 1959)



China International Art & Design Expo., 1999
Zhang Jing (b. 20th century)



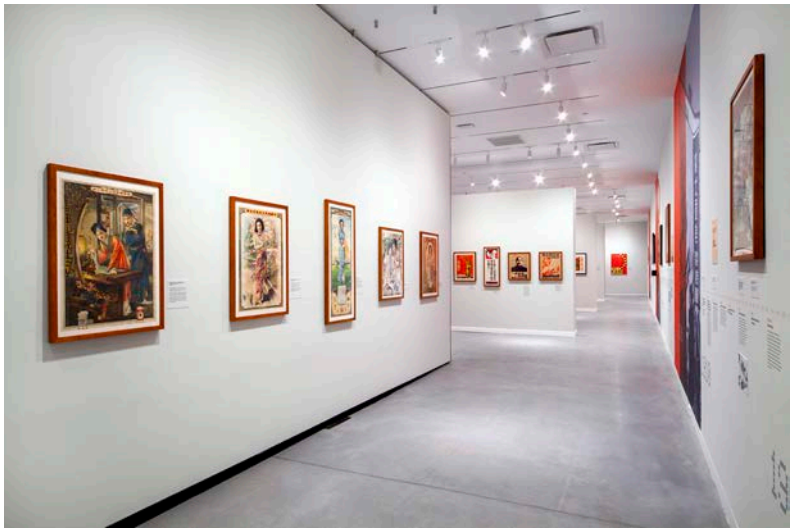
China International Art & Design Expo., 1999
Chen Youjian (b. 1950)
Lu Jianxun (b. 20th century)



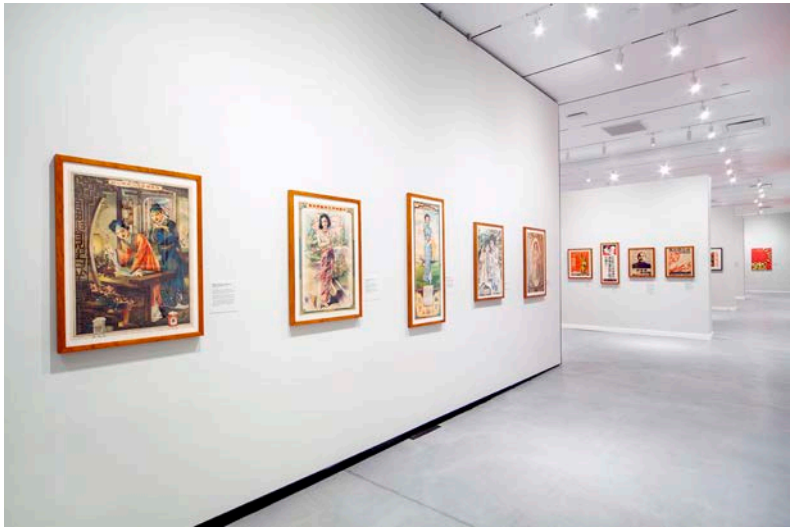
China International Art & Design Expo., 1999
Yu Bingnan (b. 1933)

