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Visual Propaganda in China during the Cultural Revolution
Master's Thesis



MAY 11, 2018
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1. Introduction

The concept of culture is very dynamic and these ever-changing features unable us to find simple answers or easy items to memorise about any culture. To make any attempt at static pieces of knowledge is, therefore, often challenging and incredibly hard to achieve. As Dittmer points out in his article, *“the central purpose of the Cultural Revolution was to transform China’s political culture to achieve the same sort of revolutionary breakthrough in the cultural sphere that had already been achieved in the military-political and socio-economic realms”*. (Dittmer, 1977, p.67). The essence of Chinese Communism nicely portrays the indigenous character of the revolution. Mao Zedong as the great leader was determined to reach his goals aimed at the construction of a new country in which a new culture prevails through the political and economic revolution in China. More specifically, he demonstrated the need to *„change a country whose people are so ignorant, back-ward and long ruled by an old culture, into a civilized, progressive one ruled by a new culture“*, therefore, the fundamental point of view toward the relationship of culture, politics and economy is based on the idea that *“any given culture is the reflection of a given political and economic system of society”*. Having said that, *“it is the given politics and economy that first determines the given culture, which only subsequently itself exerts influence upon the politics and economy”*. (Mao Zedong, 1966, p.45). Mao’s radical programme of the 1950s known as the Great Leap Forward was a monumental disaster. His response was to move the country even further to the left through the Cultural revolution. The idea was to purify the Chinese communism as well as to restore his leadership by purging his political rivals. To make his messages maximally understandable in the given context, he needed to choose forms of expressions which he believed to be maximally transparent to the audience. As communication takes place in social structures marked by power differences, how the audience understands the notion of maximal understanding can vary culturally.

The use of propaganda has been widely applied by various leaders at different times and for different reasons throughout the course of human history. *“One aspect of propaganda is that, by its very nature, it is designed to reach and influence a mass audience, and as such, it is a kind of technique that must appeal successfully to the emotions, commitments and enthusiasms of the crowd to win acceptance for a conclusion”*. (Walton, 1997, p.388). In accomplishing his goals, Mao relied on a specific mode of communication in the form of artwork, films, music, and speeches used to influence the behaviour of the audience to express support to a communist belief. This development enables us to think of propaganda as a carefully constructed plan consisting of a certain strategy to promote a concrete ideology and thus maintain a beneficial position for the leader. Followed by the construction of systematic propaganda, Mao attempted to create a certain perceptual, cognitive, or behavioural state of mind mostly through specific linguistic codes and images which is why posters were developed during the revolutionary breakthrough in the country so quickly and effectively. As a result, Mao successfully managed to fulfil the intent of his propaganda effort in achieving a certain response from the audience supporting the objectives and goals of the propagandist.

Generally speaking, images have been increasingly used to depict certain events, behaviours, people, cultures, and social forms. This system of visual representation including three fundamental components such as description, analysis, and interpretation, enables us to produce knowledge of human social phenomena. The way in which people interpret or perceive images is also influenced by their cultural background, therefore, offer multi-layered meanings. However, this pattern does not necessarily mean that attributing a meaning to an image happens completely subjectively. Based on the theory of social constructionism, this research paper aims to work with visual images and written text – in which the social positions of difference and authority are articulated – to focus on the production and rhetorical organization of both visual and textual materials. To accomplish this, I use discourse analysis which provides a solid base

for exploring and examining the meaningful aspects of visual representations, however, to address the qualitative and meaningful dimensions of culture, it is essential to go beyond this approach. The composition of the image, its symbolic message, and its linguistic code form a coherent whole and thus enable the reader to explore the symbols of power and leadership within the period of the Cultural revolution. Seeing this, I wish to reveal how propaganda posters functioned in ideological terms – what news was reported and what was not, how it was presented, what was given most significance, or who was being identified as having blame. In this way, I argue that the viewer's agreement was not necessarily real but rather manufactured.

2. Theorising Social Constructionism

To understand the emergence of social constructionism, it is essential to look at a branch of philosophy that studies the processes of knowing itself. The fundamental premise of social constructionism is based on the idea that knowledge is constructed through an individual's experiences with a particular environment which can eventually lead to correct or incorrect perceptions. Endorsing a subjectivist's view, social constructionism "*places knowledge in the domain of social interchange*", therefore, knowledge is "*the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship*". (Guterman, 2014; Gergen, 1985, in Guterman, 2014, p.20). As a result of this, there are many examples of socially constructed realities in the domain of language between people. Construction can be seen as an internal process in which a person does not exist independently from the social situation and thus works with many separate pieces of knowledge and uses them to make an overall image of a new concept. While a person can construct meaning individually, it is also possible to construct knowledge in groups in which members focus on collective efforts to impose meaning on a particular issue. Therefore, people are influenced not only by their social setting but the creator of it as well. The same can be true for the Chinese people who were either consciously or unconsciously influenced by their norms, values, and common modes of behaviour constructed through their social setting during the Cultural revolution. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann argue that human activity and thus society is subject to habituation which is based on the idea that "*any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern and can be performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort*". (Berger et.al. 1966, pp.70-71). Furthermore, Goffman provides another interesting insight for understanding the formation of social or interest groups. He assumes that "*the individual develops identity or persona as a function of interaction with others, through an exchange of information that allows for more specific definitions of identity and behaviour*". (Goffman, 1959, pp.23-46).

Being a member of a particular group means to conform to the norms of that group to which they belong. Groups norms, as defined by Jowett, are beliefs, values, and attitudes derived from membership in such social groups. (Jowett, 2012, p.37).

According to Kecskemeti, the ideology of propaganda posters provides “*the audience with a comprehensive conceptual framework for dealing with social and political reality*” (Kecskemeti, 1973, pp. 849–850, in Jowett, 2012). In order to explore and examine the ideology, it is essential to look for a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours. Ideology, as defined by Cooper, is perceived as “*a coherent world view that determines how arguments will be received and interpreted. The common sense of the world-view provides the basis for determining what is good, bad, right, wrong, and so forth*” (Cooper, 1989, in Jowett, 2012, p. 162). Culture plays a role in all conflict situations, whether intracultural or intercultural in nature. As a result, people acquire identities by participating in collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize their actions. Identities are, therefore, relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self often linked to institutional roles such as citizen. Seeing this, identity with its appropriate attachments of psychological reality is inherently relational within a specific, socially constructed world. (Wendt, 1992, p.397-398). Once the Red Guard began to gain more support among the people, they frequently relied on the use of propaganda to justify their actions and promote their world-views. While some propagandas exist to organize an attitude toward a person, like President Liu Shaoqi; others to organize an attitude toward a group, like the old members of the CPC, teachers, professors, other professionals, towns and village leaders; others to organize an attitude toward a policy or institution, like the party's leadership; and still others to organize an attitude toward a mode of personal participation, like joining the Red Guard. (Lasswell, 1927, p.629). Through heavy use of propaganda posters, the Red Guard successfully put the blame on scapegoats whom ordinary people could direct their anger toward. Seeing this, they expressed a form of consent to the

given social order as well as the conformity to the rules within a specific set of structures defined by the propagandist. Although there are some commonalities between cultures, “*what a person is understood to be varies culturally*”. (Giddens, 1991, in Jackson, 2014). The concept of cultural identity refers to “*an individual’s sense of self derived from formal or informal membership in a particular group that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life*”. (Jameson, 2007). Seeing this, the purpose of the propaganda posters was to influence people to adopt beliefs that correspond to those of the propagandist as well as to engage in certain patterns of behaviour like joining the Red Guard. It is mostly through linguistic codes and cultural socialization that our primary cultural beliefs, values, norms, and world views are internalised to varying degrees. If we define ideology as “*a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view*”, we all have ideologies because we all have a particular point of view. (Kress *et al.* 1993; in Mooney, 2011, p.6).

