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Engendering Modern China: Visual Representations of the PRC

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Engendering Modern China: Visual Representations of the PRC



NO. 51310 新中国的妇女 New China Women 年份: 1951 尺寸: 40X53cm 作者: 立丁 Li Ding

An Honor's Thesis
Presented by
Jennifer Elizabeth Lee
to the East Asian Studies Department
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the
Major Field

Prepared under the direction of
Professor Amy Dooling, Primary Adviser
Professor Yibing Huang, Secondary Adviser

Connecticut College
New London, Connecticut
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Engendering Modern China: Visual Representations of the PRC

Abstract:

Propaganda posters have been one of many forms of political media used by modern governments such as the United States, Russia, England, and China, to spread a message across a large area to a wide audience. The popularity of the use of propaganda posters has sparked an interest in the study of posters. China has a long and varied history of the use of posters and propaganda posters. Pre-1949 propaganda posters, especially during the revolutionary period, used woodblock prints with stark lines and deep bright colors. Woodblock prints often employed yellow and red backgrounds to accent the black figures in the poster. In the early 1950s bright colors and realistic scenes and figures reminiscent of the previous generation of calendar posters were common. The influence of idealism can be seen in the larger-than-life industrial production and farming scenes and the healthy and Chinese citizens in the posters. The 1960s continued many of the same techniques of the 1950s but displayed a less obvious visual connection with calendar posters. Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) posters saw a dramatic artistic shift. Figures became less realistic looking and bright colors and intricate scenes were replaced with simple and clear backgrounds and messages. The Cultural Revolution also saw the return of the woodblock print; this time period produced many visually interesting red and black woodblock print posters.

In recent years, the changing artistic techniques of propaganda posters as well as themes and subjects have attracted much scholarly research. Yet despite the long history of such art, most scholars have focused either on calendar posters of the Republican era or the Cultural Revolution posters. Although one could argue that these two time periods represent two different ends of the spectrum of poster arts, in reality the greatest number of extant posters—and therefore part of the scholarly archive—come from these two time periods. As more collectors begin to showcase and share posters from early post-liberation China, scholars have begun to take an interest in studying posters of the post-liberation period. The period between 1949 and 1957 is unique in its situation between the conflict period of Guomindang versus the Communist Party, and later the Cultural Revolution period. This transitional period presents a unique look into the emerging China. Despite the scholarly attractiveness of this period, to date little research has been conducted on posters of this time period.

The conspicuous presence of women in 20th century propaganda art has, not surprisingly, attracted the attention of scholars interested in questions of gender. Extensive research has been published on this subject in Russian and Soviet Bloc countries' posters as well as American World War II propaganda posters. While the topic has received less attention within Chinese studies, Tina Mai Chen and Harriet Evans are two prominent scholars who have taken the lead in the area of gender representation in Chinese propaganda posters. Chen has written articles discussing gender in early post-liberation as well as later posters, and Evans has done extensive research on gender in Chinese society as well as gender representation in posters of the Cultural Revolution era.

This thesis came out of a desire to build on the scholarly literature on gender and propaganda art. Tina Mai Chen examines the female figure in 1950s Chinese propaganda posters arguing that posters empowered Chinese women and helped create a new role for them in the Chinese state. Harriet Evans explores gender representation in propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution period and argues that although women in these posters may look different the underlying gender construct do not actually change. Propaganda posters of the immediate post-liberation period are largely unexplored. I wish to call attention to this pivotal period in China's history and to push beyond the research of Chen and Evans. Posters of the early-post-liberation period did not entirely focus on women's entrance in the workforce or display what some scholars describe as an "erasure of gender."¹ Consistent with Evans' thesis, early post-liberation propaganda posters do continue to show gendered themes and images carried over from the Republican era. I will expand upon the scholarship on the relationship between propaganda posters and gender representation by linking these posters to the period posters from the 1930s

¹ Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Public Sphere in China." *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999. 35-67. Print. 11.

and 1940s in order to show visual continuities between the pre and post-liberation periods and also bring attention to the acknowledged influence that the earlier posters had on immediate post-liberation posters. Where I part ways with Evans', however, is in arguing that although gendered images and themes do persist in propaganda posters, advancements are made in the gender ideology.

Tina Mai Chen, an established Chinese scholar who works on gender, has written extensively on Chinese women and women's agency as well as the subject of the "body" as represented in the early post-liberation period. In her article "Proletarian White and Working Bodies in Mao's China" Chen explores the idea of the *nüjie diyi* (female role model workers) as represented in propaganda posters of the 1950s. There existed a disconnect between the images and the posters' messages and what was carried out and changed in every day practice. Chen writes, "As in all mass media systems, a complex relationship existed between images, internalization of messages, political practices, state policies, and appropriation of everyday culture."² Propaganda posters images helped exhibit changed gender ideology and women's position in society, but that did not necessarily mean that women's position in society changed in practice.

Socialism and the socialist realist techniques used in propaganda posters of the early post-liberation period created this image of the "new woman" in socialist society. Regardless of the fact that there had been many "new women" in past generations, women again were placed in a new mold. Propaganda posters circulated images that redefined the female body in order to justify women's entrance into the male dominated workforce.³ Just as with the end of foot

² Chen, Tina Mai. "Proletarian White and Working Bodies in Mao's China." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11.2 (2003): 361-93. *Academic Onefile*. Web. 365.

³ Chen, Working Bodies 356.

binding in the early 20th century, female bodies were once again to be liberated in order to perform tasks and fit into a new role in society. Despite these apparent “changes” Chen explains, “liberated body parts represented new sociopolitical and gendered visions of China, but these visions tended to be imagined on the bodies of women by male intellectuals or masculinized political parties.”⁴ Chen argues that male versions of female bodies may not be as liberated as those images created by women.

The cultural representation—and indeed the historical experience—of women cannot be separated from the political culture of 1950s China.⁵ The “woman question” of the 1950s was tied directly to the state. This redefinition of women, especially in relation to the workforce, helped forge a connection between women and the state. Propaganda posters displaying images of “new women” strengthened this connection. State propaganda and propaganda posters thus “conceptualized [these] women as bearers of modernity, socialism, national autonomy and gender equality.”⁶ Chen argues that representations of women and women workers, especially the *nüjie diyi* enabled a shift in public opinions of gender roles. These new female icons empowered historical women and created a niche for them in the new communist state, effectively reversing traditional gender hierarchies. Chen argues that although the extent that posters promoted change did not directly translate into societal change, there was a shift in the direction towards change.

In her research, Evans takes a different approach than Chen. Chen focuses on the relationship between the visual images in posters and broader social realities. She concludes that posters ultimately empowered women and created a new space for women within Chinese

⁴ Ibid 367.

⁵ Chen, Tina Mai. "Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China." *Gender & History* 15.2 (2003): 268-95. Web. 271.

⁶ Ibid 273.

society. This new space helped usher in a new definition of women. At the same time, Chen does concede that there still existed a gap between the images and complete transformation of Chinese society. Chen posits that women's agency only existed within this state sponsored and created feminism.⁷ Evans draws different conclusions from her research on propaganda posters and women's representation. Evans states that despite new visual representations the fundamental and underlying definition of women did not change at all, and that such art actually diminished the ability for women to move forward in society. Even within the radically different representations common in the Cultural Revolution posters conventional gendered norms from the pre-revolutionary era still prevailed, including a hierarchical definition of male and female roles. According to Evans, locating women in men's positions ultimately only glorified the male role in society.

In Harriet Evan's article "'Comrade Sisters': Gendered Bodies and Spaces" Evans discusses Chinese political posters and their importance in Chinese society and their importance in the discussion of gender. She also conducts a comprehensive study of the construction of the images in the posters and how this construction makes meaning. Contrary to Chen's idea that newly represented bodies showed China and women's liberation, Evans argues that conventional gendered roles still existed even in the seemingly progressive representations of women in propaganda artwork. Policies in China did not create gender equality as promised. Evans argues that policy did not fail because women's liberation was tied to the liberation of the state, rather the state's definition of gender hindered liberation. The government created gender difference based on biological studies, studies that presented "evidence" that women were weaker in physical and mental areas. Evans focuses on propaganda posters produced during the Cultural Revolution. She states that the images in posters reflected the government's idea of women role

⁷ Ibid 292.

models. Although the state created these posters to represent and show a certain political message, the representation of women did not always coincide with the intended political message. These images, Evans argues, did not only reflect ideas on women and gender, but created and affected the idea of what gender was to the Chinese society.

Evans discusses gender representation in four areas. In opposition to Chen's ideas, she first seeks to discredit the claim that women gain power with their level of "sameness" with male images. Images of women appear in the same professions as men and glorify the same physical and mental attributes historically associated with the masculine. Evans argues that these images of women do not act as just another representation of men, but in different situations the images of women mean different things. Women seem to gain power and authority with an increase in their numbers. Men from the sidelines watch the women and become spectators seemingly giving power to the women. Evans argues that although in many situations women seem to wield power and spatial dominance, male authority figures that outrank—and therefore possess greater power—undermine the power of the women in the posters. Women, when pictured by themselves, seem to have power in their singularity, but again this power is undermined as singular images of women often appear in stereotypically gendered roles.

In her second point, Evans argues that men and women do appear together in posters, but only in typically masculine situations; conversely, men never appear in typical feminine situations. If a male does appear in a feminine situation he appears with a woman or women and he stands apart as a spectator not as a participant. Evans argues that when women and men appear together in posters, women do not represent a challenge the authority or power of men. Women who seem to appear as the most important figure in a poster are undermined by subtle signs that actually show the men to have the real authority.

Evans brings forth another example of a gendered representation of women in political posters in the representation of class. Posters with the iconic image of the worker, peasant, and soldier never use women for the three central figures. When a woman is included in this representation she is always shown as the peasant. Women, when meant to show class and revolution, are represented in a subordinate role to the male image. Lastly Evans discusses the idea that as in the gendered representation of images class, posters showcase male and female differences in age and ethnicity. Evans suggests that the representation of ethnic minorities is shown through exotic and colorful images of women. Posters also limit the representation of women to the young and healthy. Representations of older men suggest wisdom and authority and eliminating this category of women excluder women from achieving this level of status.

In short, Evans takes issues with the premise that poster images during the Cultural Revolution erased gendered visions of women. Gendered images and representations still existed in these posters. Whether through analysis of space, situation, other images, or the lack of images, posters continued to show the differences in gender thought and continued the recognized norms of the definition of gender.

While both Chen and Evan offer valuable insights into the question of gender representation in propaganda posters, I find Evans' argument more compelling than Chen's. Evans conducts a deeper level of examination of propaganda posters. She contests the conventionally held idea that women, shown in historically male positions create an equal and progressive space for women in Chinese society. In my own research I will argue that propaganda posters of the early post-liberation period persist in a gendered representation of Chinese women visually and thematically but subtle improvements are made in the gender ideology.

After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the state choose to create and promote gender equality and to find means to call attention to the issues surrounding gender equality as well as create gender "models."⁸ The state has historically had a role in the definition of gender roles in China.⁹ In the early 1950s as the Communist Party began to solidify its power after defeating the Guomindang, certain issues had to be addressed including the topic of women in society. Since the early Republican period, Chinese began to separate themselves from the strict bonds of family leaving a void that the government stepped into. With a new governmental regime in place women again found themselves in the position of representing the "backwardness" of China, just as Chen explains women have for years. Different from previous periods more concrete solutions to the hardships that these women faced were also brought up. Sexism and feudalistic thinking had to be addressed within the party. Women needed to be educated about themselves, in terms of their rights and school education, but also needed to be educated about the government and what they could expect from the government in terms of their rights. Propaganda posters became an effective medium with which to promote new laws and practices that involved women and were endorsed by the Communist Party.

Immediately after the victory over the Nationalists the Communist Party had to quickly cement its role and its power in the new Chinese state. Communist ideas needed to be held fast but also grown and expanded. Women and images of women became a vehicle that could be entrusted with the socialist ideal. "Political art is engaged in creating a certain image of the state

⁸ Evans, Harriet, and Julia C. Strauss, eds. *Gender in Flux: Agency and Its Limits in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print. 6.

⁹ Mann, Susan. *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print. xvii.

that supports its legitimacy,” and using women in early post-liberation propaganda posters became a political tool to indicate the continued direction of the Communist Party.¹⁰

The line between women’s and men’s work (either in work or space) did not abruptly disappear with the formation of the new government. Susan L. Mann maintains that sexuality, gender, and gender norms are “strictly regulated and calibrated by rules and conventions, customs and taboo, by medical and governmental authorities, and by profiteering and preaching” and old norms have to be reorganized in order to create new norms.¹¹ Despite these steps made by the government to shrink the gender gap and conventional ways of thinking, ways that have existed in minds throughout history, gender norms and ideas do not immediately change.

I will argue through comparison of the early post-liberation propaganda posters with the advertising posters of the “New Women” of the 1930s and 1940s that in fact the official message of the post-liberation posters in regards to women’s new status is at odds with what is shown, and in fact, reproduces many of the gendered themes and visual imagery from the 1930s and 1940s posters. Chinese propaganda posters are full of contradictions that complicate the definition of women. In a seemingly completely different time period traditional images and themes as seen in the 1930s and 1940s still linger in early post-liberation propaganda posters. The women shown in propaganda posters of the early post-liberation period between 1949 and 1957 were meant to show the new definition of women in communist China. The state sought to harness the power of visual culture and to alter the definition of women. Yet, as important as these continuities are important to note, I would argue that the images are not completely static and subtly changes in the image and definition of women do occur. The government did actively

¹⁰ Bazylevych, Maryna. "Public Images, Political Art, and Gendered Spaces: Construction of Gendered Space in Socialist and Post-Socialist Ukraine." *Journal of Contemporary Anthropology* (2010): 120. *Purdue Web*. 2.

