

Combat and Collaboration: The Clash of Propaganda Prints between the Chinese Guomindang and the Japanese Empire in the 1930s–1940s

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On the night of July 7, 1937, Chinese and Japanese troops engaged in a firefight in the vicinity of the Lugou Bridge, a crucial access route to Beijing.¹ Only a few months after this incident, key cities in the surrounding region fell to Japanese forces. Although the two countries had fought spasmodically since 1931, full scale war did not commence until 1937, and ended only with the surrender of Japan at the end of World War II. The eight years of the Second Sino-Japanese War opened the way for the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which eventually overthrew and replaced the previously dominant Guomindang (GMD, the Nationalist Party). Japan, on the other hand, had to abandon its imperialist aspirations and redefine its role, not only within East Asia, but also with respect to the West.

Introduction: War and propaganda posters

As early as the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–5) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), the Japanese had already availed themselves of mass-produced forms of political art such as lithographs, woodblock prints, painting illustrations, and photographs to portray themselves in an idealized manner for the domestic, Chinese, and international audience.² Theoretically, propaganda art was to have the function of “organiz[ing] [the] group mind and simplify[ing]

1 Most images from this article come from the archives of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. I therefore wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Jidong Yang, Dr. Hsiao-ting Lin and Ms. Carol Leadenham for their invaluable help at Stanford University. I am also indebted to Dr. Xiaodong He and Dr. Shaojuan Zhang for their help with the Japanese translations, and to Whitney Chandler for his advice on writing this article. The two anonymous reviewers' suggestions helped tremendously in shaping the final version of this paper.

2 Sepp Linhart, *Niedliche Japaner oder Gelbe Gefahr? /Dainty Japanese or Yellow Peril?: Westliche Kriegspostkarten 1900-1945 /Western War Postcards 1900-1945* (Vienna: LIT, 2005); Ukiyo-e Caricatures, 1842–1905 Database. <http://kenkyuu.eas.univie.ac.at/karikaturen/> [Accessed on 11. June 2014].



its mass thinking.”³ It set out to guide the audience towards a desired shared attitude. During the Russo-Japanese War, colored woodblock prints, which actually had started to decline after the introduction of photography, regained their appreciation because of their perceived value as easily digestible visual forms to prompt Japanese domestic audiences to identify with the government’s war-time goals.⁴

World War I taught most nations the value of propaganda. Harold Lasswell, who traced the new role of government propaganda, concluded in 1927, “The history of the late war shows that modern war must be fought on three fronts: the military front, the economic front, and the propaganda front.”⁵ Not surprisingly, during the second Sino-Japanese War, propaganda and one of its essential mediums, the political poster, played a vital role. For China, the war coincided with and spurred the efforts of a modernized state to gain international standing and respectability. In this process, political prints articulated revised narratives of national identity.

As far as the scope of this paper is concerned, my discussion will be limited to the confrontation between the GMD and Japan in visual propaganda warfare directed towards Chinese audiences. In their efforts to foster a resolve in their support and weaken their opponents’ cohesiveness and fighting spirit, both sides used the printed image as well as theater plays, newspapers, radio broadcasts and movies all played vital roles. Among all these propaganda instruments, my study will focus on the “visual spectacle” of the large-scale wartime posters created by the contending parties for pasting on walls, because their consistently shared iconographic elements cry out for analysis.

Reception: Japan’s impact on Chinese art before the second Sino-Japanese war

The form of the political poster is closely connected to technological developments, namely the introduction of inexpensive, multi-copy processes of color printing and the development of new printer’s inks. Modern printing techniques for images were ushered in on a large scale during the late nineteenth century in China, when British entrepreneur Ernest Major, the manager of the Chinese-language newspaper Shenbao 申報 (Shanghai Newspaper), set up

3 Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2004), 44.

4 For more information on images associated with the Russo-Japanese War, read Frederic Sharf, “A Much Recorded War,” in *A Much Recorded War: The Russo-Japanese War In History and Imagery*, ed. Sebastian Dobson et al. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2005).

5 Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927; repr., Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2013), 214.

the Dianshizhai lithography press in 1879.⁶

Shanghai's dynamic political and cultural structure formed a hybrid environment for invention and innovation that accentuated the cross-fertilization in mass communication content and technology throughout Asia. Rudolf G. Wagner concludes that about 7% of the images in the first twenty volumes of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (1884–1891) were copies from Western pictorials. He therefore argues that, in terms of the circulation of images, China had been swiftly incorporated into the global system by the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ Later, especially after the May Fourth Movement in 1919, some artists further embraced up-to-date international design vocabularies such as those found in Japanese graphic prints, art deco imagery, and Russian constructivist illustrations.

Japan played a key role in China's education in Western culture, and politically a handful of Chinese scholar-officials such as Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909) advocated a program of “learning from the West through Japan 驅徑東洋學西洋” after China's devastating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895.⁸ Even before this date, as argued by Lai Yu-Chih, a number of Chinese artists collectively known as the Shanghai School absorbed elements of Japanese visual culture in their work.⁹

Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, Sino-Japanese artistic societies mounted several joint art exhibitions¹⁰ and more and more Chinese artists started

6 Traditional Chinese uses of print included copies of religious texts and imagery, illustrated books for elite audiences, and pictures printed for popular consumption, especially New Year prints invoking prosperity. The Chinese had found that their own printing techniques were outdated and inefficient when compared to those used by Western missionaries and entrepreneurs, who introduced Gutenberg through the distribution of Bibles, newspapers, journals and commercial flyers. For information on Chinese print history, see Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 25–6; Stephen MacKinnon, “Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period,” *Modern China* 23, no.1 (Jan 1997); Christopher A. Reed, *Introduction to Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

7 Rudolf G. Wagner, “Joining the Global Imaginaire: The Shanghai Illustrated Newspaper *Dianshizhai huabao*,” in *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 3–96.

8 Zhang Zhidong first brought up “Learning from the West through Japan” in his Exhortation to Study 勸學篇 in 1898. More information will be found in Douglas Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912: The Xinheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 213.

9 The Shanghai School is a style of Chinese art popular in the late nineteenth century and centered in Shanghai. The representative artists of Shanghai School include Ren Xiong (1823–57), Ren Bonian (1840–1896), and Wu Changshuo (1844–1927). Lai Yu-chih has a lengthy discussion in her dissertation on how Chinese graphic design and the art of the Shanghai School drew influence from Japanese art, especially from Japanese Ukiyo-e woodblock prints. See Lai Yu-chih, “Ren Bonian (1840–1850) and Japanese culture in Shanghai, 1842–1895” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2005).