Under Mao Tse-Tung , the dictatorial leader of the People’s Republic of China from 1949 until his death in 1976, such pervasive propaganda, along with the basic principles of the communist economic system, was meant to create a New Chinese Person possessing all the desired qualities, caring more about the collective than themselves, believing in the Chinese country and the Communist party, and spreading these ideas around the globe. Beliefs are a set of learned interpretations that form the bases for cultural members to decide what is and what is not logical and correct. (Lustig, 2010, in Jackson, 2014). As there are more than thousands of beliefs, the propagandist has to build on the existing beliefs of the people to create a new one. If the embodied knowledge is strong, the propagandist is more likely to influence the formation of a new belief. On the other hand, values are shared ideas about what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, kind or cruel, or important and unimportant. (Lustig, 2010, in Jackson, 2014). Seeing this, personal values are derived from cultural values covering many aspects of society and together they form an individual’s perceptions of the world. Culturally shared traditions are

customs or rituals that have been passed down from one generation to another. The great mass movement was focused on the removal of the so-called 'The Four Olds' known as culture, habits, ideas, and customs that were not compatible with Mao's vision of communism in China. An attitude is a determined posture to respond to a particular course of action. Jowett argues that: *"as people form beliefs about an object, idea, or person, they automatically and simultaneously acquire attitudes toward it"*. He then elaborates further: *"whereas each belief is an association of an attribute with an object, an attitude is essentially an attribute evaluation"*. (Jowett et.al 2012, p.36).

3. Methodology

The aesthetic turn in the field of international relations enables the reader to explore and examine the interpretive aspects of politics by looking at art as an alternative source to understand how visual images stand out as an example of the social circumstances in which they are embedded. Propaganda posters are certainly valuable in their visuality carrying the burden of its political thinking. The affective role of images reveals the cultural significance, social practices, and power relations as well. Seeing this, it seeks to “shift critical focus from facts to feelings”, therefore, more attention to visual units is helpful for framing our understanding of the world. (Callahan, 2015, p.891-900). To structure data collection and observations, it is essential to apply an appropriate research method consisting of rules and procedures to facilitate systematic analysis of the propaganda posters and thus support research and evaluate claims for knowledge.

Visual propaganda provides the audience with political communication through creative ways combining different approaches for social listening. Propaganda posters are produced as isolable, self-contained, or separate and thus have a clear frame or boundary within which the various elements of image make sense. To continue with the definition, visual units of meaning, then, are defined within the context of a particular research question as well as within the theoretical categories of the medium and genres on which this research focuses. (Bell, 2004, pp.4-7). In order to explore and examine visual propaganda as a means for political communication during the Cultural Revolution, it is crucial to measure dimensions of the content of political messages. To capture the processes of social construction that constitute social life of individuals and societies, this research paper will use discourse analysis as a compelling theoretical frame for observing social reality. In fact, discourse analysis aims to find out “*how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created in the first place and how they are maintained and held in place over time*”, therefore, it is a powerful

method for studying social phenomena. (Nelson *et al.*, 2002, pp.3-6). According to Pedersen, discourse analysis assumes that *“basic assumptions with regard to being, self and the world are constructed by individuals living in a historical and cultural context which is produced and reproduced by their speech acts”*. (Pedersen, 2009, pp.1-9). To continue with the definition, our understanding of discourse has a quite specific meaning. As suggested by Rose, discourse can refer to *“groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it”*. (Rose, 2007, pp.136-164). Seeing this, discourse analysis can also be used to explore how images construct specific views of the social world and thus pays careful attention to an image itself as well as other sorts of evidence. (Rose, 2007, pp.136-164). Having said that, propaganda posters – a powerful form of political communication between the propagandist and the audience – can be understood as a specialized form of knowledge among various social groups within the country. As highlighted by Tonkiss, discourse analysis does not primarily depend on the quantity of material analysed. What is important, she suggests, *“is the richness of textual detail, rather than the number of texts analysed”*. (Tonkiss, 1998: 253, cited in Rose, 2007, p.144). Having said that, this research paper will introduce six propaganda posters that resonated strongly within the society – more specifically youngsters, peasants, and soldiers – to reflect how their symbolic messages and linguistic codes serve as transmitters of certain ideas.

3.1 Visual Semiotics

In the field of the social sciences, visual analysis is concerned with the content of images, the arrangement of elements within them, the nature of the processes of production of the images, and the social context surrounding their production. Seeing this, visual analysis is a research method which is qualitative in form. Banks indicates two good reasons for incorporating the analysis of images – paintings, photographs, film, videotape, and a host of other images – into

a research. The first good reason is that images are somehow ubiquitous in society, therefore, some consideration of visual representation can potentially be included in all studies of society. Secondly, he argues that a study of images in the collection of data allows for some sociological insight that is not accessible by any other means. (Banks, 2017, pp.2-18). If identified correctly, all of the elements of visual units may be important sources of knowledge through the process of visual analysis. As Collier highlights in his work, *“the challenge is to responsibly address the many aspects of images, recognizing that the search for meaning and significance does not end in singular ‘facts’ or ‘truths’ but rather produces one or more viewpoints on human circumstances”*, therefore, *“much of the promise and value of visual images in research is based on this aspect of their character”*. (Collier, 2004, pp.1-3). Seeing this, the purpose of this research is to identify all factors constituting the real power in the use of propaganda posters during the Cultural revolution in the People’s Republic of China by exploring and examining all attributes needed for a successful representation of the visual word through pictures. In this way, all details of propaganda posters are systematically described including their meaning by using information about their production and use as well as their historic, political, social, and cultural context.

Roland Barthes endeavoured to extend the scope of analysis focusing on visual communication and thus began to analyse a ‘rhetoric of the image’. (Barthes, 1967, cited in Margolis et al. 2012, pp.2-15). Pictures are used for diverse purposes. In the use of propaganda posters, I will study the so-called advertising image. As Barthes points out, *“in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed a priori by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible”*. Furthermore, *“if the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a view to the optimum reading: the advertising image is frank, or at least emphatic”*. (Barthes, 1977, pp.152-163). To elaborate further on this definition,

propaganda posters immediately yield the image's ineffable richness by proposing at least three valid messages to the audience. To analyse propaganda posters during the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China, I will put emphasis and focus on the composition of the image, its symbolic message, and its linguistic code to provide the reader with the complexity of the knowledge invested in the reading of the message in order to decode its meaning. As stated by Margolis and Pauwels, "*reading pictures is a semiotic process*" in which "*images are signs that do not only have meanings but also create meanings*". (Margolis et al. 2011, pp.2-15). By employing this approach, the use as well as the effects of communication by means of propaganda posters will be studied in relation to their modes. As a result, the reader will have a sound understanding of the communicative intentions and cultural meanings embedded in propaganda posters during the revolution.

Posters took on a very important role during the Cultural revolution and thus became the iconic piece of Chinese propaganda serving as a powerful tool in delivering slogans to the masses. As they were widely accessible, talented artists needed to create thousands of posters, millions of which were often reproduced and launched into circulation to motivate the nation throughout the whole region. The composition of propaganda posters frequently featured figures who managed to convey emotions through their facial expressions and thus making the posters more attractive and effective at the same time. As a result, posters created images of role models of various social groups such as peasants, soldiers, and youngsters fighting for a socialist nation. Colourful and visually engaging posters often included expressive and straight-forward messages motivating the enthusiasm of the masses to secure support for Mao's long-term vision. While the composition of propaganda posters will typically govern whether propaganda posters attract the audience, symbolist and structuralist perspectives aim to arrive at "*at a fuller appreciation of the visual representation by relating it to other social and cultural arrangements*". (Smith et al. 2011, pp. 2-18). In general, visual units of meaning operate at

several levels such as *“the 'exegetical' meaning of a symbol, which derives from indigenous informants; the 'operational' meaning, which the anthropologist establishes from observation of the symbol in use; and the 'positional' or contextual meaning of a symbol, which derives its relation to other symbols as part of a pattern or system”*. (Turner, 1967; cited in Smith et al. 2011, pp. 2-18). The symbolism associated with particular colours occupies a central place in examining and analysing propaganda posters during the revolution. As highlighted by Smith, colour is replete with symbolic significance, therefore, can distinguish different categories. (Smith et al. 2011, p. 2-18).