¹¹ Mann xvi.

promote change in the ideology of gender yet neglected the ostensibly clear gender continuities that posters promoted, and in their widespread availability, promoted across the country. The propaganda posters of this period did not merely reflect the ideological message of gender equality but constructed this message for the Chinese people. The Chinese government perpetuated a certain vision of women in its publication of propaganda posters.

In the pages that follow, I will first explore the topic of propaganda poster art itself and address the questions of the current archive of propaganda posters of this period. Yang Peiming, of the Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Center, currently owns and curates a newly available collection of Chinese propaganda posters in the world. The Yang collection of posters is important because it represents one of the few collections of the early post-liberation period. His collection and its availability open up the possibility of research of post-liberation propaganda posters.

Second, I will explore the broader discourse of the “New Woman” in post-liberation Chinese society in which propaganda posters must be located. Education and literacy movement swept through China during this period. Education of women would bring China out of its period of backwardness. The literacy campaign of women was shown and promoted through propaganda posters. Women also began appearing in propaganda posters as participants in the farming industries. Education and participation in production was meant to create the new ideal and unrestricted women of the new generation. Women were no longer to be fettered by traditional subjugation and would be liberated during this new age. Images of women in former male-oriented and dominated roles also began to appear during the early post-liberation period. “Equality posters” ostensibly put forward the idea of a new role and definition of women. I will explore the lingering gendered visual images within the post-liberation posters that complicate

the claims that with the Communist victory a “new woman” had emerged in China. I substantiate my claim by drawing attention to the fact that similar visual images were already represented in the calendar posters of the Republican era.

Lastly, I will analyze the new wife and mother figure as represented in propaganda posters. First, I will present posters that feature the new marriage law. These posters celebrate the love-based marriage and the separation of marriage from the family, yet on closer inspection still promote male power and the subordination of women to the state. Next I will analyze the revered mother figure. The mother figure is often shown as caretaker and housewife and valorizes women’s role as child bearers. Last, I will look into the role of woman as consumer. Women were often placed in the role of either representing the prosperity of the state through consumption or produced for the state in order to continue the success of the nation. Throughout I will draw comparisons to posters of the early post-liberation period with those of the 1930s and 1940s and explore similar themes that persist within the two periods.

Chapter One

The Propaganda Poster

“Seeing comes before words”¹²

John Berger

“No history has been described in such detail as by the posters of the Mao era [1949-1976]. This is a unique era. The posters still have a bit of a mystery and a touch of the unbelievable. I feel proud to do something nobody has done, to provide a feast for the eyes and give future generations the opportunity to study this part of China’s history.”¹³

Yang Peiming

Propaganda Poster Arts

Often dismissed or neglected, propaganda posters cannot only be considered in the context of politics but also occupy an important space within the art world. Propaganda posters in their simplest form are works of aesthetic representation. As an art form past techniques, styles, and artists all influence posters. In the Chinese context, longstanding aesthetic traditions play a role in the shaping of the posters of the post-liberation period. In order to understand the history behind Chinese propaganda posters especially those of the early post-liberation period, one must first have an understanding of the origins of “communist art.”¹⁴ Traditional Chinese woodcuts, woodcut printings, and *xin nianhua* (New Year’s paintings) art forms all heavily influenced propaganda posters. Soviet Union political art and Chairman Mao’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Arts and Literature,” also had a large impact on CCP propaganda posters.

New Year’s posters (*xin nianhua*) have a long history in Chinese culture. New Year’s calendars and woodblock prints depicted deities, folk heroes, auspicious signs, and zodiac symbols.¹⁵ New Year’s posters generally fall into three distinct categories. The first kind of

¹² Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting, 1972. Print. 33.

¹³ Yang, Peiming. Personal Interview. 25 July 2012.

¹⁴ Cohen, Joan Lebold. *The New Chinese Painting: 1949-1986*. New York: Abrams, 1987. Print. 16.

¹⁵ “Culture and History: Chinese Calendar Advertisements of the 1920’s.” *Culture and History*. The China Gateway, 2004. Web. <<http://www.bc.edu/research/chinagateway/culthist/beauty.htm>>.

calendar depicts the stove god that determined a family's fortune for the New Year. The last two kinds of calendars, "Welcoming Joy" and "Spring Ox," both include images of the spring plowing ceremony, solar-lunar calendar, and charts of luck and unlucky days.¹⁶ New Year's posters are influenced political posters. Artists used styles and symbols popular in New Year's posters and adopted them for political posters. Political posters with familiar characteristics could more easily be understood and absorbed by the public. Early post-liberation posters also drew upon traditional motifs and themes. Artists combined the familiar styles of the New Year's posters with new images and ideas of the revolutionary period. New Year's pictures depicted dreams, morals, and religious beliefs of Chinese people which could be transformed with a political slant into depiction of model of social behavior and relations. Posters became the government's depiction of aspirations, and morals and religious beliefs became political beliefs.

The Republican Era in Chinese history greatly influenced propaganda posters and art in China. The revolutionary Lu Xun, most well-known for his written works, also furthered the revolutionary movement with his advocacy of the wood-block print movement. Woodcuts expanded the artwork and the printing techniques used to create and distribute artwork and more important to propaganda posters, political artwork. Engraved wood blocks and the process of lithography, a tool long used by artists, contributed to the popularity and the increased circulation of the original New Year's posters as well as political printings. Poster art continued to develop with the influence of China's neighbor the Soviet Union.

The Chinese government sent many artists to the Soviet Union to study their form of Communist art. Joan Cohen describes the appeal and structure of Soviet art,

¹⁶ Ibid

The ideal subject of Soviet Socialist Realist art were larger-than-life heroes engaged in dramatic revolutionary activities and strong, pink-cheeked heroines who were building a socialist motherland.¹⁷

These heroes influenced the Chinese poster tradition of painting role model figures in posters.

Socialist realism is an important technique used both in the pre and post-liberation posters.

Important to this study the use of woman role models was also adopted from the Soviet tradition of poster making. Using certain images and themes the government promoted a certain kind of woman and formed the definition of what a woman “should” be, in other words the ideal role model.

The “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Arts and Literature” in 1942, just as with the implementation of socialist realist techniques, set the parameters for communist art in China. All forms of art were to have a purpose; art could no longer just function as “art for art’s sake” but rather had to serve a broader, more public purpose. The talks did not limit the definition of art only to paintings, but referred to all forms of artistic expression. Theater, film, painting, and poster art all fell under the realm of revolutionary art that would serve and benefit new China. The use of art as a revolutionary tool was not new, but Mao broadened the spectrum of revolutionary art and expanded upon what would be used and promoted in propaganda posters. The artistic tradition of revolutionary art continued into the early post-liberation period propaganda posters. Chinese people were “accustomed to reading visual images as carriers of political meaning” and just as in the past revolutionary movements propaganda posters became an essential tool of the post-liberation period.¹⁸

Art historian Lu Peng described the period between 1949 and 1958 as “art in the period of social recovery and reconstruction,” so although theories of art did not radically change, the

¹⁷ Cohen 18.

¹⁸ Evans, Harriet, and Stephanie Donald. *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999. Print. 64.

structure of art institutions and their control by the government underwent a large overhaul.¹⁹ During this period the Party took over the organization of artist associations. In 1953 the government established the Chinese Artist Association (中国美术家协会). The government kept control over the art of posters in three ways, the first being through organizational structures such as the First National Congress of Literary and Art Workers, Artists' Association, Ministry of Culture. Specifically, the Artist's Association set out to encourage enthusiasm and work ethic, adherence to Marxism-Leninism and Socialist Realism art theory, and the study of government policies. Secondly, the government sponsored art exhibitions and publication (People's Art, and Artists' News to name two), and lastly, the government restructured art education establishments.²⁰ The Association's official mission was to "create art works that were superior ideologically and artistically, in order to rouse the people's enthusiasm for labor and struggle."²¹ The early post-liberation period saw a deeper search for the social, political, and ideological purpose of art, and how it could be used in the new Communist society. Artists were trained to study and use artistic techniques such as socialist realism, and theories supported by Marxism-Leninism and the Chinese Communist Party, with the ultimate goal of promoting the goals of the Party.²² Artists trained to "observe and learn from real life" and to create art not for art's sake, but to serve the newly liberated people of China.²³ As art historian Maria Galikowski writes, "Those involved in the arts, for example, possessed the cultural means to propagate ideas amongst vast numbers of people."²⁴ Common themes seen in the posters of the 1950s include

¹⁹ Peng, Lu, and Fan Jingzhong. *A History of Art in 20th Century China*. Trans. Bruce G. Doar. Milano: Charta, 2010. Print. 449.

²⁰ Galikowski, Maria. *Art and Politics in China: 1949-1984*. Hong Kong: Chinese Univ., 1998. Print. 13.

²¹ Peng 450.

²² Peng 451.

²³ Galikowski 20.

²⁴ Ibid 10.

the birth of new China, victory in the war of liberation, and production and farming. Such posters promoted party policies and depicted socialist heroes.

Posters themselves are products and catalysts of society. Posters of the 1930s and 1940s as well as the early post-liberation posters then became revolutionary art mediums that showed the “new woman” as well as reflected women’s new status in life. When propaganda posters dominated the scene of poster art and the government stopped the production of calendar posters it did not stop the influence of calendar posters on propaganda art. Many calendar artists transitioned from calendar posters to propaganda posters including famous artists such as Jin Meisheng and Li Mubai. The artists’ techniques and depiction of women did not radically change. Artists continued to use the skills they honed during their production of calendar posters and used these skills to create visually appealing propaganda art work.

Yang Peiming and the Archive

Although posters can hold great significance not only to those who view them but to those who produce them, in their most basic form posters are pieces of paper easily discarded and destroyed. Current collectors now see the value in this art form that for a period of time had been forgotten or even disregarded. The power of the poster lies within its accessibility and its widespread distribution yet this also become the downfall of the poster in terms of preservation. When art is mass produced, there is little incentive to preserve it. In addition, in the PRC, as government policies changed so did posters. Posters depicting outdated themes had to be destroyed for risk of persecution. For example, a family could no longer display a poster singing the praises of the U.S.S.R. after the relationship between China and the Soviet Union soured. At the times of policy change, the government kept the original posters from the printing presses

and the rest were then destroyed. Under these conditions the current state of the worldwide Chinese propaganda poster collection is limited. Private collectors hold posters as do some universities. Stefan Landsberger, a private collector, and the University of Westminster, have two of the largest collections. The collection used for this research comes from the collection of the Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Center museum and its owner Yang Peiming.

The Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Center exists as one of the hidden treasures of Shanghai and of China. Owned and operated by Yang Peiming, the museum preserves a part of history largely erased in China. The earliest posters in the collection hail from the *yuefenpai*—calendar girl—poster era. The museum showcases about twenty calendar posters at a time, usually from the 1930s and the 1940s, as museum goers and tourists most easily recognize posters from these eras. Surprising to some, calendar girl posters actually date back to the turn of the twentieth century, and Mr. Yang has posters as far back as 1915. The calendar poster collection alone has more than three hundred posters. The second collection spans from 1949 to 1979. The third collection includes the revival era of posters from the 1980s, 90s, and the posters most recently made for the Beijing Olympics. Yang boasts a collection of over 6,000 propaganda posters and early calendar girl posters. Although the sheer number of posters that Mr. Yang has collected alone gives credence to his collection, the variety catapults the Art Center's collection above other collections in the world. Critical to this study, Yang has the largest collection of early post-liberation era propaganda posters. Some of Yang's posters are the only ones of their kind left in the world. Yang's early post-liberation era posters and the study of these posters keep the history of these posters alive and relevant in the modern era. Not only the poster collection but Yang Peiming himself deserves study.

Yang's dedication to poster collection began well before the creation of the museum. Yang Peiming always had an appreciation for Chinese calendar and propaganda posters. Growing up, propaganda posters were a part of his everyday life, and he too was affected and influenced by the messages shown in the posters. Yang did not begin to collect posters until 1995 when the government began in earnest to destroy past propaganda materials. At the time he began to collect Yang had been working at a travel agency and was heavily influenced by his clients' interest in art. It became in vogue to travel to China and bring back Chinese propaganda posters.

In the past outdated political materials including propaganda posters were destroyed—after Mao's death, for instance, signs and materials that perpetuated Mao's cult of personality were destroyed—but in the 1990s the government made a larger effort to destroy pieces of China's political past. New policies were to be promoted and there was no need for a reminder of the past. The Yang collection began as a personal collection and a personal mission. Yang soon realized that within his own collection he possessed some of the only copies in the world of certain posters, in particular his collection of early post-liberation propaganda posters. Yang wished to share his collection with China and the world and in 2002 opened the museum which later, in order to accommodate increased foot traffic and in order to display more posters, moved to a larger location. In March of 2012 the museum received an official license from the government and at the time of this writing Yang is planning to move locations once again to an even larger space

Transitioning from a personal collection to a museum worthy collection compelled Yang to search out more posters. Yang has traveled all over China in search for posters but finds most in Shanghai. At the height of propaganda poster production Shanghai and neighboring Hangzhou

were centers for poster art and printing. Some of China's greatest art schools are still located in these two cities. In the 1980s and the 1990s during the shift to a market economy, former government agencies such as museums, libraries, and culture centers began to dispose of old propaganda posters. Yang seized the opportunity to save the discarded posters and purchased them from the former government agencies as well as from dealers who also began to save propaganda posters. Conscious of his goal to represent a wide variety of posters in his collection, Yang chose posters that represented diverse aspects of posters as well as a wide range of time periods. Almost twenty years after Yang began to collect posters the supply has dwindled. Now it is very difficult to find original posters. Recently Yang has bought posters from an American collector in New York in order to, as he has claimed, return the posters to their original home.