10 Walter Davis, “Welcoming the Japanese Art World: Wang Yiting's Social and Artistic Exchanges with Japanese Sinophiles and Artists,” in *The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 84.

paying attention to Japan. By the 1920s, the influence of Japanese art on Chinese propaganda art began to manifest itself in the domain of political cartoons. Many political posters produced during the First United Front (1922–27) borrowed the style and content of another popular Japanese pictorial genre that had emerged around the turn of the twentieth century: *manhua* 漫畫.¹¹ Chinese political cartoons reached their height after the outbreak of the May 30 Movement in 1925, probably the most significant anti-imperialist and labor movement.¹² The famous Chinese cartoonist Feng Zikai (1898–1975), who was strongly influenced by Japanese techniques, published several of his anti-imperialist *manhua* in a then-popular journal, *Zhongguo qingnian* 中國青年 (Chinese Youth).¹³ This spawned many imitations and numerous pictorials were published, such as *Gongren huabao* 工人畫報 (The Workers' Pictorial), *Bagong huabao* 罷工畫報 (The Strike Pictorial) and *Gongren zhilu* 工人之路 (The Path of the Worker).¹⁴

Tōyō and Tōa Shin Chitsujo

As the twentieth century got underway, Japan coined the term “tōyō” to emphasize a Pan-Asian cultural alliance. As analyzed by Stefan Tanaka, “tōyō” is a “geocultural entity” that encompassed the history and culture of the East, as opposed to that of the West.¹⁵ In the words of Tanaka,

The mentality behind the dichotomies between the East and West is that all of Asia was grounded in similar cultural and spiritual roots and formed a barrier, even superiority, against the West... Tōyō provided the conceptual arena in which to make claims for an area as well as a cultural typology that encompassed and located both Shina and other Asian countries.¹⁶

11 *Manhua* can be literally translated as “cartoons” or “impromptu paintings.” Interestingly, the term *manhua* was first adapted from the Japanese term *manga* in May 1925. The term “Zikai *Manhua*” was applied to the paintings of the Feng Zikai published in *Wenxue zhoubao* 文學週報 (Literature Weekly). See Geremie Barmé, “An Artist and His Epithet: Notes on Feng Zikai and the *Manhua*,” in *Papers on Far Eastern History* 39 (1989): 17.

12 Ren Jianshu 任建樹 and Zhang Quan 張銓, *Wusa yundong jianshi* 五卅運動簡史 [A Brief History of the May 30 Movement] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1985), 246.

13 Gan Xianfeng 甘險峰, *Zhongguo manhua shi* 中國漫畫史 [History of Chinese Cartoons] (Jinan: Shandong huabao chubanshe, 2008), 87.

14 Information on this part can be found in Bi Keguan 畢克官 and Huang Yuanlin 黃遠林, *Zhongguo manhua shi* 中國漫畫史 [History of Chinese Cartoons] (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2006), 45.

15 Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 11.

16 *Ibid.*, 5.

Clearly, then, Japan, considered itself to be the legitimate inheritor of orthodox East Asian civilization, the possessor of the best of Asia. Meanwhile, the tumultuous situation in China provided excellent opportunities for Japanese expansionism. Having occupied Manchuria earlier, Japan officially introduced the concept of Tōa Shin Chitsujo 東亞新秩序 (New Order in East Asia) when it occupied a number of important Chinese cities on November 3, 1938.¹⁷ The two wars—the “China Incident” (Shina jihen) with China and the Greater East Asia War (Dai tōa sensō) against the United States—therefore became a part of the Tōa Shin Chitsujo campaign.

To sum up, Sino-centrism had dominated Chinese-Japanese relationships among Chinese as well as Japanese elites for hundreds of years, but after Japan’s Meiji Restoration, the influence of Japanese aesthetics on Chinese art had become undeniable. In fact, rather than being seen as a challenge to the traditional Chinese artistic canon, Japanese elements seem to have been most easily incorporated into the newly emerging art styles and genres, such as the Shanghai School, or the political cartoon. However, Japan’s colonial expansion complicated its cultural influence on China as the Chinese set out to develop a novel set of icons to distinguish themselves from Japanese cultural aesthetics.

Propaganda of the Imperial Japanese Army

In the political climate of the early twentieth century, military conflicts were also accompanied by wars in the public media and news. Already during the Russo-Japanese War and well before the advent of widespread government propaganda during World War I, the Japanese government had been aware of the propaganda value of manipulating news.¹⁸ During Second Sino-Japanese War we also see a significant participation of Chinese opponents of the Japanese colonial enterprise in the propaganda battle. Nevertheless, factional disagreements frustrated China’s official and non-official efforts to establish a national news network and implement a forceful propaganda agenda.¹⁹

As far as propaganda posters were concerned, numerous war-related art prints were produced in both China and Japan. In fact, the Japanese print business reached its culmination with the foundation of the Japanese Print

17 Wang Jianmin 王建民, *Kang Ri zhanzheng* 抗日戰爭 1937–1945 [The Anti-Japanese War: 1937–45]; *Zhongguo jindai tongshi* 中國近代通史 [The History of Modern China], vol. 9 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2006), 194.

18 For more information, read Tomoko Akami, *Japan’s News Propaganda and Reuters’ News Empire in Northeast Asia 1870–1934* (Dordrecht: Republic of Letters, 2012).

19 The program of establishing an effective Chinese propaganda network is discussed in Shuge Wei, “Beyond the Front Line: China’s rivalry with Japan in the English-language press over the Jinan Incident, 1928,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 188–224.

Service Society (Nippon Hanga Hokokai), organized by print artists in the early spring of 1943 to give direct support to the war effort.²⁰ Already during the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese woodblock artists took up the challenge of photography by imbuing their works with a heightened sense of realism to convince the public that their scenes were authentic.²¹ In addition to functioning as a reporting tool, such prints were usually propagandistic in both their nationalistic subject matter and their emotional energy.

As part of the Tōa Shi Chitsujo campaign since 1938, numerous political prints depicted Japan as a forceful protector of the essence of East Asian culture. The goal was “to convey the idea of war not as destruction but as a positive adjunct of East Asian culture, and to illustrate the Japanese occupation of China as peaceful.”²² In December 1937, a few months after the Lugou Bridge Incident, Beijing was captured by the Japanese. Significantly, many bureaucrats who had served in the Beiyang Government prior to the Northern Expedition were re-appointed by the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA). Some of these men had been exiled from politics for many years, and Japan offered them an opportunity for a comeback. Former Beiyang official Wang Kemin 王克敏 (1879–1945) was appointed head the new regime, and the old Five Colored Flag was restored as its official banner.²³ The restoration of Beijing—capital city of several dynasties—as the seat of government became an effective symbol for Japanese troops advertising themselves as protectors of the “orthodox” Asian culture. Soon after that, the East Asian Cultural Association was established in Beijing in early 1938, thus demonstrating that the Japanese empire represented the antithesis of Western imperialism.

From the time of the Mukden Incident in 1931, the major Japanese propaganda agency tasked with appealing to the Chinese population for the IJA was *Senbuan* 宣撫班 (the Pacification Unit). After Beijing was occupied, the *shinminkai* 新民會 (the New People Association) was established with a function similar to that of the *Senbuan* 宣撫班. However, while the leadership was Japanese, the majority of the staff members were Chinese. Both organizations had their headquarters in Beijing, but there were also a number of regional agencies based on the same model. After the establishment of the China Expeditionary Army (支那派遣軍 *Shina haken gun*) in September

20 Kendall H. Brown, “Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945,” *Impressions* 23 (2001): 66.

21 The influence of photography on woodblock prints has been dealt with in Margarita Winkel’s “Photograph and Ukiyo-e Prints,” in *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, ed. Amy Reigle Newland, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Hotei publishing, 2005), 269–72.

22 Brown, “Dark Valley,” 67.

23 *Di wo zai xuanchuan zhanxian shang* 敵我在宣傳戰線上 [The enemy and we on the frontier of propaganda warfare] (Wenhua jiaoyu yanjiuhui 文化教育研究會, 1941), 277.

