

Red Souvenirs

Commodification of Chinese Propaganda Art

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Introduction

“Red souvenirs,” including key rings, cell phone straps, and postcards, are the most recognized of all contemporary Chinese souvenirs with their vibrant images of communist leaders and martyrs. In China, the color red is a symbol of socialism and traditionally an auspicious color. The motif of Red souvenirs is mainly based on the “Red spirit,” that is, the collective memory of revolutionary history, which is particularly embodied in Propaganda art and martyr memorials embellishing public squares. During 1942 and 1976, “Red” memorials were built all over the country in an official art style called the “Mao style.” After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Mao style faded with enormous hatred directed toward this turbulent movement. However since 1978, this hostility has gradually receded with the implementation of reform and the adaption of a more open policy, and the Mao style increasingly began to decorate souvenirs.

What accounts for this successful reevaluation of the Chinese propaganda posters? How did they change their functions from means of propaganda to souvenirs? Focusing on “Red series” playing cards, this paper demonstrates the commodification process of the Chinese propaganda art accompanied by the revival of the Mao Cult and the increasing popularity of “Red tourism.”

Rise of the Red Spirit

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in 1921 by Chen Duxiu with the support of the Soviet Union in an initial collaboration with the Kuomintang (KMT). After the death of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the KMT, Chiang Kai-shek gained control after a power struggle within the party. He struck out against the communists in March 1927, resulting in the death of many communists in Shanghai, Guangdong, and Changsha. In response, on 1 August 1927, the CCP launched an armed uprising against the Wuhan Nationalist Government, in Nanchang, the capital of the Jiangxi Province. From the struggle, Zhou Enlai, Ye Ting, and Lin Bocheng emerged as the new leaders of the party. On 9 September 1927, another uprising led by Mao Zedong occurred in the border area between the Hunan and Jiangxi provinces. Because of the failure of these two urban uprisings, the CCP were forced to withdraw to the hinterland to reorganize their troops. They eventually grouped in Jinggangshan, located in the Luoxiao Mountains. In 1931, the Chinese Soviet Republic was established under Mao Zedong’s leadership in Ruijin in southeast Jiangxi. After an attack from Chiang Kai-shek’s forces, Mao Zedong decided to leave Ruijin and launched the Long March, a massive military retreat from Ruijin to Yan’an, located in Shanxi Province. Although many soldiers died on the 12,500-kilometer trek, in 1937 the Red Army finally arrived at

Yan'an in western Shanxi Province (Figure 1), where the new headquarters of the CCP was later established. Subsequently, the Long March has been considered as one of the most important historical events that younger generations born after 1949 should learn about to gain the proper appreciation of the Red spirit.

It was in Yan'an that Mao Zedong further developed his revolutionary thought, which later became the basis of *The Little Red Book*, a selective collection of Mao texts, and declared Yan'an Talk after the Conference on Literature and Art in May 1942. The latter conference was assembled to resolve the tension between the two groups of artists: one was those who had learned western art styles in the newly built art academies in Shanghai and Hangzhou, and moved to Yan'an to work at the Luxun Academy of Fine Art founded in 1938, after the anti-Japanese war intensified; the other was the local artists with Chinese traditional art styles of wood-cuts and ink-painting. At this conference, Mao Zedong pronounced that the artists should create works to awaken and inspire the masses to rise, urging them to unite and struggle, and to participate in transforming their own environment, which determined the official art style of the forthcoming period.

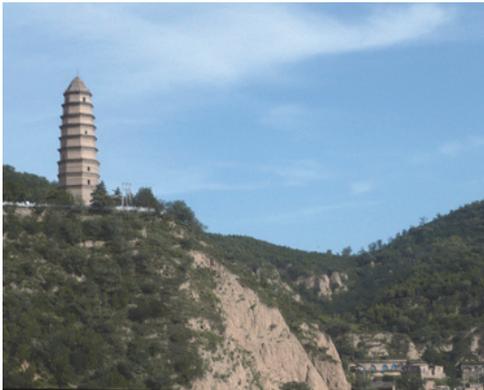


Figure 1.



Map 1.