In an interview with Yang I asked him to explain the state and importance of his collection as well as the future that he saw in propaganda posters and poster collecting. Yang strongly emphasized the importance of his early calendar posters, but most importantly the early post-liberation posters. Yang also likes to collect posters from the Cultural Revolution, posters that on the Chinese mainland have largely been destroyed. These posters have lost many Chinese people's interest and faith. After the Cultural Revolution the relics of the Cultural Revolution time period, these representations of the ultra-left, began to slowly show up on the art market.

Yang calls his collection a "window into the elites' view of the world." Having and exhibiting his posters will show and help future generations understand the past. Just as people harbor different thoughts and feelings towards past historical events they also have different feelings towards posters. Every day the world becomes smaller and smaller, whether it is art or history everyone shares in the history of propaganda posters and Yang wishes to share his collection with the world. When he is not searching for new posters he sorts through his current

collection and promotes the importance of propaganda posters, and remembering propaganda posters. His future plans include having more showings of his posters outside of China and is currently in the process of compiling a book of his posters in order to give more people access to his great collection.

More importantly, to the larger field of poster research, Yang's collection allows for a more in-depth study of socialist gender ideologies and propaganda art. Through my work I seek to show the connection of pre- and post-liberation posters, not only in common images but in common themes in the representations of women. The expansion of the poster archive has allowed for this research. Yang's collection opens up new possibilities for the poster art field of research.

Chapter Two

The New “New Woman” of China

“[Wo]Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstance chosen by themselves, but under circumstance directly encountered given and transmitted from the past”²⁵

Karl Marx’s The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

“Sad is the position of women. How they fare is determined by men”²⁶

Poet Bo Zhuyi

In order to understand the lingering gender themes and images that persisted into the post-liberation propaganda posters, one must first look at what constituted a “new woman” during this period in comparison with the period of *yuefenpai*, or calendar posters. The early post-liberation “new woman” retained many characteristics of the “new woman” of the previous decades. But at the same time, posters became a site of conflict over the representation women and their role in society. In comparing the images of the new woman Republican era in calendar posters and post-liberation propaganda posters I will look at the themes of education and literacy, production, and “equality posters.”

“New Woman” of the 1930s and 1940s

The changing definition of the “xin nüxing” or “new woman” of the 1930s and 1940s as well as the post-liberation period demonstrates “the uneasy alliance between the wider revolutionary and women’s movements [which] have sometimes brought competing claims on the identity of women;” a struggle between the new and the old ensued and converged on the

²⁵ Evans, *Gender in Flux* 4.

²⁶ Li, Yu-ning. *Chinese Women through Chinese Eyes*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992. Print.107.

definition of “woman” in China.²⁷ The calendar poster and propaganda poster became a medium to showcase the new woman of both periods. The new woman of the 1930s and 1940s emerged from a period of social struggle and revolution. Feminists, scholars, and writers of both sexes had different opinions on how to define the new woman of New China, including her role in the economy, in politics, and the family, all of which were debated in the press.

Female figures depicted in the 1930s and 1940s calendar posters represented a new ideal of the progressive “new woman,” and gave a simpler and more concrete representation of the highly contested definition of the modern new woman. Traditional Confucian culture separated women from men leaving women to the domestic sphere with no ability or right to participate in outside society and politics.²⁸ In the early 1900s many women began participating in revolution and public life in a highly visible fashion, although this emancipated lifestyle was available to only a fraction of elite women. Middle and upper class women had the opportunity to participate in “public life” in ways that included going to school, going abroad, and partaking in leisure activities. Rural women could not attain this new level of freedom instead having to continue living in the private *nei* sphere of traditional society.²⁹ Only middle and upper class women could participate in the newly changed society as this class of women had greater access to both education and resources that allowed them to participate in the public sphere. Yet this participation, from any class of women, in itself represented progress.

The image of “xin nuxing” was popularized by calendar poster artists whose primary goal was to sell products. Although seen as new women, these image in reality “creat[ed] a

²⁷ Croll, Elisabeth. *Feminism and Socialism in China*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1978. Print. 3.

²⁸ Croll 13.

²⁹ Evans, Gender in Flux 28-29.

framework not dissimilar from the traditional way of viewing as objects of visual pleasure.”³⁰ Artists created the *xin nüxing*, “by combining what they envisioned as outstanding features in women and embodying these parts in a ‘prototype woman’.”³¹ Modern new women in calendar posters were middle and upper class women shown taking advantage of their new position in Chinese society. New women wore colorful fashionable *qipaos* or fashionable Western style clothing. These *qipaos* set women apart from their backwards counterparts in the countryside who wore pants and jackets.³² Their hair was cut short in a bob or done in pin curls, and they showed off their natural feet in the newest style of shoes. Women were not pictured with family members or husbands, but were often painted with images of children. Last, but not least, a modern woman was educated; as such many calendar posters featured women holding or reading books. Artists sought to create a representation of the ideal woman, yet not all women could achieve or even have access to this ideal. Peasant and working class women, who did not have access to education or the ability to participate in political activities, were not considered modern. The lack of education and political mobility only decreased the ability of lower class women of achieving this “new woman” status. Needless to say, these women were not shown in calendar posters.

The trope of a “new woman” breaking through traditional barriers extended into the early post-liberation period. Diverging from previous thought concerning the definition of the new woman, the CCP choose to extend the idea of the new woman to all classes. The label of “new woman” was no longer limited to the upper class; a revision of “woman” was a revolution of all classes. Posters of the early post-liberation period also represented a “prototype woman,” but an

³⁰ Wong, Aida Yuen. *Visualizing Beauty: Gender and Ideology in Modern East Asia*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2012. Print. 60.

³¹ Leung, Warren, ed. *Chinese Woman and Modernity: Calendar Posters of the 1910s-1930s*. Hong Kong: Joint Pub. (HK), 1996. Print. 10.

³² Mann xvi.

imagined woman dreamt up by the communist party and created by the poster artists. Yet this so called new “new woman” retained many similarities with the visual images of women of the 1930s and 1940s period.

New “New Woman”

Socialism and the socialist realist techniques used in propaganda posters of the early 1950s helped create the image of what we now term the new “new woman” in socialist society. As already mentioned above, though, using femininity to represent social change is not unique to the Communist period. As early as the late Qing dynasty and throughout the Republican Era (1920s-1949) the definition of women and what they represented changed. In the post-liberation period the government sought to again remodel the definition of “woman,” creating a *new* “New Woman” that reflected the New China. Propaganda posters showed images that redefined women’s body in order to create a method for women to enter into the male dominated workforce spaces.³³ Women’s bodies, not unlike their formerly bound feet—were once again liberated in order to perform to tasks and fit into a new role in society. Despite these “changes” Chen explains,

liberated body parts represented new sociopolitical and gendered visions of China, but these visions tended to be imagined on the bodies of women by male intellectuals or masculinized political parties.³⁴

Images circulating in this period still shared many characteristics with posters of the 1930s and 1940s and even older antecedents. The realistic figures depicted in calendar posters continued to appear in the post-liberation period. The techniques of socialist realism honed during the

³³ Chen, *Working Bodies* 365.

³⁴ Chen, Tina Mai. "Proletarian White and Working Bodies in Mao's China." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11.2 (2003): 367. *Muse*. Web.

yuefenpai period transitioned into the new communist era of poster production. The use of bright colors, optimistic and prosperous scenes, and lifelike figures all remained prominent feature of calendar art during the early post-liberation period.

Post-liberation posters ostensibly sought to break away from the commercialized images of women in the 1930s and 1940s calendar posters and instead celebrate women as productive members of the new communist society. Calendar posters represented China's capitalist and "bourgeois" past. The government emphatically opposed the commercial objectification of the female body previous practiced by past decades of poster artists. The government did chose to appropriate the female image in order to promote its own new communist agenda, but did so not to sell a product but to sell an ideal; although the government condemned calendar posters they had to find a space in the new communist society for the old calendar poster artists.³⁵ The government recruited such artists to paint the new propaganda posters, but these artists did not recreate or redefine the female image, but rather reconfigured the women from the calendar posters to fit into a new communist approved mold. Not only did the government persist in upholding gender ideologies but the poster artists themselves played a large role in the continuation and construction of gendered themes and images as well. The art historian Lu Peng goes so far as to say,

. . . painters of monthly calendar pictures (*yuefenpai*), versed in depicting young ladies hailing from the gentry and the urban bourgeoisie, were now called upon to portray laborers and to produce images of the laboring women of the new society. However, this often only represented a change of clothes or props around the stock characters they created, and the new images readily evoked the illustrations of the young urban women that prevailed until 1949.³⁶

³⁵ Laing, Ellen Johnston. *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-century Shanghai*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2004. Print. 224.

³⁶ Peng 455.

The artists painted what they knew—images of women that they build their careers on—and incorporated new government approved images. The recycling of images and themes did not only prevail in posters painted by former calendar poster artists but across the entire spectrum of propaganda posters.

At the most basic level the early post-liberation woman as represented in propaganda posters seems to indicate an alternative from the feudal and traditional woman of the past. She has broken free from past restraints and presents the ideal woman of the future. To the extent that Republican era artists helped in the creation of the new political posters, and overlap in style and representation of women was perhaps unavoidable. She carried with her the legacies and expectations of the past, often superimposing a traditional ideal woman onto a communist themed background. Women in early post-liberation propaganda posters, similar to calendar posters, continued to be connected with traditional spaces. Women are shown inside—a traditionally female space—are associated with family and motherhood, and the beauty and the body are still greatly emphasized in propaganda posters. This is not to say that the image of women in posters did not show some change.

Posters' main purpose transitioned from a tool of commercialism favored during the Republican era to a teaching mechanism used by the newly cemented CCP body. Women were repositioned as the main subjects of the pictorial campaigns and were shown in education themed posters, participating in production, and were shown in these posters in positions such as doctors and dock workers. Most significantly, the new era of poster construction made an important inclusion of rural women in the portrayal of the “new” new woman. The widely distributed poster reached homes across the country and the change in emphasis on the everyday woman, the peasant woman, represented a momentous shift in gender representation. Yet upon closer

inspection the viewer can find the traces of lingering gender themes and images as well as a strong influence of the calendar posters, both subverting the official proclamations that women were liberated and shown to be completely “new” and changed in early post-liberation propaganda posters.

Education

In 1945 95% of women were illiterate.³⁷ After it took power, the CCP undertook a mass education campaign that not only sought to educate men, but made it a priority to educate all women as well, including significantly, the vast population of rural women. For modernizers throughout the 20th century, uneducated women signified a backwards traditional and patriarchal country. Educating women would bring a new and powerful China into the new age and onto the world stage. Schools for girls began to gain popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The early 20th century saw greater opportunities for upper and middle class women to attend school, but post-1949 saw the influx of rural and peasant girls into education facilities. Poor and working women finally had greater access to education. Educating women holds great significance. In pre-modern times, the education of women was limited to creating the ideal Confucian woman, compliant and dutiful.³⁸ Modern education opened up women to greater opportunities, exposed them to new ideas, and most importantly propelled women out of the home. Modern women and modern China would progress into the new age educated and well informed.

The CCP’s monumental education campaign after 1949 sought to reach everyone in the cities and the countryside and spread the message of education reform both quickly and

³⁷ Evans, *Gender in Flux* 18.

³⁸ Croll 13.

effectively. The literacy campaign resonated with and touched many people's lives largely because of the use of the propaganda poster. Images catch viewers' attention and can easily put a message forward. The message of the literacy campaign, and all other government campaigns, could more easily reach the illiterate peasants' consciousness through art and images instead of through the use of words, pamphlets and documents. Mass produced posters were a cost effective propaganda tool that allowed for the distribution of posters in stores in cities across the country but also easily distributed throughout the countryside to farmers and peasants.

Connecting women and education in widely distributed images first appeared during the calendar poster period. Calendar posters utilized the in vogue theme of educated women to sell the products advertised in their posters. The figure 1 and figure 2 posters are two examples of representations of the newly educated "new woman" of the calendar poster period. Figure 1 features two women, one sitting and one standing. The woman wearing a royal blue *qipao* stands confidently with her hand on her hip gazing directly at the viewer. The other woman sits with her legs crossed and wears a light green body-hugging *qipao*. The woman sitting also holds a book in her right hand. Both women have short modern hairstyles and show off their natural feet. Behind the women is a serene nature scene. Far in the background the artist has painted a small house next to a forest and a lake. Closer to the front groups of colorful flowers brighten up the scene. Figure 2 shares many characteristics with the figure 1 poster. A woman sits on a bench also wearing a stylish *qipao* and clasps her hands in front of her. A simple background of trees and hills keeps the emphasis on the woman in the foreground. This woman also sits with a book open on her lap.



Figure 1³⁹



Figure 2⁴⁰

Despite their commercial function advertising cloth, many aspects of these posters make them progressive in terms of the definition of women. Natural feet are emphasized and bodies are feely shown. At the same time, the emphasis on the female figure reinforces the expectation of beauty traditionally placed on women. Yet the salient detail in both of these posters is the inclusion of books.

The definition of women in the early post-liberation is paradoxically not as free as it appears to be in the calendar poster period. Women and education are tied to the state and

³⁹ Leung 65.