1939, the Hōdōbu 報道部 (Report Department) was established, modeled after *Senbuhān*. Under the Hōdōbu there were several Hōdōhan 報道班 (Report Units). They were responsible for propaganda work in North China, and communicated directly with Tokyo.²⁴

These agencies sent out propaganda material along with medicines and everyday necessities as a way of manipulating the mindset of the Chinese population in the occupied territories.²⁵ The most direct approach for propaganda posters was for these agencies to appropriate the visual traditions found in Chinese *nianhua* 年畫 (New Year Pictures). According to the document of the China Expeditionary Army entitled “Tai Shina senden jisshi sankō 対支那宣伝実施参考 [Reference Materials for Propaganda Work in China],” prior to the Chinese New Year of 1938, the Beijing government dispatched policemen to give every household a poster to paste on the wall to replace the New Year pictures from the previous year.²⁶ The posters generally adopted stories with an aura of auspiciousness Chinese populations were familiar with. These posters usually portray a figure dressed in Japanese military uniform or traditional Chinese attire, sometimes with happy round-faced children. Among the numerous posters produced by those propaganda agencies, I have selected a few that represent the mainstream pictorial themes of the IJA.

Examples of the IJA’s propaganda posters

Speaking in January 1940, the Chinese Communist Party general Zhu De (1886–1976) pointed out that the Japanese were exceptionally skillful at using visual resources such as large propaganda posters and small brochures, usually adopting visual elements with traditional Chinese motifs.²⁷ The poster below, published in 1939, was an example of the China Expeditionary Army’s visual assertion of “authentic traditionalism” (figure 1). Its message was mostly concerned with the themes of “peace” and “harmony.” The inscription reads: “As we gallop towards a new China, heaven and earth are always bright 躍進新中華，天地常明朗。” The background features a dreamlike scenery of a

24 Chiharu Kawase 川瀬千春, *Sensō to nenga: <Jūgonen senso> ki no Ni Chū ryōkoku no shikakuteki puropaganda* 戦争と年画「十五年戦争」期の日中両国の視覚的プロパガンダ [War and New Year pictures: the visual propaganda between Japan and China in the fifteen years of battles] (Matsudo-shi: Azusa Shuppansha, 2000), 113.

25 Ibid., 133. In addition to propaganda materials aiming at Chinese audiences, there is the extensive English-language propaganda produced by Japan in Manchukuo, such as *Contemporary Manchuria* (1937–1940).

26 Ibid., 114–5.

27 hu De 朱德, *Zhu De xuanji 朱德選集* [A Selection of Zhu De’s Works] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), 217.

sunrise with multi-colored clouds scattering the light. The rising sun takes up the symbol of the sun from the Japanese flag and the “New China” that is bathing in its light is made up of a group of Chinese buildings, including pavilions, city gates and gate towers that are to evoke the Chinese tradition and its values. Some buildings are fading into the clouds while others are partially concealed by trees, a quintessential scene of imperial Beijing.



Fig. 1: Poster “As we gallop towards a new China, heaven and earth are always bright,” text in Chinese, ca. 1937-40, China. Lithograph, 40 x 30 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

At the center of the poster, a man in typical Qing Dynasty male attire is riding on a flying horse, holding the five colored flag and pointing the way forward. The flying horse is a traditional Chinese cultural symbol. As early as the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE–24CE), the powerful emperor Han Wudi (156–87 BCE) wrote several eulogies in praise of the flying horse, one of the magical creatures having a certain connection with dragons.²⁸ The overall implication of the image, then, is that “we” are being led by a magical power and moving forward with great speed under the benign light of the Japanese rising sun. Overall, the poster creates an idealistic scene, permeated with traditional cultural elements. Far from being an attempt to urge change or revolution, it presents the image of a smooth and rapid transition from “old China” to “new China” supported by Japan. With its emphasis on the abstract ideals of “new China” and “heaven and earth,” it is unlikely that this poster was aimed at an audience of people still struggling with basic needs for survival.

It was easier, relatively speaking, for the Japanese to emphasize the legitimacy of the imperial and traditional culture. An ideal Confucian state was required to keep the mandate of heaven and produce a well-ordered society in which harmony and social hierarchy prevailed. Since Japan maintained the lineage of an imperial dynasty reaching deep into the past, it could therefore be perceived as an ideal model of Confucianism. As suggested by some Japanese historians at the time, Japan, as opposed to China and Korea, had never in recorded history been conquered by a foreign invader (figure 2).²⁹ Another good example of this political notion can be seen in the poster “New Political Order 新政.” It features a background in red, the auspicious color of Chinese culture and architecture, in which a golden phoenix emerges from the watch tower of the Beijing city wall, along which are displayed numerous five-colored flags. The most striking image here, aside from the red color, is the golden phoenix. Symbolizing rebirth, these mythical animals have historically crowned important Japanese buildings such as the Golden Pavilion of Kinkakuji and the Phoenix Hall of Byōdōin in Kyoto as seen in the photograph besides the poster.

As observed by the China Expeditionary Army, most Chinese people were very superstitious and only a few were literate. As a result, the C.E.A. went on to appropriate visual motifs from old customs, superstitious thoughts, and folk religion.³⁰ This poster is a point in case. The phoenix is an icon from

28 For a study of the migration of this image across Eurasia, see Michael I. Rostovtzeff, “Parthian Art and the Motive of the Flying Gallop,” in *Independence, Convergence, and Borrowing in Institutions, Thought, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 45–56.

29 Lynn A. Struve, *Time, Temporality and Imperial Transition: East Asia from Ming to Qing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 257.

30 Chiharu Kawase, *Sensō to nenga*, 114–5.



Fig. 2: Poster *The New Political Order*, text in Chinese, ca. 1938-39, China. Lithograph, 30 x 21 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Archives (left). Bronze Phoenix on the roof of the Golden Pavilion at Kinkaku-ji. Photograph by Shaojuan Zhang (right).

ancient Asian mythologies. In China, as well as in Japan, the mythical Phoenix was adopted as a symbol of the imperial household, particularly the empress. This mythical bird represents fire, the sun, justice, obedience, fidelity, and the southern star constellation.³¹ According to legend, the Hō-ō (phoenix in Japanese) appears very rarely, and only to mark the beginning of a new era—the birth of a virtuous ruler, for example. In another tradition, the Hō-ō appears only in peaceful and prosperous times (nesting, it is said, in a paulownia tree), while hiding in times of trouble. As the herald of a new age, the Hō-ō descends from heaven to earth to do good deeds, and then returns to its celestial abode to await a new era. It is a symbol both of peace (when the bird appears) and of disharmony (when it disappears).³² Therefore, the phoenix on the top of the gate tower most likely symbolizes the peace after rebirth, accomplished through the occupation of the Japanese Imperial Army. At the same time,

31 James C. Y. Watt and Barbara Brennan Ford, *East Asian Lacquer; The Florence and Herbert Irving Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 73–80.

32 *A to Z Photo Dictionary Japanese Buddhist Statuary*, search term “Phoenix,” <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/ho-oo-phoenix.shtml> [Accessed on 11. June 2014].

because it is placed at the highest point of the entire architectural complex, it is a symbol of the Japanese Imperial Army itself as a power above all to reign over the entire world in peace, and of the prestige of its fame.

In addition to “orthodox East Asian culture,” the IJA tended to underscore the ideas of “peace” and “protection” (figure 3). This poster, for example, features several related symbols such as peace doves, smiling faces and a young child. The pastel colors compose an idealized world in which hatred and fear are absent. At the center of the poster, a Japanese Imperial Army soldier holds a child who is grasping a five-colored flag, and both are smiling and looking into the distance of an ideal future. A peace dove flies in a blue sky above while another takes food from the soldier’s hand. The soldier, a perfect example of romantic heroism, plays here a maternal rather than a martial role, hiding the uglier aspects of the world from the eyes of the child. The poster invokes people’s desire for peace and harmony rather than radical change and the cruelty of the battlefield.