Powerful words and slogans are very common when the propagandist wants the audience to believe something. Propaganda posters are an excellent place to see the way in which language can have power. Language has certainly many functions used to refer to things or demonstrate status and power. A single utterance can, therefore, do more than one thing. Jakobson highlights that we need to investigate language in all variety of its functions. On one side of his schema we find the speaker – the person who is speaking. On the other, we find the addressee – the person being spoken to. For the message to be communicated, there has to be a medium of communication, which can be either written or visual. This influences how the message is encoded. Whatever code is chosen it must be one that both addresser and addressee have access to. The message will be sent and received in a context that frames the message. (Jakobson, 2000, in Mooney, 2011, pp.123-126). Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. (Yule, 1996). More simply, it is a study of language use in context. (Hua, 2011, in Jackson, 2014). Pragmatics is concerned with the propagandist’s intended meanings, his assumptions, his purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions (in this case requests, orders, and commands) that he is performing when he speaks. (Yule, 1996). As a result, it puts emphasis on analysis of what the propagandist means by his utterances then what the words or phrases mean by themselves. This type of approach, therefore, involves the

interpretation of what the propagandist means in a particular social context and how this context forms and shapes what is said. There are many different possible modes of interaction between people. They depend partly on what they feel at a particular time, but they depend also on who they are both as individuals and as members of particular social, cultural, ethnic groups. The ability to comprehend and produce communicate acts in a culturally appropriate and effective manner is referred to as pragmatic competence. (Kasper, 1997, in Jackson, 2014, p.56). This notion encompasses one's knowledge about social distance, the social status between the speakers involved, cultural knowledge such as politeness and linguistic knowledge. At some point, we can certainly observe an image-text relation in which the verbal text is added to extend or complete the message of the image. (Barthes, 1977, p.39).

4. Historical Background

4.1 Socialism and Communism in the People's Republic of China

The history of communism in China has undoubtedly played a major role in the process of transforming China into a communist nation. After the Chinese Civil War ended, the Communist Red Army successfully defeated the Nationalists and the establishment of the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 as a result of the striking events. *"The ultimate aim for which all communists strive is to bring about a socialist and communist society."* (Mao Zedong, 1939, cited in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.123). Since that time, Mao Zedong appeared to be a prominent leader who launched not only the Great Leap Forward but the Cultural Revolution as well. In the first step, Mao was determined to create a new system of land ownership followed by major land reforms by replacing the old system. By launching a five-year economic plan involving the process of collectivization, Mao began to transform China from a rural economy to a new industrial leader on the world stage. However, things have unexpectedly worsened and did not bring about the results he was hoping for. Mao quickly realized that he needs to revive the revolutionary spirit to reassert his authority among the people who were struggling with massive famines and huge amounts of ruined crops. Since this was an extremely violent time, Mao's power was at stake. To regain support for the government, he launched another ideological and political plan known as the Cultural Revolution aimed at removing all old elements within the cultural sphere. In the face of revisionist approach, Mao was determined to pure communism.

4.2 The Communist Party

The Communist Party has dominated the Chinese political system by having control of internal security forces, security apparatus, corporations, institutions, media, and military. Since its establishment, its members proclaimed the realization of communism to be its highest ideal and ultimate goal. *"We must have faith in the masses and we must have faith in the Party. These are two cardinal principles."* (Mao Zedong, On the Co-operative Transformation of

Agriculture, 1955, cited in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.68). In the Maoist period, Chinese political discourse was defined as formalized language aiming to teach the enlarged masses about how to not only speak but how to think as well. Developed and used by political leaders, it soon became a restricted code consisting of correct formulations. As Schoenhals points out, the language of politics is a specific mode of communication in which a selection of various kinds of statements prevails. (Schoenhals, 1992; Cao, Tian and Chilton, 2014). Having said that, formalized language and formalized speech acts play an important part in the China's political system as they both undoubtedly constitute the structure of power. The bureaucratic agencies in the country are highly involved in having control over political discourse by proscribing some formulations and thus making formalized language the sole legitimate medium of political expression within the area.

“What really counts in the world is conscientiousness, and the Communist Party is most particular about being conscientious.” (Mao Zedong, Public Speech in Moscow, 1957, cited in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.54). Throughout this time, the Communist Party managed to deliver several steps in which the process of transformation could begin. Marxism is seen as the philosophical foundation for the rise of communism. Based on this political and social theory, the proponents of this ideology believed that social change comes about through economic class struggle. Although the party leaders had relevant experiences in managing certain governmental units, they admitted having no experience in transforming the country to a socialist nation. An alliance between the peasants and the workers was advocated under the leadership of the communist leaders. To apply Marxism systematically to the country, Mao focused on turning the semi-colonial, semi-feudal society into an independent democratic society as well as to develop the revolution for the building up of a socialist society. (The Strategy and Tactics of World Communism, 1949, in Karunakaran, 1952, p.36).

For many years, the violence excesses of the revolution caused that no one really talked about it in the country, but recently many people began to speak out about their personal experiences of that time. Saul Yeung provides an interesting overview of how Mao decided to mobilize the young people as a driving force of the campaign to purify the Communist Party. Saul was only 20 years when he joined the Red Guard to prove his devotion to the revolution. He was invited and encouraged to visit the Communist Party's offices to expose and root out Mao's opponents. Saul admits that this was certainly a happy time for him due to free travel and the possibility to see all other cities. Although many parts of the country were still suffering the effects of the famine that had followed Mao's Great Leap Forward few years earlier, the members of the revolutionary front had no clue about it. Wherever they were in the country, the Red Guard tried to come up with ways to demonstrate their revolutionary commitments. Saul acknowledges that there were no clear instructions about how to act and behave during the revolution. They had to find out by themselves how to express their loyalty to the ruling party. Seeing this, the use of propaganda posters appears to be an effective tool for managing their actions against removing the old habits, ideas, traditions, and culture. For Saul, the movement was quickly accelerating, and they suddenly became in charge and everyone had to do what they said. By targeting the people who were not behaving properly, he managed to show them his way of right thinking. As a result, all over the country, local groups attacked fellow students and public officials who did not show enough commitment to the communist principles. (Saul Yeung, BBC Radio, 2017). Based on Saul's accounts of his time in the Red Guard, this testimony serves as a proof that the revolution took an unprecedented speed and was very hard to control.

4.2 Classes and Class Struggle

The term, social class, has been used to define and analyse identities and relations between groups located at different levels of the socio-economic hierarchy. Language is an important

factor in any discussion of social class. Furthermore, language is a fundamental human activity through which we communicate our particular representation of the world. It is primarily through language that cultural values and beliefs are transmitted from one member of a society to another and from one generation to the next. (Eppler, in Mooney *et al.* 2011, p.161). The work of communist Karl Marx holds a view that the class struggle, frequently referred to as class conflict, provides an impetus for radical social change. Although class conflict can take numerous different forms, the conflict exists primarily due to competing socio-economic interests as well as desires between social classes or groups. As a result, the enormous social and economic changes produce dramatic shifts in the country's class structure. According to Taylor and Francis, class is a concept including several contextual meanings and can be defined in terms of simple gradations based on material conditions based on inequalities of income and standard of living which divides class in terms of hierarchical social categories such as higher, middle, and lower. (Taylor et al. in Jones, 2001, p.161). To put it more simply, a class of people is a social group having similar socio-economic status and thus sharing some common characteristics except power, prestige, and influence. In a social environment, there are two groups of people: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. While the former produces, the latter exploits the producers based on their capability to market.

To specify the content of social class, Kraus argues that our understanding of its significance can be increased *“if we recognize that class, like many other politically charged words, can mean different things to different actors”*, therefore, the content of class is variable and adjustable to a particular social context. (Kraus, 1977, pp.54-64). Hierarchical social categories enable people to identify their place in the class structure and thus either consciously or unconsciously distinguish between friends and enemies. As a result, Chinese people were able to identify with their class and this in turn meant that class in China was given a degree of specificity. Seeing this, Mao argued for the restoration of class as a major organizing principle

for any social change in the country. Furthermore, the idea of class struggle was employed as a weapon by the adherents of the Maoist slogan aimed at reinforcing the revival of interest in class conflict. After Mao developed his thoughts he identified openly the proper goals of class struggle. The following Cultural Revolution was, therefore, focused on rectifying those people within the Party who took the capitalist road. As Kraus continues, Mao's interest in class struggle implied a recognition that Chinese Marxism must be designated for application to socialist societies. (Kraus, 1977, pp.54-64). The aim of this research paper, however, is not merely describe these interactions, but to trace their linkages to issues of power.