⁴⁰ Ibid 96.

motherhood while in the calendar posters education is seen as a highly desirable attribute and something intrinsically valuable and sought after by all cultured women.



Figure 3

Figures 3, 4, and 5 all show women learning and practicing how to read and to write. Figure 1 shows a daughter helping her mother practice characters in her work book. The poster has a simple background emphasizing the foregrounded mother and daughter figures. The new generation teaches the old generation. The mother, of the older generation, cannot attend school but her daughter takes time to teach her. Figure 4 also shows a son teaching his mother how to read and write. A mother sits at a desk inside of her home. As she holds her younger child her

older child teaches her from his workbook. The background shows a plain wall with a set of patterned drapery that flanks the window. The vase of flowers in the foreground of the poster compliments the flower pattern of the woman's blouse.



NO. 56172 老师教我, 我教妈妈 Teacher teaches me and I teach mother
Year: 1958 Size: 77x53cm 印数: 302,100 出版号: 8085-1510 作者: 王柳影 出版社: 上海画片

Figure 4

It is important to note the secondary message of these two posters. In both posters the women are learning to read and to write; the women need someone else to teach them as they have not had the opportunity to learn themselves. This act of learning from one's children has a double meaning to it. The children are readily available to teach the mothers but at the same time this places the mother's learning secondary to her other duties. Instead of becoming a primary activity or even priority in life learning, she instead becomes more of a pastime or something to be shared with children. In addition, the role of educator has changed from the mother, as was defined in the pre-1949 period, to the child and in the case of figure 4 the son. Government

official Zuan Fu, speaking in the early 20th century stressed that, “With a constantly growing number of educated women, children will have in the near future the valuable privilege of a mother’s teaching at home, the real school for patriots.”⁴¹ Women were once the educators of the next generation. This role, although it fettered women’s importance to bearing children, still elevated the role of mother. The woman in figure 4 has lost the distinction of educator and has instead been firmly placed in the role of educated.

Figure 5 takes the same approach to women’s learning that figures 3 and 4 take. Figure 5, a poster encouraging viewers to follow the “socialist road” and become a learned person, features a woman breastfeeding her child. The poster shows a peasant woman in the foreground holding a pamphlet in one hand and cradling her child in the other. She wears a kerchief over her



Figure 5

⁴¹ Croll 55.

head and a simple blue blouse and blue pants. Behind her in the background other women tend the field. The simple background draws the viewer's attention to the foreground of the poster and to the main peasant figure.

The women in figure 5 is not only learning to read, but working, feeding her child, and keeping herself updated on the country's current policies. According to the text accompanying the poster, women's education follows the path of socialism and benefits China and the government. But visually, the poster shows as much about the complexities of the double burden as it does advocates for the education of women. The combination of the images of mother, socialist ideology, and the peasant woman displays, as Susan Mann argues, the construction of gender norms by the state and the perpetuation of these norms by the propaganda poster. Figure 5 presents one of the many heroic figures and role models created by the CCP—a heroic woman was a socialist and also a good mother—and shown in propaganda posters. The poster is progressive because the government included a woman of the peasant class in its policies and in its representations. Yet painting a figure of a woman whose primary role is a mother and not an educated person cheapens and reinforces gender roles and lessens the impact of the peasant “new woman”. Although subtle changes in the gender ideology can be discerned, the stark representation of the traditional role of woman primarily represented as a mother figure complicates the claim of the newness of the representation women.

The figure 6 posters from the years 1955 and 1957 show two women holding their daughters while signing petitions advocating against the use of nuclear weapons. The first poster has more of an emphasis on the United States as an enemy. In the background behind the women and her child a white dove looks out as the viewer. The dove represents the ultimate symbol of peace and hope. The woman stands against a light blue background highlighting her

righteousness and purity while the enemy from the United States cowers against a black background symbolizing his evil nature. The first poster uses less realistic looking figures. The second seeks to emphasize that protest against nuclear weapons serves the best interests of China's children. Jin Meisheng, a well-known calendar poster artist in the 1930s and 1940s, painted the second poster. The popular realistic technique of the Republican era is evident in the rendition of the woman and the child. Jin's seal is also stamped on the painting, a common practice of past poster artists. The tradition of adding artists' seals would later be banned during the Cultural Revolution period as it was deemed too "bourgeois."



Figure 6

Although these posters do not specifically advocate women's education they are relevant in my discussion here because the posters' central figures are writing women. What's more, the figures not only write but they are evidently cognizant enough to write about and understand a petition against nuclear weapons. The women's skills extend beyond the ability to write their names. The appearance of almost identical paintings two years apart, painted by different artists indicates the continuing importance the government attached to the image of the educated woman. Women and images of women were still very much tied to the state. This is one of the few posters that depicts a woman writing for herself and not being taught or teaching another person. Despite the slightly improved importance that this woman gains from writing herself, she is not completely alone, rather she holds her child. In the collection studied no propaganda poster—whether specifically advocating women's education or showing a woman using her education—is a woman depicted on her own writing on her own behalf. When she does write herself it is within a larger context; in this instance she is writing a petition for the state. The propaganda posters thus suggest a hidden message that women can earn an education but within the context of motherhood or helping the state, similar to figure 5. Chen would argue that the woman's initiative and participation alone would change her situation and her status in society. She is writing on her own behalf signifying a slight elevation if not subtle change in women's definition. The image of the writing woman gains a certain prestige and represents a visual advancement in the status of women. Yet the subordination of her identity to the state as well as her permanent role as mother calls into question the extent of this gain. The gendered overtones of the poster overtake the slight shifts in definition.



No.54030 工余学习 Study at Spare Time 年份: 1954 尺寸: 53x77cm
 印数: 10000 出版号: 14067 作者: 杭度 Hang Du
 出版社: 上海画片出版社 Shanghai Picture Publishing House

Figure 7

Figure 7 “Study in Spare Time” shows women practicing their writing and also reading the newspaper together. They appear to be factory workers on their lunch break perhaps. This poster is the one educational poster in the Yang collection that does not feature a mother and child combination. The first level of this poster shows the viewer a change in the definition of a woman; educated women are reading and writing and doing so for pleasure in their spare time. On closer inspection the images in the poster reinforce traditionally supported ideas of women’s deferment to men and the stereotypical cultural male to female hierarchy. The most obvious would be that the women are wearing bright and colorful clothing drawing attention to their appearance. Although not with children, the women are in a group creating a women’s space. In the right hand corner of the painting four men in cadre outfits look and listen as the two women in the center read off the day’s headlines. This male gaze strips the women of their authority and their independence. Women can make slight gains, but these gains are offset by an affirmation of

male power. The addition of the four men also creates a dynamic of teacher and student, again creating a gendered hierarchy in the scene. The male cadre's placement off to the side of the poster continues the tradition of male to female hierarchy. The women may be reading, but they read with the praise and the approval of their male counterparts.

Overall, educational posters of the early post-liberation period show important changes in the definition of the modern woman, expanding the category to now include peasant women and continuing to advocate for women's education. The state's continual assertion of a link between women and literacy creates a space that gives importance to women's education. Yet, in no poster is the literate woman as such the main focus of the painting. Women remain secondary to children, the state, men, and larger goals. The new woman is neither equal nor as important as these other factors. She cannot be a new "new woman" and therefore represent the change in the definition of woman if she does not have an equal level of importance with men or the state. Rather than create a progressive space to express the changed definition of women, education themed propaganda posters incorporated slight changes to the markedly traditionally gendered images.

Production

Friedrich Engels posited that the liberation of women from traditional subjugation and traditional definition came through work and contribution to social production; women were to be liberated, and therefore freed from the traditional definition of woman, through work. Despite this straightforward explanation of the process of women's liberation, the Republican era saw many interpretations of this theory of liberation. Work in connection to the modern woman was characterized differently by different people. Most in line with Engels' description, some

activists and feminists spoke of liberating the so called “fourth class” of women, the women of the peasant and working class. Women were not only oppressed by their class but also by their gender and needed to be liberated in both ways; participation in production would begin the process of liberation.⁴² Others supported the idea of economic independence and its ability to create a more equal plane between men and women. When a woman could support herself she gained a sense of dignity and personhood. Yet others argued that marriage and motherhood and the work that these two responsibilities entailed was a women’s true work and contribution to society. New women and their role in work have had a contentious relationship. Ding Ling, in her passionate essay “Thoughts on March 8,” speaks of the hypocritical attitude that the CCP and party members take when trying to reconcile a woman’s role of mother but also productive and working member of society. Republican era women faced the challenge of contributing both to the nation and also to their families.

The new “new woman” of the early post-liberation period participated in all forms of production and farming. She did an equal share of all production work and showed her social equality through this participation. Production included participating in farming as well as performing work in China’s factories. Although the inclusion of women in the work force, both in practice and cultural representation, is a step toward equality and redefining the Chinese woman, posters inadvertently reveal continued inequality and the gendered definition of a woman as worker. Creating images of women in the production sector is not a “sufficient condition” for change in the definition of women.⁴³ In spite of the visual image rendering women as worker, poster representation of women continues visual themes of Republican era posters. This continuity of imagery carries past definitions of women into the early period of the CCP.

⁴² Gilmartin, Christina K. *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California, 1995. Print. 39.

⁴³ Croll, Print. 282.

Women may be set against new backgrounds and placed in new setting, but visually gendered themes persist. This section separates the production posters into “Big Girls,” “Pretty Girls,” and “Role Models.”

Big Girls

The posters of the early post-liberation “new woman” retain certain characteristic with the women of the past. Artists use the technique of manipulating a scene in order to give meaning to an object, for example, an artist might put a sick or sickly person against a background of darkness.⁴⁴ The dark and somber background gives the viewer a feeling of despair, a feeling that this person may not live through her sickness. Artists of the post-liberation period similarly designed scenes in order to project specific idea about the woman. Posters that showed



Figure 8

⁴⁴ Moore, Henrietta L. *A Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. Print. 76.

women participating in all forms of production began appearing in propaganda posters. Large, healthy, and fresh faced women smiles brightly while carrying overly large farm produce as seen in figures 8, 9, and 10.

Figure 8 shows a peasant woman carrying three large heads of cabbage. She shows no sign of discomfort or distress but rather basks in the glory of her accomplishments. The scene behind her is less distinct emphasizing the main figure of the peasant woman. The woman is painted against an endless field of cabbage that stretches out behind her and a fellow worker. Both figures 9 and 10 share a similar layout with Figure 8. Both of these posters were made towards the end of the 1950s as China was making its preparations for the Great Leap Forward campaign of 1958. Figure 9 shows the accomplished result of combining production (the reservoir) and farming. The woman holds in her hand a large bushel of wheat indicating the prosperity of the land and of China. She has red rosy cheeks and has bright and eye-catching clothing. The woman in figure 8 is also very similar to the woman in figures 9 and 10. The woman in figure 10 holds up a large bushel of peanuts for inspection. In the background the viewer can see other women harvesting peanuts. The eye is drawn from the front to the back of the poster creating a sense of a never ending field.

At first glance the images of women working in these posters seem progressive in their view of labor. Artists depicted strong and healthy women participating in China's production and prosperity. New women were strong and capable and would propel China forward. Peasant women had been participating in farm work as long as there had been work to be done, yet the significance in these posters lies in their redefinition of women doing farm work. The smiling



No.56042 水库带来了丰收 Water Reservoir Brings Harvest
 年份:1956 尺寸:53x77cm 印数:40000
 出版号:8085*1478 作者: 金雪尘 Jin Xiuchen
 出版社: 上海人民美术出版社
 Shanghai People's Fine Art Publishing House

Figure 9



No.56040 多种花生增产油料
 Plant More Peanuts for Producing More Food Oil 年份:1956
 尺寸:53x77cm 印数:26000 出版号 作者: 刘青慧 Liu Qingwai
 出版社: 上海人民美术出版社
 Shanghai People's Fine Art Publishing House

Figure 10

faces and healthy bodies of the women represent the satisfaction that the women gain from completing farm work. Yet within these posters lies a double meaning. Progressively, the images suggest women's importance to the state's prosperity. Conversely, the majority of the production themed posters in the Yang collection that feature women as the main image, show women in the farming and the agricultural sectors. Produce and the harvest have historically been associated with women, and the harvest traditionally symbolizes prosperity and fertility. To many viewers, thus, pairing a woman with a large cabbage or a bushel of peanut suggests that she is healthy, fertile, and ready to bear children. As Evans posits, the fundamental definition of women did not change, although arguably a slight elevation in the status of peasant women does occur. Women

may be participating in production, but the definition and representation of women resonates with the familiar ideas of fertility and child bearing.

Pretty Girls

Not all production posters showed big women with big produce. Many production themed propaganda posters depict young healthy and beautiful women. The women in figures 11 and 12 recall the images of women of the calendar girl posters. The posters' emphasis on the body, the open depiction of female beauty as well the women's bright and beautiful clothing all evoke the aesthetic of the Republican era depiction of women.

All three posters in the "pretty girls" category show groups of women together participating in production. Figure 11 shows a farming village where women are cleaning and drying wool. The background depicts the different processes in the gathering and preparing of wool. Two peasant women are the main focus of the foreground. The woman on the right hand side of the poster wears her hair in a long braid that trails down her back. Her bright red blouse is dotted with crisp white flowers. The woman located in the front left hand side of the poster wears a bright purple patterned blouse with bright blue pants. Her light blue apron emphasizes her trim waist and the basket of wool balanced on her shoulder shows her strength.