Fig. 3: Poster “Chinese Child with Soldier of the Imperial Japanese Army,” ca. 1939-40, China. Lithograph, 40 x 30 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

The ideas of “peace” and “protection” were sometimes translated into the notion of “brotherhood” (figure 4). This poster, titled “Good Will Between China and Japan,” features two cartoon-like characters: a Chinese man, dressed in blue and holding the banner with this slogan, and a Japanese man, dressed in white and waving his arm, along which a slogan reads “Peaceful Order in East Asia.” Both have large, smiling faces with red cheeks. In the background is a map of the globe that focuses on Japanese territory, clearly indicating Japan as being the leader of this community of brotherhood. As in the previous poster, red, the most auspicious color, predominates. In most political posters produced by the Japanese Imperial Army, Japan is visualized as the elder brother (figure 5). The poster, entitled “China and Japan Are Like Brothers that Build East



Fig. 4: Poster “Good Will Between China and Japan,” text in Chinese, ca. 1938-39, Japan. Lithograph, 31 x 21 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

Asian Peace Together,” draws on a very famous story about the Song Dynasty historian and politician, Sima Guang (1019–1086). As even Zhu De noticed, the Japanese had on many occasions utilized the story of Sima Guang as a metaphor for their relationship with China.³³ When Sima Guang was a child, one of his playmates fell into a large ceramic vat and was about to drown. The other children scattered in panic, but Sima Guang cracked the vat with a rock and saved the child. His calm decisiveness won him considerable praise. Though the story might be apocryphal, it has remained popular in China up to the present day.



Fig. 5: Poster “China and Japan Are Like Brothers that Build East Asian Peace Together,” text in Chinese, ca. 1938-39, Japan. Lithograph, 31 x 21 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Archives.

33 Zhu De, *Zhu De xuanji*, 朱德選集 [A Selection of Zhu De’s Works] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), 218.

The poster has altered the story slightly so as to fit its propaganda agenda. A giant vat, set in a traditional Chinese garden landscape, has been broken by a little Japanese boy, dressed in the JIA uniform; he appears calm, decisive and smart, like the original figure in the story. A Chinese boy is depicted flowing out of the broken vessel along with a stream of water. The rock used by the Japanese boy to break the vat lies nearby. The vat itself is topped by the Japanese national flag together with the Chinese five-colored flag. The obvious message of this poster is that smart and brave Japanese are saving the Chinese from their own mistakes and ignorance. The Japanese are the elder brothers, the Chinese are the younger brothers. Further symbolism is added by four characters inscribed on the vat, reading “ronggong zhi weng 容共之甕 [Vessel containing Communism].” Thus, the Chinese people have drowned themselves in a political structure tolerating Communism, and this “vessel” must be broken by the Japanese to save China.

Another standard approach of the Japanese Imperial Army was to equate the Guomindang with communism, claiming it was “turning [China] red/ Communist *chihua* 赤化.” Where the GMD government advocated an “anti-imperialist and anti-invasionist” policy, the Japanese advocated “Anti-Communism.” Representing themselves as defenders of “orthodox” Chinese culture, the Japanese propagandists portrayed Communism as a primitive and foreign ideology. And Chiang Kai-shek—ironically, in light of previous and subsequent events—was portrayed as the ultimate icon of this ideology and his government, by extension, was Communism’s stronghold in China.

As the self-anointed representative of a “legitimate” East Asian culture and the true heir to the best traditions, the JIA tended to emphasize the benefits of the status quo, and advertised themselves from a defensive standpoint with romantic celebratory imagery—unlike the aggressive tone of propaganda during the Russo-Japanese War (figure 6). Published in 1938–9, this colorful poster features a buoyant soldier on horseback, dressed in traditional Chinese outfit with military boots, confidently brandishing the Peking Government’s five colored flag. To the right, he overlooks a scene in which a diverse group including peasants, scholars and foreigners is gathered in harmonious felicity to observe the (Japanese) sun rising auspiciously over Beijing’s most hallowed architectural monuments. Behind him, soldiers wearing both traditional and modern military garb march into a dark and stormy environment to confront the enemy threatening this idyll, personified by grotesque caricatures of Chiang Kai-shek and Stalin looming in the blackness above. “Chiang” appears bold and disproportionately skinny, while “Stalin” appears stout and tough-looking.

This poster underscores the JIA’s position as defender of the legitimate order, in which traditions are respected and all classes and nationalities abide in peace and harmony. Indeed, among the group of contented citizens shown in



Fig. 6: Poster “Celebrate the New Order,” ca. 1939-40, China. Lithograph, 31 x 41 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

the poster is a woman in Japanese costume, serving to highlight the Pan-Asian posture of the ruling government. Relating Chiang Kai-shek, who was in a United Front with the Communists, to Stalin, the GMD-CCP Alliance appears as a dark and gruesome future that has to be prevented by all means. Under the assumption that many Chinese were unfamiliar with the principles and ideals of Communism, relating Chiang Kai-shek to such a foreign ideology was a plausible strategy to discredit him.

The Japanese military advance across China worked effectively and by December 1937 they captured the GMD capital Nanjing and in October 1938 Wuhan, forcing the GMD to retreat to the inland mountain city of Chongqing. During this process, the IJA intensified its propaganda efforts. For example, only one week after the occupation of Wuhan, the bilingual Chinese and Japanese *Wuhan bao* (The Wuhan Newspaper) already started publishing.³⁴ But following the fall of Wuhan, the GMD launched several large-scale counter-offensives against the IJA, and from 1940 on the IJA encountered tremendous difficulties in administering the seized territories. It attempted to solve its occupation problems through the creation of friendly puppet governments, the most prominent being the Nanjing Nationalist Government headed by Wang Jingwei (1883–1944), a close associate of the late Sun Yat-sen.

³⁴ *Di wo zai xuanchuan zhanxian shang*, 76.

At this stage, the IJA, as well as the new Nanjing government, continued to connect the GMD with Communism. The Japanese even claimed that the presence of the Communists was the reason why there was war in East Asia in the first place. The Wang Jingwei government maintained that “The new Republican Government [of Nanjing] is the orthodox Chinese government. It carries the mission of fulfilling peace, fighting anti-Communism and maintaining Tōa Shin Chitsujo. That is why it is revolutionary.”³⁵ Wang Jingwei’s government published several journals to reflect this ideology, such as *Sanmin zhoukan* 三民周刊 (Three People’s Principles Weekly), *Ziyou pinglun* 自由評論 (Independent Critic), *Xin shiji* 新世紀 (The New Epoch), and *Shidai wenxuan* 時代文選 (Contemporary Essay). Additionally, it used flyers, banners, mass meetings, newspapers and wall posters as vehicles of propaganda. Before the fall of Wuhan, most of the IJA’s posters had been produced in Tokyo. Later some of the images were produced in China. In late 1938, for example, Shandong province produced half a million propaganda brochures for the IJA, which were disseminated by aircraft.³⁶

Aside from the military conflict between the GMD and the Nanjing Government, there was a visual contest between the two as well. Their propaganda posters were ephemeral and attempted at times to distort political reality, and could on occasion be convincing. As we can learn from almost every case in Chinese history, from the Northern Expedition to the Cultural Revolution, such posters would provoke, foment and inspire for only a brief period;³⁷ immediately afterwards, having made the required impression, they would suddenly disappear, their powerful and compelling imagery seemingly disowned and forgotten. The messages they had sent to people, together with their visual languages, usually became outdated quite soon.