4.3 Identification of the Propagandist

As defined by Jowett, *"the source of propaganda is likely to be an institution or organization, with the propagandist as its leader or agent"*. (Jowett, 2005, p.273). The concept of self-persuasion as a phenomenon suggests that *"as we may persuade ourselves in an authentic way, so we may persuade others authentically"*. (Burks, 1970, p. 109). Mao Tse-Tung as the Great Teacher, the Great Leader, the Great Helmsman, and the Supreme Commander, seemed to have become a dominant figure in the People's Republic of China. To promote successful propaganda posters requires a strong, centralized, decision-making authority that produces a coherent message throughout its structure. Looking at the course of events, Mao Tse-Tung successfully applied this approach by not only logical but psychological appeals to the public as well. It is important to note that it is the propagandist who communicates meanings via implicatures and it is the audience who recognizes these communicated meanings via inference. The inferences selected are those which will preserve the assumption of cooperation. (Thomas, 1995, p.40). To reveal the structure of the propaganda organization, it is essential to look at how Mao Tse-Tung got his position and how he inspires loyalty and support among the people. Typically, the leader will have a certain specific style that enables him to attract many

supporters, maintain his desired popularity, and mold the people into organizational units or social groups.

According to Landsberger, Mao Tse-Tung was frequently painted in red and other warm tones and thus seemed to radiate as the primary source of light in a composition as well as illuminating the faces of the people that always looked towards him. Seeing this pattern, his image was considered more important than the occasion for which propaganda posters were designed. In this way, Mao Tse-Tung remained united with the people willing to go with the revolutionary flow of the moment. His official portrait became a regular presence in the central place in the home of every person in the nation. Mao was an enduring icon and his continuous efforts at mobilization would have been unthinkable without the central role he played in the day-to-day affairs of the population through the propaganda posters and his own portrait on display. These official portraits of Mao had to be treated with special care meaning that nothing could be placed above it and its frame should not have a single blemish. (Landsberger, 2015, pp.14-46). The iconography of the leader began to appear early in propaganda posters increasing in frequency and prominence in all public spaces. Leeuwen stresses the fact that iconography pays attention to the context in which propaganda posters are produced as well as distributed and circulated in public places, and to how and why cultural meanings and their visual expressions come about historically. As Leeuwen continues, iconographers are strongly aware of the fact that symbolic meanings may be intended to be understood only by a restricted audience (Leeuwen, 2004, pp.92-118). Talented artists employed by state officials generated distinctive images that incorporated several elements from the rich traditions of Chinese culture and thus propaganda posters resonated strongly with a restricted audience – youngsters, peasants, and soldiers. These trends continued and reached their peak during the years of Maoism. Mao was soon depicted as a living god. *“Violence between factions often led to death. Everyone fought in the name of Mao and to be a Mao-ist was the goal of the time. I continued to dream that one*

day I would be honoured to have an opportunity to sacrifice myself for Mao". (Anchee Min, in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.5). To read revolutionary books and learn from revolutionaries during the Cultural revolution assured that people would not betray their faith in Communism. Seeing this, Mao managed to achieve his goals in a manner that ideally maintains and enhances the relationship in which communication occurs. Since the propagandist typically presents himself in what he says and do, the communication strategies he uses to influence how others view him are extremely important. In this way, we can see communication as impression management controlled in three basic ways – manner, appearance, and setting.

4.4 The Context in which Propaganda Posters Occur

The use of propaganda posters as historical evidence is an important form of recording acts of eye witnessing. As it is difficult to translate their testimony into words, historians frequently question the extent to which images offer reliable evidence of the past events. The situation complicates even further when one considers the visual narratives as well as the social and political context of these images. Context is seen as linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena that surrounds a particular linguistic feature or utterance. (Swann, 2004, in Jackson, 2014, p.43). To understand the production and distribution of propaganda posters effectively and safely, it is necessary to include both contexts by exploring and examining the situation as well as the setting to help the reader make sense of outside information. *"From the day I was born in 1951, I was subjected to a visual education from children's picture books, through school textbooks and books for teenagers, to the huge number of other images and propaganda posters. They all dealt with similar subjects and were my signposts through life. They made sure we did not make mistakes."* (Duo Duo, 2015, pp.9-10). This is an interesting departure point for analysing propaganda posters. Since the people in China were exposed to a visual education throughout most of their lives, it was easy to influence or even manipulate their thinking. There are many

types of context and its elements that can influence and shape the communication process. Cultural context including all of the factors that make up one's culture involving all the learned social norms as well as perceptual context including the individual characteristics of the interactants such as motivation, intention, and personality traits people bring to the communication event can both certainly influence communication between the propagandist and the audience. *"On the wall next to my bed hung a poster with a quotation from Mao Zedong: "While working the fields during the high season, eat solid food; in the time when there is not much to do, eat half solid and half liquid food, supplemented by potatoes and sweet potatoes. I knew every word but even so I did not understand what it meant. I now think if this quotation had been turned into a visual image, it would have been understandable to anyone. In the vast fields there was nothing to harvest; 20 million peasants were starving because they had nothing to eat". (Duo Duo, 2015, p.10). After considering the prevailing public mood, several specific issues are identifiable. They were widely felt among the Chinese society due to serious constraints that kept these issues from being resolved. In this way, we can also talk about psychological context reflecting one's needs, desires, values, attitudes, feelings, emotion, perceptions, and prior experience. In conjunction with physiological context touching upon the well-being of individuals, the potential for misunderstanding subsequently arises. In order to make the revolutionary breakthrough successful, the propagandist must consider many types of context and contextual elements that can influence the communication process he aims to begin. As a result, communication between the propagandist and the audience is intentional with a specific purpose in mind. As both share the same background and experiences, the intention and meanings that lie behind the communication process are not complicated by a range of factors and thus can be deconstructed easily.*

5. Understanding Propaganda

5.1 The Ideology and Purpose of Propaganda Posters

After exploring and examining the basic elements of propaganda, it is essential to evaluate the rise of the Chinese propaganda posters in the period between 1966 until 1976. The main advantage of propaganda posters was that they were cheaply and easily produced, therefore, became one of the most successful tool for penetrating every level of communication. Most importantly, they were widely available and thus could be seen in places like offices, factories, houses, and dormitories. Through all of its long history in the People's Republic of China, the political system primarily focused on the area of arts to propagate correct behaviour and thought among the Chinese people. It has not only provided examples of correct behaviour, but it successfully illustrated a concrete expression to numerous policies and various visions of the future as well. Mao's behaviour communicates ideas and attitudes to others which means that the audience needs to be mindful of the messages that he is sending. Being able to visualize a product in a commercially attractive way, these original works of art including the politically inspired slogans were reproduced further in journals and magazines or even turned into postage stamps. These propaganda posters allowed the political message to be passed on because they were visible on the streets, in railway stations, and in other public spaces while some of them were even distributed through the social network known as Xinhua (New China). As a result, these posters visualizing abstract ideas created the future in the present showing life as it ought to be. This method reached the peak of artistic expression in the years of the great mass movements in which millions of people were mobilized into action. This development indicates that Mao was clearly able to transform his knowledge of both verbal and nonverbal communication in practice and thus successfully communicated very sensitively across cultural boundaries within the country. Apart from entertaining the people in the country, propaganda posters were given an important didactic function which had to educate the people in what was considered right.

Visual propaganda has helped national parties and their leaders to secure or maintain power in the country, therefore, are often remembered by people for a lifetime as influential events or even turning points. Visual images for persuasion used in the Cultural Revolution depending upon the country, its laws, and the political circumstances, have often been significant in its impact on the people. These visual images were the primary media of political communication for a long period of time in the Chinese history and they continue in importance during the revolutionary breakthrough. The leaders of the People's Republic of China accorded exceptional importance to the centrality of visual images for persuasion and indoctrination during the Cultural Revolution. The first political posters appeared in the early phase of the revolutionary breakthrough and soon were produced by many organizations and institutions. As a result, a massive number of posters went into circulation on daily basis. Mao Zedong appreciated the effectiveness of propaganda posters for influencing ordinary people with his vision. Such development indicates that a majority of the population was struggling with the low level of literacy. Although mass propaganda can take many different forms, the strong visual traditions of the Chinese people minimized the need to comprehend the written word. Seeing this, propaganda posters displayed widely in all public places whose colour and design enlivened society offered a more effective way of reaching a wide audience. As the Cultural Revolution proceeded, visual methods became more intensive and widespread. Furthermore, all poster production was brought under the supervision of the state officials operated under the direct supervision of the propagandist. The themes, texts, and images of posters were dictated to all talented artists and closely regulated by official leaders in the country. This centralization and control over poster production resulted in a tremendous expansion in the volume of propaganda posters. Mao determined his effort to confront every Chinese citizen for the purpose of mass mobilization and indoctrination. „*My strength and courage came from the posters I grew up with. I believed in heroism and if I had to, I preferred to die like a martyr*“ . (Anchee

Min, in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.5). In combination with political ideology, visual propaganda in the country had a unique and compelling character because political artists drew on the rich traditions of Chinese culture.