Figure 12 shares a similar composition with the figure 11 poster. A group of women factory workers have gathered together outside to exercise. As the title suggests, their groups' exercise routine will not only strengthen their bodies but will benefit production. In the background of this poster the viewer can see the outline of a factory building as well as the smokestacks both set against a blue sky. Although this is a production poster, meant to show the importance of strengthening oneself for the benefit of production, the overwhelming emphasis of the poster is on the women's bodies and their beauty. All women in this poster wear bright

patterned clothing. All either have the bobbed hairstyles reminiscent of the calendar poster hairstyles or hair done in pigtail braids with ribbons tied on the end. The women are shown not on a farm but in the yard next to a production plant. The background scene has changed yet the emphasis on the body and the male gaze remains.



Figure 11



Figure 12

The figure 13 poster again shows as strong emphasis on the women in the posters although few men can be seen doing work in the background. Similar to figure 11, the men in figure 13 create a sense of the male gaze; the men in the background become almost voyeuristic. Beautiful women with exposed arms and calves work in front of them where they can easily be

seen and looked upon. The women wear short or braided hairstyles as well as bright and patterned clothing.



NO. 51168 农村风光 Landscape of Fields 年份: 1953
尺寸: 53x77cm 作者: 忻礼良 Xin Liliang
出版社: 三一印刷公司 Three One Printing Company

Figure 13

The “Big Girls” of the previous posters show women by themselves, and all emphasize a certain kind of produce. The women in the figures 11, 12, and 13 posters emphasize the idea of women doing communal work. Posters put women together doing work in order to make the work patriotic and differentiate it from the work pre-1949.⁴⁵ As in the education posters it is important to note the absence in these posters. Women are either by themselves or with a group of women. The women in these posters all wear bright flower printed clothing and all of the women are beautiful. Cai Ruohong, an art administrator during the post-liberation period, believed that beautiful women could and should still be used in posters, only instead they would

⁴⁵ Chen, *Working Bodies* 373.

represent “beautiful working women.”⁴⁶ Physical beauty, a traditional facet of the definition woman and womanhood, was still actively promoted in posters. Just as women used their political power to promote political issues related to women, the government “use[d] the women to demonstrate popular support for their politics.”⁴⁷ Beauty of the female body was still used to draw attention to the poster, to create a certain sense of desire not only for the women but for the political ideas represented in the poster, whether these ideas are education economic prosperity and success. Yet, attractive women are not only politically effective but reassert gender difference.⁴⁸ These women may be participating in hard and tiring labor, but they would promote the ideal of beauty while doing the work.

The figure 14 and figure 15 posters exhibit two posters that compare and contrast with the 1950s period propaganda posters. Figure 14 is a calendar poster from the 1930s. The two women in the poster wear elaborate floral embroidered *qipaos* and hold bouquets of flowers. The poster advertises beauty products yet the beauty of the two women themselves is the main focus of the poster. The figure 11, 12, and 13 posters advertise the new policy of working women yet the viewer’s eye is drawn towards the beauty of the women depicted. Figure 15—a poster from a decade later during the Cultural Revolution—on the other hand, presents a discernible shift in terms of what was desired and desirable. Women have turned from waif like creatures to a brute force. Women factory workers in the background wear plain blouses and cover their hair with kerchiefs leaving very little exposed. The woman in the foreground emphasizes her size and strength and not her erotic beauty. She is not only on display but a body in motion. Here the CCP had recast the female physical body and changed the use of beauty to be more in alignment with

⁴⁶ Laing 225.

⁴⁷ Zheng, Wang. ““State Feminism”? Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China.” *Feminist Studies* 31.3 (n.d.): 519-51. *JSTOR*. Web. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20459044>>. Web. 526.

⁴⁸ Wong 69.

the political ideal of the period. This is in itself of form of beautification as this was the aesthetic of the Cultural Revolution period.⁴⁹ The earlier post-liberation period posters reveal the influence of the calendar poster period and their privileging of the attractive feminine form. Yet the emphasis shifted during the Cultural Revolution period.



Figure 14⁵⁰

Role Models

Production themed posters also depicted model women; role models that women could look up to and emulate. Creating women role models became one of the methods to depict the



Figure 15

⁴⁹ Wong Pg. 74.

⁵⁰ Leung 44.

new woman of China. Role models set a standard for all women of China and represented the state produced image and definition of women.

Figure 16 has a background of flowers set against a bright red wall with the title of “Honor Roll.” The woman wears flowered patterned clothing and an apron tied over her blouse. She hangs up a picture of herself next to other pictures of role model workers, a highly self-reflexive gesture that calls attention to the act of representation itself. Her bright pink cheeks and smile suggests her high level of excitement over her recent honor. The flower accents and the patterned clothing are a legacy of the calendar poster period yet the woman role model theme belongs to the post-liberation period. This poster brings to mind the idea of “separate but equal”. Women can be honored as model workers, but the women are only compared to other women workers. Just as with the production and the education themed posters, women are depicted as having gained a new role in society but this new place and role is within the context of other women and not of the entire Chinese society as a whole.

The theme of figure 17 again is a women role model. The woman in the poster wears the plain blue uniform of a factory worker—a clothing option that begins to depart from the colorful and patterned clothing of the calendar poster period—but she retains the face and hairstyle of the calendar period. The yellow and red medal pinned to the woman’s chest as well as the certificate her son holds all are symbols of her success. The woman celebrates her success in her home with her three children. Although the title and supposed purpose of the poster is the winning of the role model prize, this is placed secondary to the woman’s maternal role. The background of the painting depicts the factory where the woman presumably works while the foreground shows her celebrating with her three children. The woman is not only a production role model because she does her job well, but also because she has wonderful mothering skills. Again society’s



NO.56070学习先进争取做一个先进生产者
Learn from the advanced to be an advanced worker
年份: 1956 Size: 53X77 cm
出版号: 作者: 邵晶坤Cao Jinkeng
出版社: 朝花美术Caohua Fine Art Publishing House

Figure 16



No.54027光荣的生产模范 Glorious Model for Production
年份: 1954 尺寸: 53x77cm 印数: 10000
出版号: 538 作者: 金肇芳 Jin Zhaofang
出版社: 上海徐胜记印刷厂 Shanghai Xu Sheng Ji Printing Plant

Figure 17

contradictions play themselves out in the propaganda poster. The woman is celebrated for her victory of becoming a model worker but this celebration is done within the context of her position as a mother of three children. Woman as mother had been a part of the long standing tradition of family and therefore the foundation of Chinese society, and the mother had been and continued to be an idealized figure in Chinese society. The mother figure was crucial to the family structure and could not be completely dismantled. Woman as mother and worker combined the traditional definition of woman with the Marxist version of a liberated woman.

The visual shift of woman as worker stands in contrast to the foregrounded idea of woman as mother and diminishes the level of change of the definition of women.

Figure 18, a propaganda poster from the Cultural Revolution, helps put the figure 16 and 17 posters into context. In figure 18 the obvious traditional beauty indicators have disappeared. The woman's hair is plain and roughly pulled back into two short ponytails. She wears a unisex uniform made with a plain and pattern-less material. Apart from her pigtails she has no major gendered indicators that mark her as a woman. The background is plain with only a large written



Figure 18

message. The emphasis on physical beauty has disappeared yet similar themes previously established themes of the modern woman remain; she is obviously literate and also demonstrates her political agency. This comparison is made in order to bring to focus the connection between

the early post-liberation posters with calendar posters, as well as demonstrate the obvious visually gendered characteristics in posters. Propaganda posters introduced new facets to the visual representation of women but posters still carried over visual gendered ideologies from the previous eras.

Equality Posters

The theme of placing women in male domains in order to redefine gender ideals, makes an appearance not only in Cultural Revolution posters as Harriet Evans has studied but can be dated back to early post-liberation propaganda posters. Women in jobs such as welders and parachutists were meant to show the success of the party in integrating women into society as well as increasing the rights of women.⁵¹ Posters depicted women doing the same work as men, liberating the body and mind of women. Despite the images shown in what I would categorize as equality posters, there still existed “contradictions between the official promise that women would be liberated by proletarian revolution and the realities of women’s continuing social and economic subordination to men.”⁵²

Women parachutist posters as show in figure 19 became very popular posters to show women’s liberation and the changing definition of woman in the new Chinese society. In the figure 19 poster a woman parachutist floats down to the ground confident in her position. Behind her, against a bright blue sky dotted with clouds, other parachutist also fly their parachutes marking the sky like brightly colored jewels. At first glance this poster shows nothing but a woman in a position newly opened to women.

⁵¹ Chen, *Female Icons* 271.

⁵² Evans, *Language of Liberation* Web.



Figure 19

In order to find the true meaning of this poster one must look deeper than just the initial reaction and image. Painting a woman performing a job formerly restricted only to males does not suddenly create equality between the sexes nor does it erase entrenched societal gendered themes. Even though this woman evokes no obvious signs of sexuality or femininity—flowing hair, patterned dress, flowers in the background—nevertheless the image is an example of the enduring gendered visual themes. The expectation of a woman as an object for viewing pleasure still lingers in this poster. As such, the spectator is positioned as male.⁵³ A woman flying in the sky, even if dressed in a brown military uniform still evokes feelings of grace, and beauty; she does not fly down rather she floats. Bryna Goodman, writing of women in the workforce in the

⁵³ Berger 64.

early Republican era, discusses the emergence of woman into the once male dominated work sector, “The new woman eroticized the public sphere with her presence and ignited male fantasy.”⁵⁴ The novelty of a woman participating in a characteristically male profession creates a provocative and erotic scene. The portrayal of the women in such a fashion caters to the male audience continuing to place women in the position of objects of pleasure.



No.56034 造船厂的女焊工 Women Welding Worker 年份:1956
尺寸:53x77cm 印数:12000 出版号 作者: 章育青Zhang Yuqing
出版社: 上海画片出版社 Shanghai Picture Publishing House

Figure 20



Figure 21

Figure 20, “Women Welding Workers,” shows a group of women together working on welding projects in a shipyard. The background shows a bright blue sky and rows of ships in the process of construction. In the background men work on the welding of the ship’s hull and the

⁵⁴ Goodman, Bryna, and Wendy Larson. *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005. Print. 274.

women in the foreground weld together pieces of the ship. The women wear matching tan uniforms but sport pretty red and white scarves that poke out of their shirts. Both women in the foreground have smiles on their faces and seemed to have stopped to rest for a moment and have a chat. The women's bodies, faces and hairstyles retain similarities with Republican era depictions of women. Figure 21 is a calendar poster from the 1930s. Two women in revealing bathing suits enjoy time outside at the beach. One woman rides a bicycle while her friend walks alongside her. The background is simple showing a beach scene next to a grassy hillside. Both posters emphasize the very modern theme of the importance of female friendship. Expanding beyond the inner circle of the family, modern women find companionship with their female friends outdoors. Interestingly, the figure 20 poster presents this bond within the context of the workplace. Work is emphasized over leisure yet the theme of female friendship remains. Side by side figures 20 and 21 could be swapped. Slightly different scenery and a different set of clothes create the 1950s version of the 1930s poster.

In addition, similar to the figure 19 poster, women in figure 20 have again become the subject of the male gaze. Despite their hard labor they do not show any signs of wear or exhaustion. The two women in front that the viewers can easily see show their faces and therefore their beauty. As such, the women themselves rather than their work become the main subject in the poster. If one does focus on the labor rather than the women, one can notice that no men do the kind of work that the women perform. This specific work has been tasked out to the women while the men work in the ship and perform the more dangerous tasks. A very small space has been carved out for women in the workforce.



NO.56063新中国的女航海员 Women navigator of New China
 年份:1956 尺寸:53X77 cm 印数:72.000 出版号:8085.0501 作者:李幕白Li Mubai
 出版社:上海画片Shanghai Picture Publishing House

Figure 22

The “Woman Navigator of New China” poster shown in figure 22 depicts two naval officers, one male and one female. The poster uses muted neutral colors throughout the background but uses a bright white for the naval uniforms in order to focus the viewers’ attention on the two figures in the foreground. The background of the poster shows the sea at sunset, with a clear sky shot through with a strip of orange. The foreground presents the image of the layout of a ship. The most distinct images are the two naval officers, again to call attention to the figures as main subjects.

In this poster it is important to compare the title to the actual image itself. The title makes the claim that the primary point of the poster is to highlight women in high positions in the military; a woman can now also act as a navigator in China’s navy. Yet she still occupies a lower position than her male counterpart. Of the “equality” posters studied, very few show men

alongside women. When men are featured they are shown in a higher ranking position than the accompanying female. There still existed a sexual division of labor; men still occupied higher positions and still ruled over their female counterparts.⁵⁵ Paradoxically, then, the image simultaneously shows both the lingering gender hierarchy as well as some progress.

Women were now shown in a more active role in the military, but all women were still presided over by male and not female superior officers. The woman's shoulder brackets indicate her lower rank as do her actions; she records information while the man gathers the information. Women's definition expanded to also fit the role of soldier, but the gendered image of women having a lower status relative to her male counterparts still persisted.

The woman in the poster of figure 23 sits against a backdrop of golden wheat fields. Women work behind her harvesting the year's wheat and modern farming machines work farther in the background. Electrical lines and factories dot the skyline demonstrating China's step towards modernity and success. The main figure of the woman wears a bright red blouse with a medal pin to her chest suggesting that she is in charge of the collective behind her. The woman's position as head of the collective and her ability to write and keep records is meant to show her new position in Chinese society, as well as the changing role of women.