Combat: The Second United Front between the GMD and CCP

The War of Resistance had reduced the conflicts between the GMD and CCP and had prompted the formation of the Second United Front (1937–1946); the CCP Red Army was now officially reorganized as part of the National Revolutionary Army. While the GMD engaged the Japanese in conventional battles, the some of the CCP’s contingents in the NRA engaged in guerrilla warfare, while protecting their regular forces for a later conflict with the

35 “新國民政府，乃國民政府之正統，它負有‘實現和平’、進行‘反共’、安定‘東亞新持續’的使命，其革命性也正在這裏。” Ibid., 32.

36 Ibid., 77.

37 For more information on, and samples of, Chinese propaganda posters from different periods, read Anchee Min, Duo Duo and Stefan R. Landsberger, *Chinese Propaganda Posters: From the Collection of Michael Wolf* (Hongkong: Taschen, 2003).

GMD.³⁸ Within the Political Department of the Military High Command, however, an agency in charge of political education, media relations and propaganda, the CCP proved to be quite efficient, which „ was even noticed by the Japanese military who considered the Political Department’s activities to be “highly skilled.”³⁹

This was not the first time that such an institution had been established. Prior to the Northern Expedition, at the suggestion of Soviet military strategist Henk Sneevliet (1883–1942), Sun Yat-sen set up the Political Department of Central Military Command in 1924 at the Huangpu Military Academy, a modern military school in Guangzhou dedicated to training a revolutionary army. Most members of the Political Department, including the chairs, vice-chairs and political department secretaries, were Chinese Communist Party members.⁴⁰ Indeed, it is said that the National Revolutionary Army included about 1,000 CCP members, 70% of whom were in charge of political education.⁴¹ Although the first marriage between the GMD and CCP was one of convenience and was filled with mistrust, their joint efforts excelled in the techniques of propaganda to mobilize the Chinese lower classes into supporting the Northern Expedition in 1927.⁴² The CCP was quick to benefit by becoming adept in an art at which the Soviet Communists excelled—that of transmuting the hopes and fears of a mass audience into positive action through printed imagery.⁴³

The Central Military Command had been dissolved after the success of the Northern Expedition and the founding of Nanjing as the capital. It was reactivated, however, under the pressure of the Japanese invasion, soon after the January 28 Incident in 1932. The core mission of the Central Military Command was to coordinate military strategies for the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Political Department of the Central Military Command was re-established in February 1938, with Chen Cheng (1898–1965) (GMD) as the chief director and Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) (CCP) as deputy director. In April, Guo Moruo (1892–1978)

38 Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013); David Horner, *The Second World War Vol. 1: The Pacific (Essential Histories)* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 14–15.

39 Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 128.

40 Wang Qisheng, *Guo gong hezuo yu guomin geming* 國共合作與國民革命 [The Cooperation between the GMD and CCP]. *Zhongguo jindai tongshi* 中國近代通史 [The History of Modern China], vol. 7 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2006), 79.

41 Wang Zonghua 王宗華, *Zhongguo da geming shi* 中國大革命史 [History of Chinese Great Revolutions] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1990), 366.

42 For more information on the First United Front and its effect on the GMD’s transformation, see Wang Qisheng, “The Cooperation”.

43 Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895–1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 194.

(CCP), a key figure in the production of propaganda for the Northern Expedition, was appointed chairman in charge of anti-Japanese propaganda.⁴⁴ As Kushner notes: “Imperial Japanese forces singled out the Communist army as being most successful at recruiting the local Chinese population against the Japanese.”⁴⁵ It must also be pointed out that the GMD-CCP Central Military Command was not the only source of its anti-Japanese propaganda. It often left this task to voluntary associations or local military units. In addition to the Political Department of the Central Military Command, there were also numerous “political departments” under different institutions of the GMD military organization, and a number of civilian “anti-Japanese propaganda” agencies.

After the Japanese promulgated the ideal of the “New Order in East Asia” on November 3, 1938, their Chinese opponents strove to utilize a variety of signs, symbols and artistic techniques to create their own propaganda print art in an effort to counter Tōa Shin Chitsujo. The GMD-CCP alliance treated the Japanese emphasis on traditional and imperial culture as hypocritical. It created posters with a quite different focus, addressing groups of people who were less sensitive to traditional symbols and more concerned with the survival of the country. For the GMD-CCP alliance, the primary goal was to assert the necessity of anti-Japanese war efforts, to galvanize the Chinese people to fight, to mobilize the class consciousness of Japanese soldiers against the policies of their government, and to elicit the sympathy of the international community.⁴⁶

To provide a useful comparison, I have selected a number of propaganda posters produced by the GMD-CCP alliance that were aimed at Chinese audiences. These images show some of the core themes to be found in GMD/CCP propaganda during the Second Sino-Japanese War (figure 7). This poster, for example, published by the Political Department, Military Command, offers an aesthetic impression that is strikingly different from Japanese exemplars. A blunt caption, reading “It is the Enemy or Us!” accompanies a depiction of a Chinese soldier in blue military uniform stabbing a Japanese soldier. The Chinese soldier, facing away from the audience, is proportionally much larger than the Japanese soldier. His sleeves are rolled up to his elbows, revealing muscular lower arms and hands, while the Japanese soldier is so defenseless that he is unable to hold his gun, and puts up a last futile struggle as blood pours from his chest. There are not a great variety of colors in this poster, only light blue, red and greyish blue. However, the calligraphic lines of the image are effective in depicting movement and a sense of nervous emotion.

44 Wang Jianmin, “The Anti-Japanese War”, 161.

45 Barak Kushner, *The Thought War*, 128.

46 *Wo dang wo jun fan di wei de xuanchuan gudong gongzuo* 我黨我軍反敵偽的宣傳鼓動工作 [The Propaganda Efforts of Our Party and Our Army against Enemies and Puppet Governments] (Wenhua jiaoyu yanjiuhui 文化教育研究會, 1941), 61.

The message in this poster is quite straightforward: the Chinese can beat the Japanese. It also aims to arouse hatred towards the foreign enemy. There are no cultural symbols to give the audience any clues as to the difference between the two countries, but the Japanese soldier is shown with sideburns, darker skin and an angular physiognomy, underscoring the fact that he is ethnically alien to the Chinese. Needless to say, hatred of foreign enemies



Fig. 7: Poster "It is the Enemy or Us!" Text in Chinese, ca. 1938-45, China. Published by the Political Department of the Military Command. Lithograph, 22 x 17 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

became increasingly important as a component in Chinese nationalism as the war progressed. In fact, the Political Department had already discovered during the Northern Expedition that propaganda promoting hatred and resentment was generally more effective than any other for mobilizing the lower classes.⁴⁷ Therefore, Chinese propaganda posters reached their peak of influence with posters produced during the Second Sino-Japanese War that were openly fanning hatred and fear of the foreign enemy.

Generally speaking, the posters produced by the Chinese side have more Communistic undertones, and have working classes, peasants and other non-elite people as their intended audience (figure 8). In this poster, for example, a group of armed, uniformed soldiers is depicted marching into a bombed-out area, which is possibly a pictorial translation of the “war frontier.” On the left, a larger-than-life soldier stands upright, dressed in winter uniform and carrying a gun, with one arm and a fist upraised. As noticed by Mary Ginsberg, raised fists are among the most widely-adopted icons in Soviet propaganda art.⁴⁸ The theatrical aesthetic celebrated by this poster, including the colors and the figural postures, impress upon the spectator the earnestness of the national cause and the necessity of joining the army to fight in the field. The caption below exclaims: “enemies can destroy our materials but they cannot shake our wills.” The visual and textual content of this poster was intended to channel revolutionary energy where it was needed most.

