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Blogpost: Visual Analysis of a Work by your chosen artist: Political Posters in Mao's China

For this blogpost I elected to write regarding a political poster painted by Ha Qiongwen, titled "Long Live Chairman Mao!" In order to fully understand this political poster, some background regarding the era in which it was painted may be helpful. In 1949, China ushered in a new era of government which was led by the Communist Party of China and Chairman Mao; the de facto leader of China until his death in 1976 (Yaochang 2014: 290). Mao was a self prescribed Leninist (at least until he began developing his own theory of rule) and felt that literature and art should be an integral part of the proletariat's enterprise. Essentially, this meant that Mao aimed to use the majority of literature and art being composed in China at the time to further his political agenda. With a large portion of the people in China during this time being illiterate, Mao needed to convey his political content in a way that people would be able to understand with little to no education. As such, Mao made a speech after his election in 1949 that set Socialist Realism as the "...official theory and method of artistic and literary composition..." in China during his reign (Yaochang 2014: 290-291). This declaration somewhat restricted what artists and writers could publish during this period, as if the Communist Party of China deemed a work to be 'inadequate', the work would not be published/allowed for distribution.

When examining the poster I selected, one will see a young child and her mother playing in what appears to be cherry blossoms, with the text "Long Live Chairman Mao!" at the top. When first published this poster was revered by the CPC, however once the Cultural Revolution started this was not the case. Upon further inspection, one will notice that the woman holding the

child is wearing rather nice clothing, suggesting she is a member of the bourgeois and not the proletariat. Further, no physical depiction of Mao is present, which became more and more essential to the CPC as Mao engrained himself into all aspects of Chinese society. Qiongwen became an object of criticism during the Cultural Revolution, and was publicly humiliated and beaten on numerous occasions due to his slight deviation from the CPC's standard (Shen 2000: 192).



2. Ha Qiongwen, «Long Live Chairman Mao!», 1959, poster, 77 x 53 cm
Used oil on poster

Bibliography

Poster and Historical Background

Yaochang, Pan. "The Posters of the Mao Era: A Perspective of Art and Society." *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 35, no. 69, IRSA, Jan. 2014, pp. 289–304.

Personal Information Regarding Ha Qiongwen

Shen, Kuiyi. "Publishing Posters Before the Cultural Revolution." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2000, pp. 177–202. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41490832. Accessed 17 Apr. 2020.