Chen argues that these images of equality created a new gender ideology.⁵⁶ The gender ideology was expanded to allow for women to enter spaces previously dominated by men, yet despite this gain, the traditional gendered ideology did in fact persist. This woman may be the head of the collective organization but again she is attached to farming and agriculture. She does not lead any men but rather only women can be seen in the background of the poster. She wears red to represent China and China's bright future, but she cannot completely break from her

⁵⁵ Yang, *Spaces of Their Own* 43.

⁵⁶ Chen, *Female Icons* 290.



Figure 23

gendered role. Yes, she may be the head of a collective in the poster, but she leads no one but other women; her authority is also limited to power over women, and not men. Her position of authority gives her power yet this power is lessened by the image of a woman only leading women, an image respectful of the tradition of not having men and women work together in the fields.

Conclusion

The new “new woman” of the early post-liberation period did not drastically depart from her sisters of the previous generation. Often, the visual gains are at odds with the visual

reassertions of gender difference and gender ideology. Visually, the women of the 1950s posters share many physical characteristics with the women of the earlier Republican era posters. In addition, similarly both periods emphasize the importance of female beauty and the use of woman as an object of visual pleasure. The women in the early post-liberation posters are presented as having gained power under socialism, but men retain power in both the male and female spheres. Women remained visually fettered to both the state and the traditional female role. Some reinterpretation was made to the ideals and images associated with women, but gendered images and themes as represented in posters undoubtedly remained.

Chapter Three

New Wife and Mother Figure

“I grew up in a culture where posters remembered, talked back, and also constructed and reconstructed who I was and what was socially expected of me”⁵⁷

Chen Xiaomei

Wife and Mother Figure in 1930s and 1940s

The Republican period saw a transformation in the role of women in Chinese society. Traditionally, a woman secured her role as wife and mother only when she gave the family a son. A woman's importance, or at the very least obligation, was tied to child bearing and the bearing of a son. Although China has a history of educated women writing about women and their position in society, during the Republican period the number of politically active and educated women increased significantly. From the early 1900s on there was a steady increase in the number of women and girls attending schools. The ban of footbinding not only truly enabled women to walk freely, but also symbolized the unfettering of women in society. These educated women graduated school and moved on to run magazines and journals that discussed and debated women's rights and women's role in Chinese society. Women eventually gained the right to vote, participated in political institutions including the Guomindang and later the Communist Party, and began to carve out a space for themselves in public life. Yet despite these revolutionary achievements the tension between increasing the rights and equality of women on the one hand and not undermining the traditional structure of society, family, and marriage on the other still persisted.⁵⁸

The Republican period saw a struggle against Confucian traditions that regulated the place of (upper class) women in the home. This struggle met a backlash in the revival of, what

⁵⁷ Evans, *Picturing Power* 105.

⁵⁸ Croll 76.

Elisabeth Croll refers to as, the “cult of domesticity”. In 1934, as the Communist Party began its Long March, the Guomindang launched the “New Life Movement”. This “movement” combined Confucian values of family, motherhood, and wifehood with the new progressive ideas of women’s education and emancipation. According to this neo-conservative ideology, women were to stay in the home and cook and clean while the husbands went to work and provided for the family.⁵⁹ Yet, within this discourse, wifely and motherly duties took on the new meaning of modern and progressive.⁶⁰ Many women chose to fight against this seemingly modern yet deeply patriarchal definition of womanhood. They, and progressive male reformers, argued for what was referred to as the *xiao jiating*, or small family. Marriage was redefined as an institution based on love, and not the benefit of two families. The nuclear family of husband, wife, and children was popularized, and sought to retreat from extended family. This ideological clash between old and new continued well into the post-liberation period.

Perhaps not surprisingly against this political backdrop, calendar posters of the 1930s and 1940s often represented the new wife and mother figure. Beautiful women set against either backgrounds of intricate landscapes or living rooms spent time with their children. Women also were often shown doing needlework or advertising clothing and cloth. Gendered themes and images continued reveal continuity with traditional ideas of womanhood and the definition of women, but there was a reinterpretation of the ideals and images during this period.

New Wife and Mother Figure 1949-1957 Posters

The founding of the All China Women’s Federation (ACWF) in 1949 created a more formal space within the government to advocate for and protect a woman’s agenda. The 1950

⁵⁹ Ibid 158.

⁶⁰ Leung 107.

Marriage Law set in motion the beginnings of the redefinition of marriage and family and women's role in both arenas. The marriage law strove to make women and men equal in a marriage. Child brides, concubines, and arranged marriages were abolished and divorce was established as a right. Women, regardless of class, were encompassed in the national discourse of creating a better and more prosperous China.

Taking its cue from earlier discourses of the "new woman," the early post-liberation period also ushered in further change in the public definition of the wife and mother figure. Propaganda posters contributed to the new nationalist construction of the socialist mother and wife. The previous chapter explored the visual continuities that carried forward into the post-liberation period. This chapter now examines not only the visual consistencies between calendar posters and post-liberation posters, but the continuities and changes in thematic content. The marriage law propaganda posters were produced to spread the message of the new law. In marriage posters, absent are the themes connecting child bearing and marriage, yet still very present are the themes of the importance and necessity of marriage to a woman's life. Children are not included in marriage posters yet the idea of having children is thrust upon the Chinese woman in other ways. The revered mother posters attempt to reconcile the traditional role of woman as mother and homemaker with her new public roles in society. The clash between the continued patriarchal governmental policies the new paradigms of socialist womanhood, just as in the Republican period, is displayed in mother-themed posters. Last, women remained the vehicle for the portrayal of the theme of consumption. Whether as consumers displaying China's prosperity or producers contributing to the good of the nation, women were tools of propaganda. Posters of the early post-liberation period made subtle improvements in the gender ideology

connected to the wife and mother figure, but overwhelmingly traditional gendered themes persisted.

Marriage Law 婚姻法

The Marriage Law of 1950 brought many positive changes to the newly founded People's Republic and to Chinese women. The law outlawed child brides, arranged marriages, and plural marriages. Women gained the right to choose their husbands and also gained the right of divorce. The government shut down brothels and punished those who sought to keep concubines. Extending far beyond the idea of giving women the right to choose their own spouse, the marriage law aimed to dislodge the patriarchal system itself. The traditional family structure had isolated women, effectively reducing their ability to participate in government and outside, or *wai*, activities. The marriage law sought to release women from men's control and give them power outside the traditional confines of the home. The marriage law supported equal status in the husband and wife relationship and also promoted romantic love marriages, a stark contrast to the arranged and often loveless marriages of the past. Yet this separation of marriage and family had unintended consequences. A separation from family could also mean a loss of emotional and financial support for a woman, leaving her with little alternative if her marriage failed.⁶¹

The Chinese government understood that like family and children, marriage made up the foundation of the Chinese society. With the destruction of the patrilineal structure the government could reinforce its own power; the government would replace the old and become the new foundation of Chinese society.⁶² As the state evolved so did family structures. Marriage

⁶¹ Peterson, V. Spike. *Gendered States: Feminist (re)visions of International Relations Theory*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992. Print. 104.

⁶² Young, Marilyn B., ed. *Women in China: Studies in Social Change and Feminism*. N.p.: Center for Chinese Studies: The University of Michigan, 1973. Print. 165.

left the private sphere and rather became a “‘cell’ of the entire revolution, of importance to the interests of society as a whole.”⁶³ Authority over women switched from the family to the state; women still existed as subordinate to a higher power earning her definition from this higher power. Family remained the foundation of the political and social order, and women remained tied to this institution and heterosexual marriage firmly tied this knot.⁶⁴ Women were still expected to get married and to have children. Publications teaching and reminding women of proper attitudes towards marriage included “Adopt a correct perspective on love” (建立正确的恋爱观), and “The hymen and love” (处女膜于爱情). Although such publications such made great leaps in the areas of women’s health and education, the marriage law and the policies that came into place in this period tied the definition of woman to the institution of marriage and the heterosexual relationship. The law itself advocated monogamy and suggested guidelines as to marital obligations, effectively creating clear boundaries for gendered behavior as well as defining legitimate sexual relationships as between men and women. A wife still had an obligation to her family and to her husband; rocking the boat disrupted her proper gendered place.⁶⁵

The poster in figure 24 is one of the many propaganda posters that represent and promulgate the new marriage law. Set inside a government office a newly married couple receives their marriage certificate from a smiling official. The bride’s parents sit off to the side. Two women in the background whisper to each other and an older man sits smiling, looking on at the events unfolding. The three colors red, blue, and yellow dominate this painting. Catching

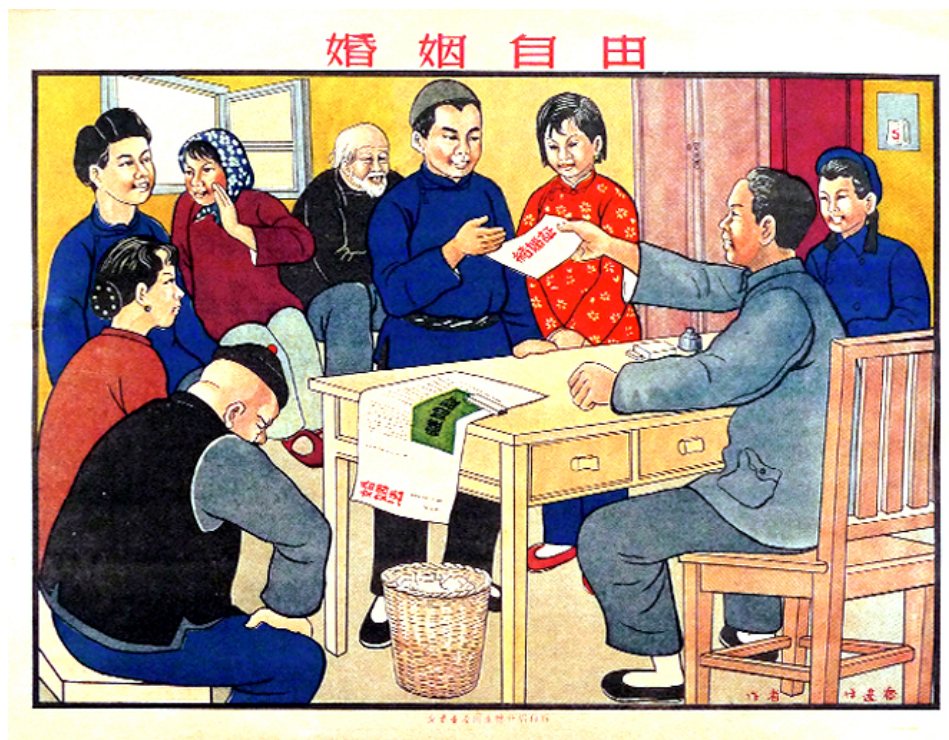
⁶³ Evans, *Defining Difference* 26.

⁶⁴ Evans, *Gender in Flux* 14.

⁶⁵ Evans, Harriet. *Women and Sexuality in China: Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949*. New York: Continuum, 1997. Print. 363.

the viewers' attention, the brightest red in the poster belongs to the newly married woman's jacket.

The woman's red jacket captures the viewers' attention but occupying the visual center of the scene the man is the more prominent figure. The woman instead stands demurely beside her husband with her hands clasped together and head down. Although marriage in post-1949 China was represented and propagated as free, new, and liberating—and marriage and its definition did change and was revolutionary—the visual inconsistency in this poster lies in the fact that here the husband in the marriage and the men in the government still appear to possess more power than the woman. The woman in the blue outfit in the right hand corner of the poster seems to be a cadre in the office as well, but does not hold the same high position as the male worker. The



NO.50050 婚姻自由 Marriage no longer arranged 年份:1950 尺寸:53x40cm 作者:任迁乔Ren Qiqiao
出版社:新华书店山东总店印行 Xinhua Bookstore Shandong General Branch Print and Distribute

Figure 24

husband takes the certificate—not the woman—from the male government official. Yet, at the same time, the action of the husband and not the father taking the certificate is a significant point. The authority in the marriage has been transferred from the father to the husband. The parents sitting in the left hand corner of the poster appear disappointed; it is a visual representation of their loss of power. The power has shifted from the family to the couple, but the woman still does not have an equal amount of power in comparison to her husband.

The poster shown in figure 25 features a visually appealing scene. Bright colors are used throughout. The bright red color used on the banners, clothing, and the flower pins symbolizes luck and happiness for the newly married couple as well as revolutionary spirit of the CCP. Younger members of the family dance in the foreground and in the background the older family members clap and congratulate the couple. The married couple stands far in the background smiling in front of a picture of Chairman Mao.

Although this poster has the title of “Happy Marriage” the couple is not the main focus of the poster. The musicians, the dancers, and the family members pull attention away from the married couple. This marriage does not represent a union between the man and the woman but rather a union between the two families and one can argue the couple and the government. The marriage law may have legally given women many new marriage rights, but the traditional expectations of marriage, the role of a wife, and the role of a family in marriage, still existed in life and in propaganda posters. In addition Mao Zedong’s portrait hangs in the background, bestowing the right of marriage upon the couple. The gains made by women are pared down in this poster by the spotlighting of the family and of Mao. The previous poster attempts to separate



No.52025幸福的婚姻Happy Marriage 年份：1952
 尺寸：53x40cm 印数：63000 编号：518 作者：江峰Jiang Feng
 出版社：上海徐胜记印刷厂 Shanghai Xu Sheng Ji Printing Plant

Figure 25

or at the very least focus the idea of marriage on the couple, but this poster reinforces the idea of marriage's importance in the center of the family. One can argue that weddings are causes for celebration and this scene depicts a family and friend celebration, which may be true. Even if the scene shows a celebration the title "Happy Marriage" designates the couple as the main characters and the most important in the marriage yet the image of the couple has been placed far off in the back and not as the main focus of the poster. In contrast to the couple the woman cadre has been given visual prominence in the poster. Casually leaning against a pillar and playing the symbols, she attracts the most attention. Her placement in the poster firmly attaches marriage to the revolution; marriage creates the revolutionary atmosphere and also creates good revolutionaries. Marriage may have purportedly been separated from the family but has now been firmly attached to the government and the revolution.