The firm posture and intense expression of the figural type represents an ideal of the robust and stalwart soldier that was also typical of Soviet Propaganda art. As pointed out by Victoria E. Bonnell, the Bolshevik male heroes of the Red Army became more or less the premier icons of Soviet Russia.⁴⁹ The ruined homes in the background inform viewers of the destruction wrought by the Japanese. The color red is used extensively in this poster, but unlike the auspicious red in Japanese works, here it symbolizes something entirely different, namely, the bloody nature of warfare. Under these red colors, the Chinese soldiers are shown marching through a white doorway into an unknown future. Red, moreover, is also the color of Communism. Color symbolism was frequently used in Soviet

47 I have discussed the issues of emotional efficiency of the Northern Expedition political posters in chapter two of my dissertation “Visualizing the New Republic: Pictorial Construction of the New Chinese Citizen (1985–1937)”.

48 Mary Ginsberg points out that the iconography for the Soviet Revolution features banners, the five-pointed star, hammer-and-sickle, and raised fists. In Mary Ginsberg, *The Art of Influence: Asian Propaganda* (London: British Museum Press, 2013), 50.

49 Victoria Bonnell points out in her book that male heroes such as the worker, the peasant, and the Red Army Soldier were archetypal figures and the icons of Soviet Russia. Cf. Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 64.



Fig. 8: Poster "Enemies can destroy our materials but they cannot shake our will," text in Chinese, ca. 1939-45, China. Published by the Political Department of the Military Command. Lithograph, 21 x 15 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

propaganda art. Bonnell comments that the color red served in Russian religious icons to identify the sacred. The color red also had positive connotations in Western European socialist art.⁵⁰ The revolutions of 1848 began with red flags being hoisted in France and continued with others in Germany. In this poster, the red colors contrast vividly with the khaki of the uniforms and the white of the bombings, which clearly aims to increase the desire to save the nation.

In the years 1937 and 1938, the relationship between the GMD and Hitler's Germany took a turn for the worse. Chiang had developed a close relationship with Adolf Hitler's Third Reich in 1934, and regarded the German model of one party under one leader as a useful paradigm for his own regime.⁵¹ After the official outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, Germany continued to be the primary Chinese source of weapons.⁵² This is visible in the propaganda posters produced between 1936 and 1937, as an example in the German helmet worn by the soldier in the image below (figure 9).⁵³ Hitler had even lamented that the combat between China and Japan was pushing China into the arms of Communism.⁵⁴ But with Japan becoming more essential to Hitler's overall strategy as a member of the Axis, Germany eventually recognized the legitimacy of Manchukuo in 1939, and claimed that the Japanese presence in China was preventing its falling to the Communists.⁵⁵ In this poster, we also see non-conventional artistic elements with more emphasis on geometric patterns, and much effort expended on the typography—the hand-drawn modern Chinese characters (*meishuzi* 美術字). Clearly, the artist embraced up-to-date international design vocabularies such as those found in art deco-imagery and Russian constructivist illustrations.⁵⁶ He or she explored the flexibility in the form of the Chinese written characters and their ability to communicate both visually and symbolically.

In addition to visually provocative posters, there were also didactic posters that were more neutral in their visual language, and that aimed at educating and remaking new Chinese citizens under the conditions of war. A poster created in 1939 by China's revolutionary army, for example, unambiguously

50 Ibid., 32.

51 More on this may be found in Peter Zarrow, *China in War*, 255.

52 Wang Jianmin, "The Anti-Japanese War", 183.

53 Ibid., 183–5.

54 Ibid., 191.

55 Ibid., 194.

56 For more information on international design vocabularies in Chinese graphic art, see Julia F. Andrews, "Commercial Art and China's Modernization," in *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China*, eds. Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 181.

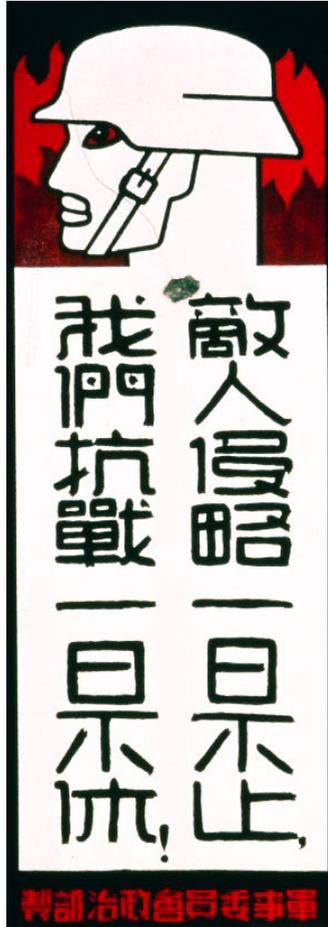


Fig. 9: Poster "Every day the enemy does not stop its aggression is a day in which our resistance will not rest," text in Chinese, ca. 1939-42, China. Published by the Political Department of the Military Command. Lithograph, 31 x 11 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

promotes the ideal of a "disciplinary and obedient citizen" for the nation with clear instructions given in a "right way versus wrong way" language (figure 10). This poster, produced by the Political Department of the Military Command, is utterly didactic in its pictorial and verbal depiction of models of nationalist discipline. Created in the wake of the Japanese invasion to explain the stakes of war more precisely, this revolutionary imagery was directed equally at Nationalists and Communists to inspire resistance to the invaders. At the center of the poster is a portrait of Chiang Kai-shek, with four boxes



Fig. 10: Poster Tuhua bibao (Pictorial Wall Post), text in Chinese, 1940, China. Published by the Political Department of the Military Command. Lithograph, 31 x 21 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives. In the caption the president says: "Anything that is advantageous to the enemy and harmful to the nation should not be done. Anything that is advantageous to the nation and helpful for our military affairs should be done with great efforts."

above him illustrating four “right ways.”⁵⁷ Chiang insisted that “[The enemies] want to use different methods to shake our will and threaten our inner spirit 欲以種種方法搖撼吾人之意志，威脅吾人之精神。”⁵⁸ Under the pressure of the Japanese onslaught in 1939, questions regarding the attitude of a model Chinese citizen under a national crisis were repeatedly addressed by Chiang’s government, and the regulations prescribed in this poster are an effective summary of these discussions. Chiang here serves as a unifying symbol for Chinese citizens, regardless of their political beliefs.

Flanking Chiang’s portrait are images, dramatically crossed through with red X’s, depicting the behaviors which are considered injurious to the cause of social rehabilitation. Juxtaposed with these are images of everyday forms of behavior that show a healthy, militaristic and national attitude. Above the inscription “Change [a] drunken and dreamy life,” a group of people are shown enjoying a decadent life of drinking and playing a simple gambling game with finger digits, an undesirable behavior bound to produce a self-indulgent personality with a weak and unhealthy body. Another image window portrays two people having a discussion in front of a dance hall, one dissuading the other from entering, with a caption below reading “Straighten up citizens’ everyday life; ban all abnormal activities.”

After the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Second Sino-Japanese War became a theater of World War II, and China officially became a member of an international anti-Axis Allies, together with the U.S., the U.K. and the USSR. Chiang Kai-shek’s portrait now replaced that of Sun Yat-sen and appeared more frequently in public places and the print media (figure 11). This poster, for example, is titled “Military Comes First; Victory Comes First” and features a portrait of Chiang Kai-shek against a background of a pattern formed by endless repetitions of the new slogan “Resistance War/ National Construction” 抗戰建國 that was proclaimed around 1938. After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, new laws were passed to prioritize the war. All political dissidents were released and the CCP’s legal standing was confirmed. Meanwhile, different social groups were galvanized to cooperate in making China ready and well-equipped for war. In March 1938 the GMD held a meeting of 403 congressmen in Wuhan and determined that the two most

57 From left to right, it reads: “Praise the loyal ones who die [for the nation];” “Cultivate the industrious and sportive youthful spirit;” “Do not violate the Three Principles of the People, do not violate the governmental decree.” “Do not work for enemies and traitors, do not lead the way for enemies and traitors, do not seek information for enemies and traitors;” “Use the opportunities of gathering to encourage people’s revolutionary spirit and establish the consciousness to fight;” “Do not buy merchandise from the enemy, do not sell food or necessities to the enemy;” “Maintain ultimate loyalty to the nation; and maintain ultimate filial piety to the people.”