5.2 The Target Audience

As highlighted by Taylor, *“one cannot speak of propaganda unless a link between the propagandist and the audience can be established”*. (Taylor, 1979, cited in Whitelam, 1986, p.166). Each of us has an identity or rather a set of identities. Affected by many factors such as social class, the construction of individual and social identities, as belonging to a particular group or community, often happens through the use of cultural socialization – a profound indicator of identity. (Thomas et al. 2004). Expectations in conflict situations are influenced by the underlying values and norms. These objects related to specific values and norms which have a standard meaning in a group are called significant symbols. A representation is composed of repeated elements and appears natural or normal. We are often invited to identify with or recognise the representation. Therefore, representation is a constructed image of something in real life- an individual person, a social group, an idea, an event, or a place in single images, a sequence of images, written words, spoken words or song lyrics. The use of propaganda posters makes us to categorise people, events, places and ideas. Representations thus contain a point of view of those who made them. Representations have a mode of address, they will address you with certain assumptions about who you are. Having said that, representation involves processes of social constructionism.

Social identity typically derives from *“knowing in which social category one belongs and assuming the characteristics of that social group”*, therefore, identity becomes salient mainly through *“comparisons with other groups, and this process of social comparison is influenced by a motivational desire to see one’s own group, and thus oneself, in a positive light”*. (Jackson, 2011, p.54). Let’s look at the example of an organization called the Red Guard in China during

the Cultural Revolution in the late twentieth century. As Lasswell provides in his work, *“the word attitude is taken to mean a tendency to act according to certain patterns of valuation”*. Seeing this, *“the existence of an attitude is not a direct datum of experience, but an inference from signs which have a conventionalized significance”*. (Lasswell, 1927, p.627)

Using images, posters, public plays, slogans, and films, its members aimed to destroy all the features of Chinese culture that did not align with the basic principles of communism. This group was able to manipulate and influence the Chinese people that the economic depression in the wake of the revolution was not the result of governmental failure but was instead the fault of the disastrous economic policies implemented by previous leaders. Mao Tse-Tung was an expert of the technique known as the direct approach which generally occurs *“when an arguer, addressing a large group of people, excites the emotions and enthusiasm of the crowd to win acceptance for his conclusion”*. (Walton, 1997, p.389). What is more, this approach is not limited to oral argumentation but can be accomplished in public plays, films, and posters by using emotionally charged phraseology. (Walton, 1997, p.389).

The leader of the propagandist movement always selects a target audience for its potential effectiveness. To secure his position as an authoritative figure in the process, the leader uses mass communication in conjunction with other audience forms such as social groups or interest groups. As Jowett argues: *“The propagandist knows, however, that the purpose is not to promote mutual understanding but rather to promote his or her own objectives. Thus, the propagandist will attempt to control information flow and manage a certain public’s opinion by shaping perceptions through strategies of informative communication.”* (Jowett, 2012, p.44-45). *“The posters had a great impact on my life. They taught me to be selfless and to be loyal to Mao and Communism. To be able to feel closer to Mao, I filled my house with posters. I looked at Mao before I closed my eyes at night and again when I woke. When I saved a few pennies, I would go to the bookstores to buy new Mao posters”*. (Anchee Min, cited in Chinese

Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.5). This behaviour reflects her ability to function in relational roles within the social setting. She was able to manage interactions in the given communication context without excessive discomfort. Although she integrated only one specific cultural perspective, mindset, and behaviour into her identity and worldview, she was able to deal with social difficulties in the given setting more easily due to acquired knowledge, motivation, and skills which are certainly necessary conditions needed for any social interactions. Social categorisation and Othering are link to the social identity theory that was developed by Tajfel and Turner to explain intergroup behaviour. The notion of this theory is that individuals tend to categorise people in their social environment into in-groups and out-groups. (Tajfel 1982, Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986, cited in Jackson, 2014, p. 159). In-group members can be defined as people with whom you feel connected to or owe a sense of loyalty and allegiance such as family members, close friends, or familiar others within the community. The Red Guard grew out of Mao Tse-Tung's vision to create a powerful new body of political support to challenge the persisting status-quo by destroying opponents of the desired regime. In this way, it can be seen as a group that offers protection in exchange for loyalty and provides its members with a sense of identity. The newly emerging youth movement began to first emerge in several middle schools and universities and its membership was restricted to those from the five red categories such as workers, poor and lower peasants, revolutionary cadres, and revolutionary martyrs. (Heaslet, 1972, p. 1032-1033)

“Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution. To distinguish real friends from real enemies, we must make a general analysis of the economic status of the various classes in Chinese society and of their respective attitudes towards the revolution.” (Mao Zedong, Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society, 1926, cited in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p. 102). In contrast to in-group members, we can perceive out-group members are those with whom one feels emotionally and psychologically detached

such as strangers, unfamiliar others or members who belong to a competitive or opposing group. (Ting-Toomey et al. 2012, cited in Jackson, 2014, p.159). Social groups typically have a clearly stated purpose. The extent to which their members recognize this shared commitment varies. If these groups have well-defined values, standards, functions and responsibilities, their members will certainly function and perform more effectively and efficiently. In-group bias refers to situations in which people give preferential treatment to those who are perceived to be in the same in-group. It is a positive attachment to norms that are related to one's in-group. This positive attachment places formidable demands on all those involved. Anchee Min admitted that the social setting provided a shared sense of purpose as "*everyone fought in the name of Mao and to be a Maoist was the goal of the time*", she says. (Anchee Min, 1976, cited in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.5). The organization of Red Guard successfully secured the so-called enthusiastic unanimity about their social aims, therefore, acted extremely effectively in many aspects during the period. The real attractiveness of an ideal totalitarian society caused a great deal of initiative among all the members of the organization. Sharing a common purpose, the movement soon had a major influence on many people in the region who were willing to make personal sacrifices to reach their social aims. Such membership in an organization is attractive as soon as this organization "*encourages initiative and enterprise from all its members and many people find a great deal of satisfaction in devotion to some wider purpose beyond their own selfish interests*". (Lindsay, 1967, p.225-226). In this way, leadership style can certainly motivate various social groups and their members and thus increase power of influence consistent with the goals and activities of the propagandist. Based on Anchee Min's account, Mao was an autocrat with semi-democratic features whose directives were obeyed unquestionably because he motivated his adherents by anticipation of rewards in the form of a new and prosperous state. As a result, he fostered a positive and motivating feeling among the people and thus allowing them to perform at their highest levels of capability. The

empowerment of others resulted in a very experienced and professional team of rebels through all levels of the Red Guard. More importantly, Mao was appointed to be their leader because of the position he holds in the country rather than his skills.

5.3 The Content of Propaganda Posters

Communication can be defined as a *“process in which a sender transmits a message to a receiver through a particular channel”*. (Jowett et.al. 2012, p.30). It occurs when we intentionally use symbols – words or non-spoken symbols to create meaning for others. (Jandt, 2001, in Jackson, 2014, p.47). Once the propagandist begins to use various forms, methods, and techniques to promote certain views among the people, communication is built through both linear and transactional models. If people want to understand the issues penetrating their daily lives, they generally seek information. To make propaganda posters widely available means to promote certain informative communication which *“differs from other kinds of communicators by having the purpose of creating mutual understanding of data that are considered to be accurate, concepts that are considered to be indisputable, and ideas that are based on facts”*. (Jowett et.al. 2012, p.31). The use of propaganda posters was used in every level of social organization and cohabitation. Most people were attracted to the multi-coloured posters due to their composition and visual content. Various governmental and party organizations that were set up to produce propaganda posters employed the most talented artists in order to visualize the current political trends. These artists painted only propaganda posters included all their love and all their yearnings into their pictures and their highest ambition was to become a professional propaganda poster artist. (Duo Duo, 2015, p.11). During the Cultural Revolution in the period of 1966-1976, politics dominated over any other issue in the content of propaganda posters and thus making Mao Tse-Tung the only permissible subject of that era.