The posters in figures 26 and 27 have similar compositions. Figure 26 shows a man and a woman holding hands with red flowers, similar to the pins in figure 25, pinned to their chests. The man holds in his free hand a copy of their marriage certificate. The background of the poster shows the text of the new marriage law itself, as if to remind the viewer that this couple and this marriage are in fact newly defined. The poster on the right, figure 27, shows a married man and woman together working their field. They both hold farm tools in their hands while looking out into the distance. The limited background and the figures' position gazing into the distance suggest that they are looking towards their future.



NO. 53065 自由婚姻美满幸福 Free marriage and happy family
Year: 1953 Size: 53x77cm 印数: 30,000 出版号: 075
作者: Yu Yongjia 出版社: 华东人民美术
East China People's Fine Art Publishing House

Figure 26



No. 53032 互助互爱创造美好的生活
Help and Love Each Other to Make Better Life
年份: 1953 尺寸: 53x40cm 印数: 30000 画076
作者: 赵延年 Zhao Yannian
出版社: 华东人民美术出版社 East China People's Art
Publishing House

Figure 27

These two specific posters show women and the marriage law in the best light. Overall, this law benefitted women, but I seek to show that the propaganda posters of this time period supporting the marriage law associated the female image with specific gendered themes. They both show a man and a woman by themselves yet, what remains is a strong government influence. In these posters, a woman's role may have been detached from that of the traditional family but nevertheless has instead been affixed to the state. The heterosexual couple is together participating in production (which both helps the state and supports the idea of women's liberation through work) as well as supporting the government's policies and set roles. In addition, a woman gained the right of marriage yet was still defined in a traditional way. Her happiness, the happiness of her family, and the happiness of the state is still very connected to marriage and a woman's obligation to marry. As Ding Ling wrote, "It's even more of a sin not to be married, and single women are even more of a target for rumors and slanderous gossip."⁶⁶ A woman's sexuality and her freedom are tied to marriage and marriage is promoted through propaganda posters.

Although marriage posters maintained the ideal of the traditional woman some advances were made in the representation of women. Consider figures 28 and 29, two posters from the Republican era, featuring marriage and brides. In figure 28 a bride wears a pale pink *qipao*-style wedding dress and a long veil that trails behind her back and wraps back in front of her. In her lap she holds a large bouquet of lilies. Two children sit at her feet, the boy leans into the girl and the girl holds her own small bouquet of flowers. A traditional courtyard scene can be seen through the circular window frame in the wall in the background. This poster of a bride emphasizes female beauty and also explicitly connects children and having children with the

⁶⁶ Ding, Ling. *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*. Ed. Tani E. Barlow and Gary J. Bjorge. Boston: Beacon, 1989. Print. 318.



Figure 28⁶⁷

institution of marriage. Marriage posters of the early post-liberation period do show scenes of a happy marriage between two people that does not necessarily emphasize child bearing as a necessity of marriage. Posters encouraging child bearing were very popular, but the posters of the early 1950s made a step towards changing the gendered theme of marriage as an obligation and a child-bearing institution, yet this idea was still reinforced in mother-themed posters.

The figure 29 poster is a painting of an actual event. Hundreds of couples got together throughout the day and were married in shifts of about one hundred people at time. In this depiction of the event, all of the women wear similar pale pink *qipaos* and matching pink veils. They all carry large bouquets of flowers and walk down the steps arm in arm with their new husbands. The husbands wear traditional jackets over long gowns. Although this poster suggests

⁶⁷ Leung 41.

a more light-heartedness to the act of marriage dissimilar from that of the early-post liberation posters, certain images from this poster reappear in the poster of the later period. The red flower pins that the grooms wear reappear in 1950s posters but both the bride and the groom wear the pins that are associated with the CCP. Marriage here, as in later posters, is being tied to the state even if in a subtle fashion. The most interesting similarity characteristic is who carries the marriage certificate. Although arguably the groom has a free hand to carry the certificate there is meaning in the act of the man and not the woman carrying it. The man here holds the power in the relationship as just as he is shown to in the above posters.

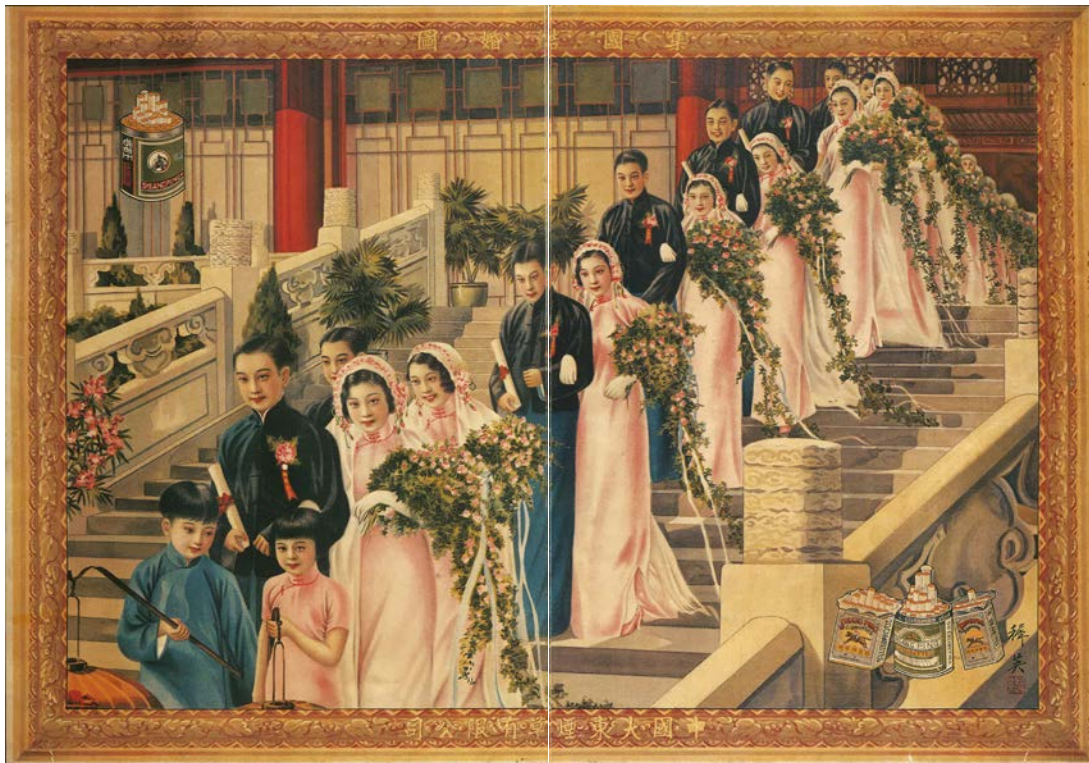


Figure 29⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Leung 156-57.

Revered “mother figure”

Women of the Republican era, despite their newly won role and increased participation in society, were not separated from the expectation of motherhood. Family and marriage still remained entwined with women’s role in society. Both pre- and post-liberation China showcased itself as a very pro-natalist society. A 1942 article, reprinted later in 1980 article in celebration of International Women’s Day, quoted Zhou Enlai as declaring,

Women can do anything that human beings can do. However, since mothers’ duties are inevitable, natural duties for any woman, in performing mothers’ duties, women may do fewer other things. This is not only permissible, but also necessary in the division of labor.”⁶⁹

Zhou Enlai, one of the main players in the Communist Revolution and therefore a shaper of early post-liberation policies and politics, declared motherhood and the bearing of children as not only natural but inevitable. Chinese minds, both in 1942 and post-1949 China, still held close “deeply embedded and gendered expectations.”⁷⁰ Women’s bodies were not liberated post-1949; the body was still tied to child bearing and even more frequently the state. There existed a constant, what scholar Wang Zheng labels, “tug-of-war” between woman activists and feminists and the state and its definition of state feminism. Deng Yingchao, a prominent woman activist, pursued an agenda that used woman’s allowed place in the policy making sphere with organizations such as the All China Woman’s Federation, to work within the CCP structure and implement progressive reforms for women. Regardless of this measure of authority, women still struggled against the patriarchal traces still persisting in government. Zhang Yun, a fellow activist spoke of this struggle writing,

⁶⁹ Li 116.

⁷⁰ Evans, *Gender in Flux* 5.

At the time [post-liberation] the Part emulated the Soviet Union, calling upon women to become glorious mothers. The Soviet Union lost half its population in WWII. But China had a large population. Women had to go to work. How could they become glorious mothers? So we did not advocate the women become glorious mothers.⁷¹

Many women activists did not endorse the idea of women as mothers, but one necessary sub-category of the definition of woman in propaganda posters, and for the government promoted idea of a woman, still included being a mother.

A poster from 1954 named “Mothers and Children are Protected by the Country” shows a mother and her newborn child. The person in white, a female doctor, has lovingly swaddled the newborn and even tied up the bundle with a bright red bow. The women either stand in a hospital



No.54010 母亲和儿童受国家的保护
Mothers and Children are Protected by the Country
年份：1954 尺寸：53x77cm 印数：150000 出版号：5.34
作者：中央人民政府卫生部宣传处 Propaganda Department of
Central Government Health Ministry
出版社：中央卫生部生宣教器材制造所

Figure 30

⁷¹ Zheng 542.

room or a room in the new mother's home. The simple background includes a small table covered by a white linen cloth and a vase of roses set upon the table. A window dressed with bright plaid curtain reveals a clear blue and cloudless sky. The neutral beige wall color places emphasis on the two figures in the foreground of the poster.

Two symbols represent the protection of the motherland, the red ribbon and the plaque of Mao hanging on the wall in the background. This poster ties the role of caretaker to the woman and the woman alone cementing the image of a woman's importance as mother. The poster also underscores the importance of the continuation of the generational line. In the past a woman's role and importance was inextricably tied to her ability to bear children and more importantly to bear a son. Yet this poster also diverges from the traditional gendered themes and images. The child is of indiscriminate gender, and furthermore the doctor that hands off the child is not a man but a woman. The poster exhibits elements of continued gendered themes yet also incorporates the new attitude towards women and which professional occupations they could hold.

The poster, figure 31, "Cultivate the Next Generation's Heart and Soul" also features a mother, her child, and a female doctor. The child in this poster is a little bit older and is shown receiving its first checkup. The foreground of this poster shows the healthy progress that the child had made and the child's proud mother. The background depicts another happy mother standing in the entranceway of the examination room holding her child. In the top left hand corner of the painting another poster hangs on the wall. The Russian poster depicts the almost exact same scene that the Chinese poster shows. The blond and blue eyed child has just been replaced with a smiling Chinese baby. In 1954, the time this poster was printed, China and the Soviet Union still had a very strong relationship. Many Chinese propaganda posters not only adopted the socialist realist techniques from the Soviets, but the Soviet influence also manifested

itself in a similar thematic structure. China borrowed themes and scenes from Russian posters and adapted them to Chinese style and taste. Both China and the Soviet Union shared a socialist tradition. The definition of women's role in society borrowed heavily from the Marxist tradition. Both countries idealized the mother figure within society and attached the ideal of the mother with that of the state.



Figure 31

The images greatly resemble the images used in past calendar posters. The mother and the woman doctor both wear their hair in the short bobbed style of the calendar posters. Their faces are drawn very similarly and the mother's blouse has a bright pattern reminiscent of past posters. The smiling fat and healthy baby also continues the visual tradition used in calendar and New Year's posters. The scene of the traditional that lingers in this poster is the theme that a woman is most prideful of her role as mother. She continues the family line and ensures the next

generations. Yet, as with the figure 30, this poster also exhibits visual discrepancies. The child's gender is ambiguous and therefore does not indicate a privileging of a male child above a female. The state has replaced the family as the main body of care; the mother by herself brings her baby to the doctor. Lastly, again a woman doctor examines the child, not a male doctor. As a doctor, the woman may be occupying a position of power but she, like the mother, has taken on a caretaking role.

The figure 32 and figure 33 posters were both done in 1953. The background of figure 32 features a beautiful landscape dotted with white flowers and bright green grass. The cherry tree in full bloom adds a pop of color to the green landscape of the background. In the foreground of



Figure 32



Figure 33

figure 32 a mother and her three children admire the pigeon that the older daughter cradles in her arms. The mother wears a plain blue blouse but sports a stylish short bob hairstyle. Her youngest child wears a brightly patterned outfit and the two older children both wear bright bottoms with their school uniforms of white blouses and red scarves. Figure 33 has a very similar composition. The bright colors and detailed clothing patterns resemble those of calendar posters, as do the detailed landscapes backgrounds.

The figure 32 and 33 posters were printed in the same year and have similar images yet thought the artist named the figure 32 poster “Live in the Happy Days of Peace,” and the figure 33 artist titled his work “Future of Our Motherland.” The stock images of a mother and her children were tied to China and to national prosperity and peace. The images suggest that the future and happiness of the country depends on women and their ability to guarantee future generations. Reproductive expectation and their entwinement with the success of the state make it a necessary and unavoidable task. Neither poster features a male presence and relegates the caretaker role to the female sphere. The daughter and son have achieved a form of equality. Both the brother and the sister wear the white shirt and red scarf required of children attending school, an important addition to these posters. Their red scarves and school uniforms suggest an equal role, making education the equalizer. The daughter attains equal status with her brother in a school setting.