58 On May 15, 1939, an important weekly newspaper, *Jiefang* 解放 [Liberation] also published an article named “Dongyuan Zhongguoren 動員中國人 [Mobilizing the Citizens of China],” authored by Chiang Kai-shek, expressing the urgency behaving like a true Chinese during the Japanese invasions.

important missions right then were “to defeat the enemy” and “to construct the country.” These two ideas were not to be separated, and major principles of diplomacy, the military, the economy and education were incorporated into this overall theme.⁵⁹ Chiang Kai-shek became a unifying symbol for the pursuit of these national priorities.

Meanwhile, this poster displays the aesthetic qualities of critical woodblock prints advocated by the leftwing writer Lu Xun (1881–1936), which became popular during the 1930s, and it is very likely that the artists who produced propaganda posters were influenced by the emerging woodblock arts movement (figure 12). During the 1930s, a few left-wing cultural communities, not officially associated with the GMD or CCP, also participated in the anti-Japanese and anti-invasion cultural campaigns. Lu Xun (1881–1936), a leader in the May Fourth Movement, launched his own Woodblock Movement.⁶⁰ The Japanese valued the aesthetic qualities and the prestige of the “traditional” form of Ukiyo-e woodblock prints. But for Lu Xun, inspired by Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), woodblocks allowed for mass cooperation and mass production and had the concomitant potential for political agitation.

The modern woodblock movement fostered the emergence of the woodblock print in China during the 1930s and 1940s as a dominant mode of representation especially among artists with left-wing and Communist inclinations. Chinese woodblock prints helped to create a new and expressive visual language. In the words of Tang Xiaobing, “This generation of Chinese printmakers greatly extended the vocabulary, grammar, and versatility of the black-and-white woodblock print and promoted it as a superbly expressive and evocative common visual language of the modern age.”⁶¹ With their dramatic compositions, chisel marks, arrangements of black and white, and representations of various objects in light and shade, these prints easily matched the requirements of propaganda posters.

Julia Andrews has suggested that after Lu Xun’s death and the outbreak of the Japanese War, woodblock print artists were enlisted to create nationalistic and propagandistic (anti-Japanese) images. The idea of art as propaganda was now fully embraced by both Nationalists and Communists. She writes:

59 Wang Jianmin, “The Anti-Japanese War”, 118–119.

60 Information on this section has been taken from Lu Xun 魯迅 “*Zhongguo muke zhanlan xu* 中國木刻展覽序 [Preface to the Woodcuts Exhibition in China],” *Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Meishu Wenxuan* 二十世紀中國美術文選 [Anthology of Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century], eds. Shui Tianzhong 水天中 and Lang Shaojun 郎紹君 (Shanghai: Shanghai Fine Art Publisher, 2001), 303.

61 Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 1.

Prints produced after the Japanese invasion, although still somewhat varied in style, tend toward a greater unity of purpose and a more urgently ideological tone, and are often carved in styles that are more realistic and easily readable.⁶²

If we compare the poster produced by the GMD in 1938–40 to the 1936 woodcut, “China, Roar,” we can discern a strong consistency in style. Both illustrate a fascination with the interplay between positive and negative space; both place emphasis on a powerful centralized icon; and both display a crude and unrefined manner in rendering contours. The poster entitled “Resistance War/ National Construction: Military Affairs Come First; Victory Comes First,” avoids any complication in its visual language, relying as it does on a contrast between black and white color blocks, which not only suggests a sublime aura of dignity, but also brings our attention directly to Chiang’s portrait and the inscription below. Similarly, in “China, Roar,” the black and white colors, free of any distraction from other colors, are able to represent intense, even maniacal emotions. Although produced as a lithographic print, it has the visual qualities of a woodblock print. Therefore, we can very plausibly speculate that some artists who worked for the GMD during the Second Sino-Japanese War were the same ones who were active in the woodblock movements of the 1930s. Similar to Lu Xun, they had also been influenced by Käthe Kollwitz’s prints, which had been published in Chinese journals and provided inspiration to the first generation of modern Chinese woodcut artists,⁶³ and it is very likely that she provided the same inspiration to the first generation of GMD-CCP propaganda artists as well.

Many posters were produced by the GMD and different cultural groups during the Second Sino-Japanese War. They were diverse in their content, visual strategies and artistic techniques. Stephanie Donald has commented on Chinese propaganda posters produced during the Cultural Revolution: “The main themes of the posters of course changed over time, emphasizing different priorities and objectives in conjunction with the fluctuations of central policy. Yet they constituted a particular and omnipresent aspect of the mechanisms used by the party-state to ensure the dominance of its discourse.”⁶⁴ However, wartime propaganda posters differed. While they relied more heavily on people’s “pre-existing attitudes” and fundamental

62 Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *A Century in Crisis*, 213.

63 Xiaobing Tang, *The Modern Woodcut Movement*, 89.

64 Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power in the People’s Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 64–5.

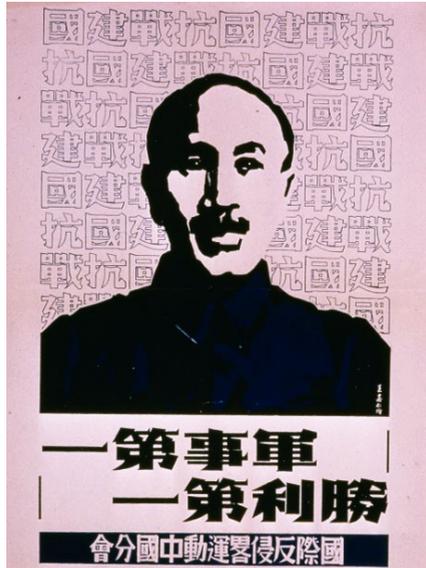


Fig. 11: Poster "Resistance War—National Construction: Military Affairs Come First; Victory Comes First," text in Chinese, ca. 1938-40, China. Published by International Anti-Aggression Association, China Branch. Lithograph, 22 x 17 in. Stanford, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.



Fig. 12: Li Hua 李華, China, Roar, woodcut, 20 x 15 cm, 1936.

interests in security,⁶⁵ they also played an important role in the GMD/CCP's effort to rally popular support for the war, and the galvanizing imagery and slogans were intended to mobilize of the population to join in the their anti-invasion effort. Employing dramatically contrasting colors and stirring slogans with oversized characters, these posters offered visual provocations, trying to whip up feelings of hate, fear and love among the spectators. Such drastic emotions provided useful points of entry for the propagandists who were attempting to foster a sense of community that would be crucial if the war of resistance was to succeed.⁶⁶

A Comparison between the IJA and GMD-CCP Posters

According to Barak Kushner: "By the onset of large-scale war between China and Japan in August 1937, print media policy turned away from overt censorship and more towards propping up social support for the war."⁶⁷ The Second Sino-Japanese War promoted the production and circulation of printed propaganda on both sides. Apart from the military conflict between the GMD-CCP and the IJA, there was a visual combat between the two as well. From a technical point of view, the Japanese-inspired political posters were of better quality because highly professional artists were employed by the Imperial Japanese Army. As Kendall H. Brown has pointed out, "Evidence suggests that these artists were not 'drafted' but volunteered, welcoming the chance to demonstrate their patriotism while receiving positive publicity and a trip to an interesting locale."⁶⁸ The CCP also commented that the Japanese had greater financial resources at their disposal than the Chinese Army, and that the political posters produced by their own side seemed to fail in attracting the interest of people who were more educated.⁶⁹

65 Bruno Lasker has argued that wartime propaganda differs from that produced in times of peace, and that war time propaganda relies on the audience's pre-existing attitude toward the war from the perspective of "general human desire" and "collective security." See Bruno Lasker and Agnes Roman, *Propaganda from China and Japan, A Case Study in Propaganda Analysis* (New York: Institute Of Pacific Relations, 1938), 117.