According to Landsberger, the images were often figurative and realistic aiming to portray the future in the present. More than that, they were painted in a naïve style, with all forms outlined

in black, filled in with bright pinks, reds, yellows, greens, and blues. The stylistic dictates of *hong, guang, liang* (red, bright, and shining) dominated the propaganda posters in the great mass movement and the revolutionary flow of the moment. What classified them as propaganda posters were the politically inspired slogans printed underneath. The artists visualized the strong and healthy bodies of the Chinese people which eventually functioned as metaphors for the strong and healthy productive classes Mao wanted to promote. In the process of visualizing a kind of fiction, the gender distinctions as well as physical differences between males and females of the subjects were disappearing and erased over time. Not only their clothes were baggy and sexless, their faces were done according to a limited repertoire of acceptable standard forms. (Landsberger, 2015, pp.14-46).

6. Analysis of Propaganda Posters

6.1 The Rhetoric of Propaganda Posters

The use of propaganda is frequently linked to the management of public opinion which is defined as “*an implicit verbal response or ‘answer’ that some individual gives in response to a particular stimulus situation in which some general ‘question’ is raised*” (Mitchell, 1970, p. 62). “*When I was 16, I was sent to work on the land. For the first time I learnt about how peasants lived. The physical work was very hard. People barely had enough to eat. In that poverty-stricken village I once saw the bedroom of a newly married peasant couple. On the wall was a poster with good luck.* (Duo Duo, cited in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, pp.10-11). This testimony reveals the importance of symbols in recognizing the need to strive for a better social environment. Although his personal ability to deal with situations such as frustration or stress caused by the social setting was relatively weak, he managed to find an optimistic approach to uncomfortable situation by relying on symbols associated with luck and thus employ new thinking seeking to extend understanding into new and unfamiliar zones. As a result, he was able to initiate contact and build relationship with the propagandist by tolerating and positively accepting his behaviour. In this way, he integrated his cultural perspective to varying extents through more inclusive decisions and actively seeking to build an inclusive social setting. Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the use of propaganda posters became a major concern in mass communication. The propaganda activities during the revolutionary breakthrough as well as the ideological battle and the diffusion of the propaganda posters as channels for persuasive messages indicate that the propagandist, Mao Zedong, needed to recruit lots of students and wanted people to work together to accomplish his long-desired vision. So what the public thought about the revolutionary breakthrough in the country really mattered at that time. He tried very hard to persuade them to think in a certain way largely by propaganda posters in which he was letting people see what was going on. In this way, he successfully managed to win their hearts and minds. Having Mao make a speech made people

want to support his goals and objectives. However, as highlighted by Margolis and Pauwels, pictures and words differ in their semiotic communicative efficiency. While the former requires a two-dimensional visible space, the latter is produced in a linear sequence. Furthermore, pictures can be seen as signs functioning by their own nature due to a natural correspondence with what they depict. According to Peirce, *“a sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign”*. Similarly to signs, pictures also have a pragmatic dimension. Having said that, it is essential to examine and explore the way pictures are produced and used as well as the effects which they have on the audience. (Pierce, 1897, in Margolis et al. 2012, pp.2-15). *“My passion for the posters began when I was eight years old. One day I brought home from school a poster of Chairman Mao. Although I did not know that the Cultural Revolution had started, my action made me a participant – I removed my mother’s painting with children playing in a lotus pond from the wall and replaced it with Mao poster.”* (Anchee Min, 1976, cited in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.5). This indicates that Anchee Min acquired knowledge of social practices as appropriate and thus became able to take part in actual performance which is always integral with attitudes, values, and motivations. She apparently displayed a deep respect for the worth of Mao as a person of high potential. Acceptance shows her ability to understand and have a more positive experience of the revolutionary breakthrough in the country. It shows how she sees, thinks about, and interprets events happening around her, therefore, it also suggests how her cultural patterns guide her thoughts and feelings about the current situation. In this way, the communication style employed by the propagandist functioned in a manner that was relatively consistent with the needs or expectations of the individuals in their social setting. Anchee Min managed to get rid of behaviours such as shakiness, undue perspiration, or postural rigidity when removing her mother’s painting and thus proved low levels of communication anxiety. The ability to be

attentive and responsive in actual performance shows her commitment to deal with the so-called social difficulties penetrating the country during the revolution. Her emotional strength was ready to seek out change in life by risking her safe environment. She was determined to push herself into uncomfortable and ambiguous situations to gain the benefit of participating in the revolutionary unit. She might have been unsure whether she had the skills required to be successful in the movement, but she decided to deal with high levels of pressure in this unfamiliar situation by having an optimistic approach to life which is certainly a very strong element of control over her own destiny.

Mitchell rightly associated the management of public opinion to *“a burning glass which collects and focuses the diffused warmth of popular emotions, concentrating them upon a specific issue on which the warmth becomes heat and may reach the firing-point of revivals, risings, revolts, revolutions.”* (Mitchell, 1970, p. 111). If we apply Hofstede’s definition of culture as *“collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from other”*, we can clearly see that the concept of culture is central to the subject of international security studies. (Hofstede, 1980). The topics of politics and economic reconstruction dominated the content of propaganda posters during the Cultural revolution after 1949. In general, propaganda posters attracted much attention due to hyper-realistic soldiers, peasants, and workers with the strong and healthy bodies functioning as metaphors for the strong and healthy productive classes Mao wanted to promote and propagate through the use of posters. As a result, a juxtaposition is normally well-defined. Chinese propaganda posters which promote and encourage hard work and solidarity are reinforced with depictions of people from various social classes celebrating national achievements. As posters document developments in the country, state officials frequently rely on posters as a channel for disseminating public information or tracking changes within the region by reflecting the priorities of the country’s leadership at the course of events. Seeing this, posters can suggest social change as well as

economic growth and thus revolutionize numerous sectors. All colours have their meaning. Generally, posters rely on brightly coloured images and text – mostly dominated by red as the colour of socialism. In the following sections, this research paper will introduce six propaganda posters employed as a strategy to stimulate a certain active behaviour on the part of the audience to demonstrate how symbols helped to facilitate interactions between the propagandist and the masses. By analysing their composition, symbolic message as well as their linguistic code, the reader will explore how symbols served to mediate between political culture and collective psychology. Such communication style can be defined as *“the way in which we communicate, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal behaviours that comprises our preferred ways of giving and receiving information in a specific situation”*. As a result, it includes *“the extent to which communicants rely upon the same channels for conveying information, and the extent to which they are tuned to the same level of meaning, that is, to the factual or emotional content of messages”*. (Saphiere *et al.* 2005; Barnlund, 1975; in Jackson, 2014, p.92). In this way, we can understand the elements of culture, recognize the impact of culture on life, and develop a working knowledge of social relations in which appreciation, acceptance, and tolerance with the status quo prevail. The members of the revolutionary front frequently expressed their attitudes toward differences by admitting and accepting that difference is positive, difference does not really matter, and that difference does not make people feel uncomfortable.

6.2 Selection of Propaganda Posters

Figure 1: “From now on we must be prepared” (1971, in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.16).

Talented artists used a remarkably consistent style drawing heavily on the traditions of socialist realism. The first figure shows a man who looks rather dominant than subordinated as he is

bigger and more warm-coloured than the other subjects in the poster. However, a little red book in the man’s hand is the part of the poster that the eyes are drawn to.



The book wrapped in

its distinctive vinyl cover is an icon of China as well as communism. The poster strengthens the fact that during the revolution it became virtually mandatory to have one as Mao attempted to export his ideas in the form of soft power. Although the man takes up a large amount of the poster, the book is clearly dominant as well because it has a lot of warm colour and is very bright. The other subjects of the poster do not really attract much attention. This indicates that there is a scattering of dominant subjects all across the poster – the man and the book. Furthermore, these two dominant subjects of the poster contrast with other parts of the same piece (mountains) to make them seem more intense and emphasize their brightness.