Compare now to posters, figures 34 and 35, from the pre-liberation era. The woman in figure 28 sits demurely on the ground among a bed of flowers while holding her two children. The woman has the characteristic curled and bobbed hair of the time period as well as the body hugging *qipao*. The two children wear Western style clothing and the young girl, just as the young girl in figure 33, sports unbound feet. The figure 35 poster is very similar to figure 34.

The woman wears blue and white pants and a matching jacket while her children also wear Western style clothing. Two characteristics separate the two 1930s posters from the later ones. The first is the gaze of the woman. In the 1950s posters the women either look at their children



Figure 34⁷²



Figure 35⁷³

or out into the distance, and in the 1930s posters the two women stare directly at the viewer. The 1950s posters show an addition of a third child, reflecting the encouragement to have more children during this time period. Set side by side the figure 32 and 33 and 34 and 35 posters expose the persistent reoccurrence of the revered mother figure theme. Despite the transition into a communist age and alleged redefinition and renewing of the woman, woman's role as mother was still privileged. It was irresponsible not to have children.⁷⁴

⁷² Leung 103.

⁷³ Ibid 150.

The poster in figure 36 titled “Happy Life Brought by Chairman Mao” shows a scene of a loving family sitting down to dinner together. A mother serves her three children and her husband the dinner she has made. The neat house, furniture, and the abundance of food show the family’s prosperity. The children’s toy ball and rocking horse can be seen in the background and the mother’s leftover knitting sits on a chair in the foreground. Similar to the other mother posters, this poster also shows two boys and one girl, features an indoor setting, shares the same vase of flowers and peace dove, and has a portrait of Chairman Mao. This is one of the few posters that include a male figure in a mother themed poster.



Figure 36

⁷⁴ Brownell, Susan, and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom. *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*. Berkeley: University of California, 2002. Print. 348.

Despite its obvious celebration of socialist domesticity, this poster projects many contradictory images and messages about gender. The mother cooks and serves food to her family and takes her place in the home while the man in the work clothes provides for his family outside of the home. The status of woman's role in the home has been elevated and celebrated in this poster. However, the image preserves the traditional association of women with the *nei* sphere and men with the *wai* sphere. This poster directly conflicts with the values constructed in the "women in production" propaganda posters. Women were to be liberated by participating in work outside of the home, but this woman is not a worker but a housewife, a homemaker. In addition the marriage law was intended to challenge the patriarchal system, yet Mao's portrait hanging in the background seems to reinforce the father dynamic, subverting the family to the masculine authority of the state.

Mao Zedong's picture also looks down over the family from his place on the back wall. Mao watches over and approves of all; the father even points to Mao's portrait. The Mao picture that hangs on the wall represents the breaking away from the reliance on family and the power of male family members and instead a new reliance and obedience to the state appears. The state now had a large influence of families and women.⁷⁵ Just as with marriage, the state monitored the liberated family and woman, yet the Mao image also indicates the subordination of women and the family to the state.

Domestic Consumption and Socialist Domesticity

The propaganda posters of the early post-liberation period saw a continued figuring of woman as consumer, but publicized it in a different fashion. Reflected not only in the socialist

⁷⁵ Glosser, Susan L. *Chinese Visions of Family and State: 1915 - 1953*. Berkeley, Calif. [u.a.: Univ. of California, 2003. Print. Pg. 200.

realist artistic techniques that showed a distinctly optimistic way of thinking, but also in the continued reappearance of the theme of purchasing and domestic stability, propaganda posters of the early post-liberation promoted the idea of China's new found wealth and prosperity. Women were often the central subject of these posters fostering the impression of the economic empowerment of women and peasants, but linking women and this traditionally domestic sphere and the improvement of the country.

The figure 37 poster shows a woman and her daughter-in-law shopping for cloth together. The young woman's son looks up smiling at them. To the right of the mother and daughter-in-law a husband and wife also pick out cloth together. Towards the back of the poster another woman approaches the shop carrying her son in her arms. This scene is meant to show China's new prosperity and the changing relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

With the prevalence of domestic abuse, reforming familial relationships became an important tool for family reconstruction, as "in peasant household the abuse of a young daughter-in-law was so common a circumstance . . . that unless it was especially flagrant it attracted little attention."⁷⁶ Although the government may have wanted to restructure the relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the suggestion to mend the relationship by shopping for clothes simplifies the issue as well as connects women to clothing and shopping. This poster continues to connect women and clothing and beauty; clothing and appearance still remain essential in the definition of a woman. In addition women dominate this scene with a single man in the foreground who accompanies his wife. All the women have children with them—all of who happen to be sons—except for the one man far in the background who also has his son.

⁷⁶ Croll 27.

The figure 38 poster is simply labeled “Dress Up,” making shopping a past time. Set inside of a shop the background has mothers and daughter shopping for clothes. Colorful vases sit upon a shelf and clothes hang up on a rack. White daisies decorate the store bringing freshness and color to the scene. Three women stand in the foreground. A mother stands and watches as her daughter tries on a new blouse and the shopgirl kneels to adjust the fit of the blouse.



NO. 54161 婆媳上街买花布 Mother-in-law and the daughter shopping on the street 年份: 1954
尺寸: 53x77cm 印数: 137,000 出版号: 5411 作者: 童育青 Zhang Yuqing 出版社: 美术读物

Figure 37



No. 56044 打扮起来 Dress Up
年份: 1956 尺寸: 53x77cm 印数: 60000 作者: 李慕白 li Mubai
出版社: 上海人民美术出版社
Shanghai People's Art Publishing House

Figure 38

In this poster it is again important to notice what is not shown. Clothing and shopping have been relegated to a purely female sphere. The poster implies that all women like pretty things and like to go shopping and dress up; this is a past time that can be shared between a mother and a daughter. “Clothing symbolizes not nature but social convention,” and keeps

women in the same role that they occupied pre-liberation.⁷⁷ In addition to the visual similarities with the calendar posters both the figure 37 and 38 posters reproduce associations between femininity and consumption. The act of purchasing cloth has taken on the new meaning of helping to mend the mother and daughter-in-law relationship. This scene of domestic consumption marries the theme of purchasing power (outside of the home) with the domestic sphere. Just as women of the Republican era embodied the new China with their gaining of an education, post-liberation era women who went shopping represented the new prosperity of China .

The figure 39 poster depicts a scene in a modern department store. A woman works behind a counter and sells shirts. Behind her stands a shelf filled with different styles of shirts. In the right hand side of the background a woman pulls out her wallet to pay for an item. The woman herself wears a plain green overcoat buttoned over a crisp white blouse. Her cheeks are rosy and her hair is styled in pin curls.

The scene differs slightly from the purchasing scenes of the figure 37 and 38 posters. Figure 39 shows a more modern shopping experience and a different kind of business. Although the scene has changed slightly, shopping for clothing is still constructed as a feminine activity. This propaganda poster acts as an ideological space in which gendered themes are constructed and also projected onto. Spaces are “often constructed in terms of differential gender domains of power” and the shopping and clothing related sphere has been constructed to fit the female role.

⁷⁷ Li 110.



Figure 39

The title of the poster “Being warm-hearted, patient, and modest to satisfy the customer” again suggests that the act of either purchasing or selling clothing has been given an elevated meaning. In addition this poster returns to the pre-liberation era idea that women gain independence and equality through employment and the ability to make their own money.

By way of comparison, consider the figure 40 poster, a classic example of a calendar poster advertisement. The background has the look of a classic Chinese landscape painting. A characteristically Chinese-style house faces a lake with a trail of lily pads. The slightly indistinct background then draws the attention to the female figure in the foreground. The woman leans on a rock and turns to face the viewer, her head slightly resting on her soldier. She wears a light pink form fitting *qipao* with a large pink flower accent on the right hip. The eroticization of the

female body here largely disappears from post-1949 period, though the emphasis on beauty is shared with the early post-liberation posters. The act of tying women to clothing and consumption carries over from the calendar poster period to the early post-liberation period.



Figure 40

Running counter to the aforementioned posters, the figure 41 poster presents a quiet country scene visibly absent of consumption. The far background shows factories against a bright blue sky and fields. In the middle ground a man comes in from the fields carrying two buckets of water and a father and son crouch on the ground while having an intimate conversation. The foreground, the main focus of the poster, shows a woman in bright blue clothing mending a shirt. A basket of darning supplies sits to her left and chickens peck the



No.51050军帮民民帮军Army Helps People and People Helps Army
 年份: 1951 尺寸: 53x40cm 作者: 张碧悟Zhang Biwu
 出版社: 上海生生美术公司 Shanghai Sun Sun Fine Art Company

Figure 41

ground in front of her. Similar to figure 39, in this poster the woman also does not engage in direct eye contact with the viewer.

This family represents the traditional structure of peasant family life. The mother stays in and mends clothing and takes care of the house while her husband and son do the farm work. In the terms of clothing, only women are ever shown mending clothes. The title “Army Helps People and People Help Army” suggests that the woman plays her part by fixing a People’s Liberation Army (PLA) military uniform. Unlike the woman in figure 22, this woman does not participate in the military in order to help her country during the Korean War but rather mends the clothes of the one participating in the war. The poster celebrates women’s contribution to the

war efforts and contributions to the betterment of the country. The traditional role of caretaker within the domestic sphere has, like the posters above, been inscribed with new meaning.

Women are regulated to the domestic sphere but the work done in the domestic sphere helps the PLA and the country. This poster suggests an alternative to the consumption focused posters. Women consume to demonstrate the continued prosperity of the country, but *produce* for the benefit of the county. A common gendered theme has been given new meaning as well as women's place as a tool for the country has been cemented. Women's role as consumer has been reconfigured to act as a tool to carry out the promotion of the CCP. A woman's body is no longer deployed as an agent solely for desire of a product, but desire for a political ideal.

Conclusion

Propaganda posters of the early post-liberation period that showcased the wife and mother figure complicated the claim that what was shown elevated women to a new and different status. Posters exhibited some reinterpretation of ideals and images, but paradoxically, gendered themes persisted. The institution of marriage, while detached from the family, was still tied to the state and marriage itself was still expected of women. Motherhood, also often shown in posters of the previous decades, still remained as a facet of the definition of womanhood. Lastly, the figuring of woman as consumer continued as a theme in the 1950s. Women and their bodies were employed to attract the viewer. Yet, different from the calendar posters, the post-liberation posters promote desire for the state and state activities and not the desire for a product.

Conclusion

“Chinese women will throw off their shackles and stand up with passion; they will all become heroines. They will ascend the stage of the new world, where the heavens have mandated that they reconsolidate the nation”⁷⁸

Qiu Jin, Stones of the Jingwei Bird

“When will it no longer be necessary to attach special weight to the word ‘woman’ and raise it specially?”⁷⁹

Ding Ling, Thoughts on March 8

Images have power not only to reflect the current times but create standards as well. The importance of realizing and understanding the gap between what the government attempts to create and propagate with images and what the images truly show reflect the true nature of women’s position and definition in Chinese society during this time period. Images cannot be taken at face value rather have to be analyzed and scrutinized. As John Berger maintains, “The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.”⁸⁰ What we believe affects how we see things and paint things; the lingering beliefs of the definition of a Chinese woman and gendered images and themes continued in propaganda posters. The image of the “new woman” reflects disconnect between the government’s ideal and what the posters honestly reveal. This disconnect between the new definition of a woman continues in posters that actually continue to show traditional gendered themes and images.

The comparison of Republican era and early post-liberation era posters contributes to the current literature on propaganda posters, but also opens up a discussion for further research. This particular case study only researches a little over forty propaganda posters. Whether to contribute

⁷⁸ Dooling, Amy D., and Kristina M. Torgeson, eds. *Writing Women in Modern China*. New York: Columbia Univ., 1998. Print. 45.

⁷⁹ Ding, 1.

⁸⁰ Berger 7.

to the study of gender ideology in posters or to continue the study of Chinese propaganda posters in general, the possibilities for further research are endless. Missing from this study that could be further explored is the role of propaganda artists themselves in the construction of gender ideologies. Particularly, the role that calendar artist turned revolutionary artist should be investigated. In addition, little research has been conducted examining the role of women propaganda artists and how they contributed, changed, or affected the representation of women in posters. Lastly, it behooves researchers to delve more deeply into the topic of the role that the CCP had in the presentation and construction of the gender ideology in propaganda posters. Whether or not the disconnect between the government's ideal and the images painted was deliberate, and whether the government understood the extent in which posters created a gendered norm, is a topic for another discussion.

Propaganda art in China became a blend of culture and ideology, an art form that connected Chinese people around the country transforming into a very powerful political tool still used today. Propaganda posters reflected and help create gender roles for future generations, and contemporary society's gender roles were informed by these past gender representations. Although almost over seventy years has passed after the end of the production of calendar girl posters, and over sixty years since the production of the particular style of posters made in the early post-liberation period, these posters images, especially the images and representations of women, continue to inform current Chinese society. Understanding past gender representation can help explain current and future representations of gender in Chinese society. Study of these posters and techniques used to represent women allow a current researcher to study how today's posters and images reflect women. The importance in studying the past lies in its effect on the present and the future. Although the posters of these time periods seem outdated, the

representation of gender transcends these time periods. Studying gender and gender representation will help close the gap in the gulf of men and women's equality in Chinese society. How women are portrayed in media not only reflect current views but help shape views on gender and gender equality.

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