66 Numerous political cartoons and posters were produced during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–45). However, the major focus of my research is on the posters put up on walls rather than cartoons that were published in journals and newspapers. For information on political cartoons during the War of Resistance, see, Louise Edwards, "Drawing Sexual Violence in Wartime China: Anti-Japanese Propaganda Cartoons," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 3 (2013): 563–586; Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

67 Barak Kushner, *The Thought War*, 77.

68 Brown, "Dark Valley", 67.

69 *Di wo zai xuanchuan zhanxian shang*, 241.

The posters produced by the Japanese underscored the Imperial Japanese Army's position as defenders of the legitimate Asian order, in which traditions were respected and all classes and nationalities lived in peace and harmony. In the words of Brown, "Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 and the feeling of having succeeded in the great Meiji project of 'civilization and enlightenment' (bunmei kaika) brought about a new consciousness of Japanese culture vis-à-vis the West."⁷⁰ Japan regarded itself as the legitimate protector of Asian culture and the leader of Tōa Shin Chitsujo, challenging the Sino-centrism that had dominated the Chinese-Japanese cultural exchange throughout its long history. In the words of Kushner, "the Japanese consistently used the term 'thought war' to describe the fight for ideological supremacy in Asia and later against the West."⁷¹ Japanese posters delivered clear and confident messages, imbued with a sense of political romanticism. As a result, depictions of the real human cost of war were very rare in Japanese propaganda posters.

By contrast, the political posters produced by the CCP-GMD alliance were aimed at the lower classes and tended to emphasize struggle, survival and hatred. They rejected the abstract ideas of East Asian cultural values and traditions, and approached the audience in a more direct and responsive way, as indeed would the propaganda produced after 1949 by the CCP. As Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald put it, "They are graphic reminders of mass insecurity, arbitrary violence, and personal trauma."⁷² These posters adopted class-based issues as their principal concern. The traumas and emotions of the lower classes had not played a significant role in earlier Chinese art.

The propaganda artists of the GMD-CCP shifted their focus from the elite individual to the crowd, and rejected political romanticism. In the words of John Fitzgerald, "romantics and idealists were now said to keep the masses in a state of sleep. [For the GMD-CCP,] there was no escaping the iron grip of the realist paradigm. Try as they might to take to the streets or organize mass protests, romantics could not possibly represent the masses... In fact, they constituted these counterrevolutionary forces themselves."⁷³ Many of those posters relied very little on elegance or aesthetics. Employing simple yet dramatically contrasting colors and stirring slogans done in oversized characters, they were visual provocations, intended to activate the populace by summoning up emotions of hate, fear and love. The simple colors, moreover,

70 Kendall H. Brown, *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Hotei publishing, 2005), 210.

71 Barak Kushner, *The Thought War*, 12.

72 Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power*, 5.

73 John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 344.

provided an antithesis to the flamboyant designs of Japanese propaganda posters. Interestingly, though produced by a government on the defensive, the Chinese posters represented violence and tension much more frequently than did the Japanese, perfectly reflecting the anxieties of the Chinese regarding national survival.

Conclusion

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, following the opening of Japan and the treaty ports in China, Sino-Japanese trade boomed and for the first time in history, Japan began to play a decisive role in China's destiny, especially in its efforts to emulate the technical and cultural advances of the West. The Shanghai School of the late nineteenth century and the political cartoons of the 1920s provide convincing evidence of the Japanese influence on Chinese art. Compared to the alien Western culture, Japan's version of the West seemed easier for the Chinese to assimilate. However, the political conflict between the two countries culminated in the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War. Needless to say, the war had a profound impact on the future political structures of both countries.

There were many reasons for this Japanese influence on Chinese art. Other than the obvious reasons, such as the opening up to foreign cultures and the increasing numbers of Japanese immigrants in Shanghai, a greater appreciation of printmaking and the blurring of boundaries between high and low art also proved to be essential factors.⁷⁴ The introduction of lithography and the circulation of newspapers and journals not only affected the political atmosphere, but also had a substantial impact on art traditions in China. Many Chinese artists of humble origin were suddenly able to gain access to a variety of visual imageries and launch their own creative practices.⁷⁵ Indeed, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Chinese artists were exposed to a variety of imageries from Japan and other parts of the world. These changes in art practice and production technique in China laid the groundwork for the richness of propaganda imagery in the twentieth Century.

However, following the second Sino-Japanese war, the collaborative efforts directed towards art and culture reform nearly faded from historical memory, given the casualties of the war and the lasting animosities it generated. According to the observation of Frederic Sharf, "there can be little doubt that Japan emerged from the war [World War I] as a world power in terms of both

74 Lai Yu-chih, "Ren Bonian", 33.

75 This opinion is held by Britta Lee Ericcultkson, in "Patronage and Production in the Nineteenth-Century Shanghai Region: Ren Xiong and His Sponsors" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1996), 4.

military might and the ability to shape international diplomatic and public opinion.⁷⁶ And in this context, the “magical” potency of propaganda was noticed by leaders all over the world. The CCP leader Mao Zedong commented in 1937: “Our party should strictly obey the following guidelines: [we will] spend one cent [of effort on] fighting against the Japanese [directly on the battlefield]; two cents on marginal expenses; seven cents on recruiting [new Party members]; ten cents in propaganda.”⁷⁷ This comment, which developed a line for the CCP to get hold of the entire country after the war with Japan, helps us not only to understand how much attention the CCP paid to the power of propaganda, but also explains why so many communistic connotations were to be found in the Chinese propaganda posters during the war.

These posters also allow us to witness the changes in Chinese nationalism from “To learn about the West from Japan, 徑取東洋學西洋” to, by the 1920s, the slogan of the CCP “ally with the Soviet Union and the Communist International, [to] help peasants and workers. 聯俄聯共, 扶助農工.” Four years after the second Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Communist Party had replaced the GMD as the ruling authority, and propaganda posters took on a greater life, exerting ever more pervasive influences on the everyday lives of Chinese people. The new rulers came with a different set of ethics, but they had a fair amount of experience to rely on in honing concept and message to maximum perfection.

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76 Anne Nishimura Morse, “Exploiting a New Visuality: The Origins of Russo-Japanese War Imagery,” in *A Much Recorded War*, 31.

77 “我們黨必須嚴格遵循的方針是：一分抗日，二分敷衍，七分發展，十分宣傳” Mao Zedong’s speech during the Luochuan Conference in Shanxi, August 1937. See Liu Yang 劉揚 and Xu Jiaquan 徐家泉, “Quanmian kang Ri zhanzheng luxian de queding 全面抗日戰爭路線的確定 - 解讀《洛川會議會議記錄 [Determining the Line of the All-out War of Resistance against Japan – A reading of the “Record of the Luochuan Conference],” *China Archives* 中國檔案 5 (2011): 76.

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