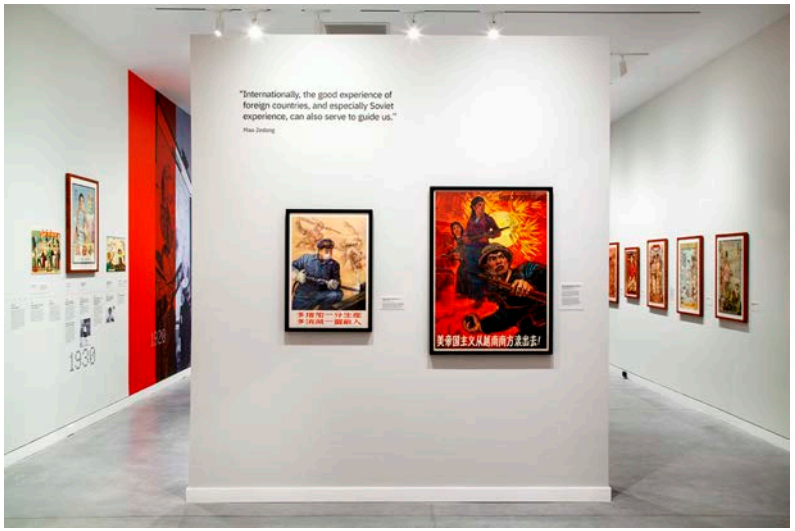

The Sleeping Giant:
Posters & The Chinese Economy
PULL

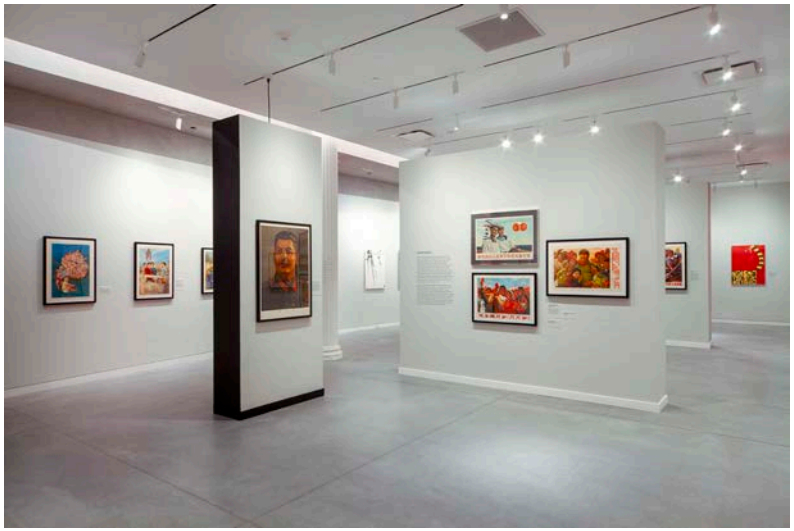

1920
1930
THE SLEEPING GIANT
POSTERS & THE CHINESE ECONOMY



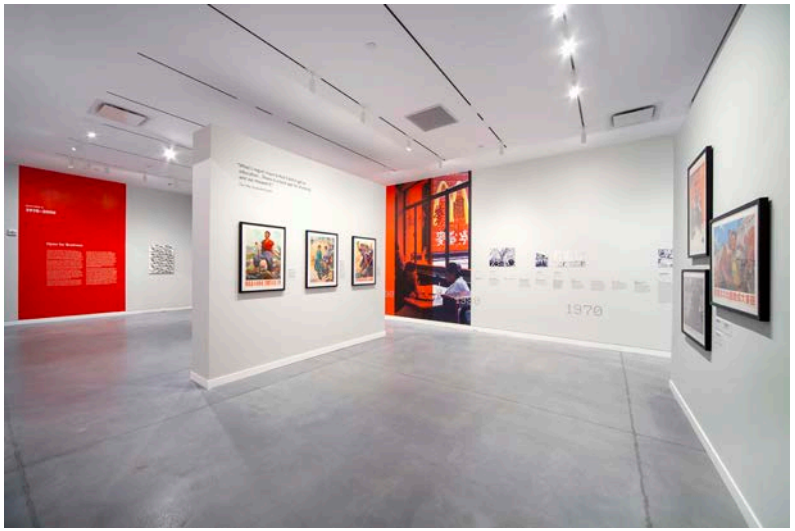

潔士香皂
芬芳細膩
潔身潤肌
TOILET SOAP
SHOOT
KILL
1910




"Internationally, the good experience of foreign countries, and especially Soviet experience, can also serve to guide us."
Mao Zedong
1930




1960


1970


1990
Wave

Press Reviews

AIGA

The New York Times

huck

FAST COMPANY

The Guardian

BEDFORD + BOWERY

POSTER
HOUSE