The use of red colour in the poster strengthens super-human heroism reflected in the man’s hyper-realistic body. As red is one of the most visible colours, it perfectly captures the viewer’s attention and trigger alertness not only to the man on the poster but also to the object he is

holding on. Unlike verbal language that is grounded on a set of systematized rules, nonverbal communication is so complicated that scholars still have never been able to devise a set of rules that would govern it. (Chen and Starosta, 2005, in Jackson, 2014, p.56). However, both verbal and non-verbal communication are symbolic, patterned, and communicate meanings. Patterns of eye contact vary from culture to culture. The man in the poster has a lack of an eye contact which eventually increases the distance between him and the viewer. However, the man expresses gestures in the form of a clenched fist indicating his determination to continue praising Chairman Mao. Certain social factors such as who you are talking to, the social context of the talk, the function, and the topic of the discussion, are important in accounting for language choice in many different kinds of speech community. The members of each community have their distinctive linguistic repertoires. In other words, in every community there is a range of varieties from which people select according to the context in which they are communicating. The linguistic code consists of directive utterances expressing an attempt to influence the audience to act in the course of events during the Cultural revolution. To involve the directive communicative functions in propaganda posters can frequently include clauses containing a modal auxiliary to intensify orders or commands expressed by the propagandist. The use of directive utterances is, therefore, primarily focused on the addressee. It describes messages that are intended to have an effect.

Figure 2: “Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts” In the image: “The east is red.” (September 1968; in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.33).



The composition of the poster indicates that the use of bright, warm colour dominates the scene. Although red colour is mostly associated with the ideology of communism, it has many personal

associations and thus serves as a stimulant in focusing attention on a specific element within the given context. The amount of red colour used in the poster is probably related to the level of excitement perceived by the propagandist and the rebels in the poster. As a result, this colour can unconsciously affect viewers physically and thus encouraging action needed for the revolutionary movement. Furthermore, the poster portrays Chairman Mao and the members of the revolutionary movement. People frequently accept the influence of individuals who are known as experts recognized for their expertise. Symbols play an important part in the use of propaganda posters and thus serve as powerful transmitters of certain ideas. Seeing this, symbols can represent many different things. The sunrise has often been classified as a symbol of rebirth and new beginning. In this way, the poster calls for all people who are willing to fight for a better and happier life in the country. On the other hand, the poster depicts Chairman Mao as a living god who is portrayed above the masses. However, he somehow managed to stay united with the crowd at the same time which indicates that status differences are clearly marked. Looking at the language of propaganda posters can provide important information

about how power is created and exercised. Language varies depending on the people using it, the task at hand, and the society in which it all takes place. Paying attention to these choices is part of having a critical awareness of language. There are also numbers of ways categorizing the functions of speech. This poster shows very expressive utterances aiming to revoke the viewer's feelings about Chairman Mao. Furthermore, implicature is a kind of inference which arises when the 'speaker meaning' is different to the 'sentence meaning'. Originally, to imply means to fold something into something else, hence, that which is implied is folded in, and has to be unfolded in order to be understood properly. In this case, context can help us to determine what is conveyed implicitly but not explicitly stated by the speaker. (Mey, 2001, p.45; Grundy, 2000, p.72). Paul Grice set out to explain how we make meaning out of 'false statements' such as 'Chairman Mao is the red sun', he claimed that there is a logical system operating in natural, everyday conversation for working out meanings beyond the words. This logical inferencing is based on the speaker who generates some meaning beyond the semantic meaning of the words and the hearer who deduces meaning. Most importantly, the inferred meaning deduced by the hearer may or may not be the same as the speaker's intended implicature. (Grice, 1975, p.98). Seeing this, communication is a two-way process and requires work from both speaker and hearer in order to 'make meaning'. In this case, a special background knowledge is required to work out implicature. As a result, the verbal text extends the meaning of the poster and vice-versa.

Figure 3: “Revolutionary rebels of the municipal technical training course, unite!”

(Bottom right: Designed by the Committee of the Revolutionary Rebels of the Shanghai municipal technical training course, in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.103).

The poster is dominated by a man who is belonging to a revolutionary movement which seems to have been the intention of the producer. It is the man who addresses the audience and makes



that connection in order to promote the message to the public. The poster is very catching and powerful due to the strong and larger-than-life rebel who pledged his allegiance to Chairman Mao in rebuilding the society. Similarly to the previous posters, the man holds the little red book in his hands. As pointed out by Daniel Leese – a professor of Chinese history and politics – “during the Cultural Revolution, in which

millions were persecuted or killed, owning it became a way of surviving”. The book which was originally produced in 1964 by the People’s Liberation Army contains numerous aphorisms covering various subjects such as class struggle, correcting mistaken ideas, and the mass line. To distribute these ideas, state officials aimed to deliver a copy to every Chinese citizen. To speed up the process, hundreds of new printing houses were built in order to achieve this

objective. To monitor the process, the Red Guard ensured that those who were suspected of bourgeoisie tendencies could quote from the book. (Leese, 2015, BBC News). The use of gestures can symbolically show complete togetherness as well as the willingness to captivate the audience. The power of political slogans comes from the premise that language influences not only thoughts but human actions as well. The poster shows a very simple and straightforward message and thus simplify often very complicated issues penetrating various different groups – peasants, soldiers, youngsters. The poster shows directive utterances attempting to get the viewer to do something. The speech acts which express directive force may vary in strength. In this case, the poster includes an order or a command which is expressed in imperative form. This also indicates that status differences are clearly marked and accepted as superiors tend to use imperatives to their subordinates. A successful outcome can reflect sociolinguistic accomplishment; however, Mao was able to use a knowledge of the rules for expressing himself appropriately and effectively in the relevant socio-cultural context. Seeing this, art provides the viewer the so-called transformative experience in which he or she gets to know and understand a feeling that they did not actively focus on before. As a result, the viewer is able to turn thinking into doing. Having said that, the propagandist frequently relies on the use of directive utterances for the purpose of regulating the future activity of the audience.

Figure 4: „Answer the call of Chairman Mao with determination and support the revolution in the countryside“ Top left: „In the interest of the people, lay in stores of grain in case of war or natural disaster“ (1970, Mao Zedong Shanghai People’s Art Publishing House, in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, pp.192-193).

The poster shows a peasant who is holding a little red book. The man can convey the attitude, feelings or personality through the visual codes such as facial expressions, gestures, and



posture. The poster is dominated by a hyper-realistic body of the man who looks strong and healthy. The other subjects in the poster point at him or lead towards him which indicates that he is

able to mobilize not only himself but other peasants as well. Such composition of the poster can easily influence youngsters who are still undecided about the membership in the revolutionary movement in the country. His posture only strengthens the fact that keeping the trunk of the body exposed indicates friendliness and openness. In conjunction with verbal communication, nonverbal signals reinforce the message communicated between the propagandist and the viewer. We use language to ask for and give people information, to express indignation of annoyance as well as admiration and respect. Often one utterance will simultaneously both convey information and express feelings. We also indicate aspects of our social identity through the linguistic choices. Our speech provides clues to others about who we are, where we come from, and perhaps what kind of social experiences we have had. The poster includes a linguistic

code involving directive utterances aimed to mobilize the masses. Seeing this, the relation between the propagandist and the audience is one of instructing or ordering to bring about some action in the course of the event. The use of directive utterances in the poster, therefore, clearly motivates mandatory or optional actionality on the part of the audience. The perception that the individual will be rewarded by the propagandist for a certain behaviour certainly influences an individual's identification with a group. In this case, rewards can include both tangible and intangible things such as praise or honours.

Figure 5: “Party members must be progressive in their attitude to the proletariat”.

Banners, left: “Long live the great leader Chairman Mao! Striding forwards triumphantly along Chairman Mao’s path for building the Party”. Banner right: “Enthusiastically celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of China’s great, glorious, and correctly acting Communist Party!”. (Rudong District Art, 1971; in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.454).

Nonverbal behaviour can certainly reveal our emotions expressed in multiple channels such as the face or body language. The display of emotions can serve as a profound indicator of our



mental state and attitudes towards certain issues or events. (Keltner *et al.* 2003; in Jackson, 2014, p. 106). Most importantly, nonverbal behaviour conveys emotions that we may not be willing to express verbally, therefore, is much better suited for expressing attitudes and feelings than ideas. There is something very basic, and perhaps universal, about much of our nonverbal communication – facial gestures that convey

emotions and attitudes. Facial expressions consist of 6 basic emotions such as happiness,

sadness, disgust, fear, anger, and surprise. The poster shows people who are undoubtedly happy, motivated, and very enthusiastic in their eyes which can indicate their readiness to act for a better future in their country. This state of mind refers to *“the degree to which a human being, as a participant in the ongoing social process in which he necessarily finds himself, defines a problematic situation as calling for the performance of a particular act, with more or less anticipated consummations and consequence, and thereby his organism releases the energy appropriate to performing it”*. (Wendt, 1992, p.398). In addition, such positive emotions can easily influence or even manipulate others who would like to feel the same way since *“emotion is the basis of human motivation and the seat of emotion is in the face”*. (Tomkins, 1962, 1963, pp.119-158). In this way, we can talk about nonverbal codes as regulators to refer to actions which maintain and thus regulate the back-and-forth nature of producing and interpreting certain ideas between two or more participants. Furthermore, they tell the viewer to pay special attention. (Ekman *et.al.* 1969; in Jackson, 2014). Expressions such as 'must' give legitimacy to expected behaviour from a group. Although the linguistic code plays an important part in delivering volumes of information, nonverbal signals make up a huge part of daily communication, therefore, it is essential to pay attention to other cues such as body language. Facial expressions can reveal true feelings about a particular situation and thus determine if others trust or believe what the individual is doing. The composition of the poster is based on the similar features as the previous ones. This only strengthens the continuing importance of red colour in the historical and cultural background of the country. In contrast to the previous posters, this poster shows a group of people including of soldiers and peasants having similar form of psychosocial expression and thus strengthening the need for collective actions as well as the important role of the masses in leadership. As they are put in the foreground of the poster, they can make a catching connection to communicate this message to the viewer. Gestures are considered to be some of the most obvious signals of our non-verbal communication. In this

case, a clenched fist is actually the symbol indicating solidarity with others in supporting Chairman Mao. Reflecting the life of the working class, art and the ruling party were aligned for the purpose of serving socialism.

Figure 6: “Eschew the worlds of literature and art and become familiar with the lives of workers, peasants, and soldiers.” In the bottom right corner of the picture: “Designated by the 65 Rebel Group at Jiangxi Province Art School.” (Commune of the Red Rebels for New Literature and Art, Jiangxi Province, in Chinese Propaganda Posters, 2015, p.450).

Art has a long political history in the People’s Republic of China, and the composition of the poster clearly reflects the virtues of the ruling party. Posters are frequently referred to as the most visible tool in any political campaigns due to signifying a pioneering spirit. The use of red colour reflects leadership qualities of Chairman Mao who promotes ambition and determination in reaching his long-term goals. The hyper-realistic figure in the poster can easily demand the viewer to take notice and thus excite his emotions as well as to inspire him to act in the course of events. The emotional impact that it creates depends, however, on its cultural, historical, and political context. In the People’s



Republic of China, red colour is a symbol often associated with good luck. Seeing this, other

colours could have indicated the counter-revolutionary ideas or moves that were deeply rejected by Chairman Mao who wanted to promote strong and healthy nation in which old customs have no place. Nonverbal communication is communication through means other than verbal units. (Martin, Nakayama 2008, in Jackson, 2014, p.56). Such communication occurs when we intentionally use symbols – words or non-spoken symbols to create meaning for others. (Jandt 2001, in Jackson, 2014, p.67). In general, eye contact regulates interpersonal distance and turn taking. The man in the poster has a direct eye contact which eventually shortens the distance between two or more people. Understanding body language can certainly help in interpreting what others might be trying to convey. The overall physical form of an individual can also serve as an important part of non-verbal behaviour. The man in the poster has an open posture indicating a wealth of information about how he is feeling. Reading his body language, the man is extremely confident and open which indicates not only his openness but also his willingness to act for a specific purpose. Having a closed posture in the poster would have certainly discouraged people from participating in the revolutionary breakthrough in the country. Furthermore, the poster includes phatic utterances which express rather solidarity and empathy with others than orders or commands. Such verbal communication only strengthens the unity between the propagandist and the audience which is important in determining the continued importance of Chairman Mao as a political symbol. Malinowski defined this type of communication as “*a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words*”, therefore, contributing to the creation and maintenance of a feeling of solidarity and well-being between all members of a particular social groups. (Malinowski, 1923, pp.478). Seeing this, the employment of phatic utterances in propaganda posters serves as an effective tool for keeping a channel of communication open between the propagandist and the audience.

7. Conclusion

The use of propaganda posters during the Cultural revolution proved that discourse can be seen as a specific knowledge about the world which certainly influences and shapes how the world is perceived and understood by various social groups. Having its own rules and conventions, Mao successfully formed and shaped a specific discourse in the form of language which was eventually produced and circulated in the state institutions to reach the audience. Looking at the use of propaganda posters during the revolution, there are certainly some commonalities. Propaganda posters during the Cultural revolution used various strategies to strengthen their effect on the audience. People were labelled as members of a group and thus representing only the traits, beliefs, and attitudes attributed to that group. These six posters described people as having special and unique qualities. While posters communicated essential public information, they also documented developments in the country through large worded slogans communicating the priorities of the country's leadership. The artistic approach remained remarkably consistent and the composition of the posters was quite constant with most of the posters painted by hand. The composition of propaganda posters, their symbolic message as well as the linguistic codes provide a sound understanding of how leaders organize the masses in order to secure their position within the country. As a result, the role of the masses is extremely important in order to make the revolutionary breakthrough possible and effective at the same time. Furthermore, propaganda posters nicely portray how nonverbal communication functions. People frequently remember comments accompanied by gestures more than those made with words. Through posture – a rich channel for conveying nonverbal information, gestures – a fundamental element of communication, face and eyes – the most noticed parts of the body language, and appearance – physical attractiveness used to convey social and economic status, we can see that nonverbal behaviour can regulate, complement, and even substitute verbal communication between the propagandist and the audience.

Considering a fundamental principle of social constructionism, people act toward objects on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them. (Wendt, 1992, p.396). Seeing this, art undoubtedly served as a successful tool during the Cultural revolution in the country as the style draws heavily on the traditions of socialist realism to signify the importance of the communist world. The message supplementing the visual units is trying to persuade the audience through simple imperative statements. There is an implied causality here and the propagandist's visions are at the start of this casual chain. Mao Zedong proved to be a strong revolutionary leader who offered people a window on the cult of his personality surrounding his place in the broader context of the movement against the sprouts of capitalism re-emerging in the country. By exploring and examining propaganda posters, the reader is able to see how the propagandist organize and present information and certain ideas to persuade others of his viewpoint and position. In this way, the propagandist builds interpersonal relationships by developing a close connection with the audience through the use of posters in public places. Art and politics were deeply intertwined, therefore, all forms of media and communication were controlled by states officials which only reinforced the status of Mao as the guiding light among the people. This pattern certainly influences what stories we read and hear and in what form we receive them. As a result, communication follows tradition and authority rather than spontaneity. In this way, ideology frequently works like a filter – removing anything that does not really fit with its values.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Bc. Aleš Karmazin, M.Sc. for his excellent guidance he has given me throughout the research. Most importantly, for challenging the ideas that I had, helping to shape and clarify those ideas, and giving critical feedback. I have been blessed to have a supervisor who cared so much about my work, and who answered to my queries so promptly.

Abstract

Analysing discourse through visual units is certainly a very fascinating and interesting way of showing how propaganda posters regulate and shape the beliefs, values, and attitudes of social groups. Based on the theory of social constructionism, this research paper aims to explore and examine the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols between the propagandist and the audience in which the social positions of difference and authority are articulated. To accomplish this, I choose six propaganda posters that resonated strongly within the Chinese society to reflect how their symbolic messages and linguistic codes serve as transmitters of certain ideas. I incorporated testimonies of Anchee Min, Duo Duo, and Saul Yeung as a form of evidence in revealing the cultural significance, social practices, and power relations because they all have knowledge and experience in the cultural, social, and political discourse during the Cultural revolution. By applying a hermeneutic approach, this research paper deconstructs the symbolic meanings and linguistic codes of propaganda posters to reveal the notion of communication competence between the propagandist and the audience.

Key words:

China, propaganda, visual semiotics, symbols, discourse

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