Socialist Realism in China

Since the defeat in the Opium War in 1842, modernization project including adoption of the western art styles had run parallel with the anti-imperialist movement in China. Both artists with traditional styles and those with newly introduced western styles have groped for the best way to raise the patriotic feelings of people through their works. Traditional painters, such as Zheng Mantuo (1885–1961), Xie Zhiguang (1900–1976), and Hang Zhiying (1900–1947), switched the motifs from beautiful women with coquettish smile on *Yuefenpai*, calendars advertising modern products such as soap, tobacco, and cosmetics, first published in Shanghai, to fighting women in order to support the anti-Japanese struggle after the outbreak the war in 1937. Hang Zhiying, for instance, depicted fighting heroines such as Hua Mulan, a legendary female soldier who fought in place of her aged father, Hong Niangzi, who joined the army of Li Zicheng to overthrow the Ming Dynasty, and Liang Hongyu, the wife of General Hang Shizhong, who fought against the Jin Army

in the thirteenth century. Female warriors were often deployed as heroines, as they represented a more dramatic and striking appearance than male warriors, being more effective in cultivating patriotic feelings among the populace.¹

On the other hand, Jin Meisheng (1902–1989) and Li Mubai (1913–1991), who learned oil painting under the influence of the Socialist Realism of the Soviet Union, which was established by Joseph Stalin in 1934,² created posters using oil paints. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, Russian propaganda posters mainly depicted workers and peasants in accordance with the official style of Socialist Realism, with stereotypical themes including revolution, *kolkhoz* (collective farm), army, sports, victory of socialism, and revolutionary heroes.³ The stimulus for poster creation can be traced to the State Electric Campaign, which was launched by Lenin to evoke the spread of light, power, and energy all over the country. The poster *Higher and Higher* (Figure 2), for instance, depicts two young workers climbing a pylon high above the countryside, representing the development of an electricity network. Although this dramatic touch may seem Hollywood-esque, the woman is not depicted in a sexual or erotic way. She looks purposefully upwards; one of the rules of Socialist Realism implies that the contemporary world is ideally connected to the Socialist future.⁴

As a result of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance signed in February 1950, Socialist Realism was passively introduced into China through plastic art. In October 1954, an exhibition designed to highlight the “economic and cultural achievement of the Soviet Union” took place in Beijing, where 11,300 exhibits were displayed in sixteen buildings, including a model of the Moscow University built in the Stalin style. The president of the Soviet Art Academy, Aleksandr Gerasimov, also visited Beijing.⁵ In February 1955, Konstantin Maksimov came from Moscow as an advisor at the China Academy of Art. His primary mission was to teach oil painting as it was considered an effective medium to convey revolutionary history. Maksimov instructed students how to create revolutionary art, both politically and aesthetically.⁶ Through Maksimov’s lessons, some Chinese oil painters learned the techniques of former Russian artists such as Bassuly Surikov and Ilya Repin.⁷

¹ Hung Chang-tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 77.

² Caradog Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

³ Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People’s Republic of China* (Translated from Russian by Robert Chandler) (London: Collins Harvill, 1990).

⁴ Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Political Images in the Age of Mass Culture*. (London: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1997), pp. 89-90.

⁵ Chen Lin, 1954, “Development of the Soviet Union’s Culture and Education,” *Peoples’ Daily* (30 September 1954) (in Chinese).

⁶ Zhou Yuejin, *A History of Chinese Fine Art: 1949-2000* (Shenzhen: Hunan Art Press, 2002), p. 80. (in Chinese)

⁷ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 137.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

The strong influence of Soviet Socialist Realism is particularly noticeable in two posters, *Another Good Harvest* (Figure 3)⁸ and *Steeling Ourselves Against the Strength of the Wind and Storms* (Figure 4)⁹. According to the theme of abundant harvest, the posters depict young women working in farms and factories and on high-tension wires and water-storage dams. The poster *Together the Workers and Peasants Sing the Song of the Plentiful Harvest* is also typical, depicting two women singing while looking upwards, one with her hair in plaits and wearing a straw hat and the other with a white towel wrapped around her neck. Their tanned faces and plump red cheeks are distinctly different from the pale faces expressing ennui in *Yuefenpai*. The emphasis on women in Chinese propaganda art is attributed to Mao Zedong's slogan "Chinese women hold up half the sky" and the underlying influence of Socialist Realism. Using this slogan in his oil painting, Wang Jinglan (1942–) depicted women holding a shovel, hoe, and yoke. Liu Hulan (1932–1947) and Zhao Yiman (1905–1932), both female revolutionary heroines, replaced the previous fighting female soldiers such as Hua Mulan and Liang Hongyu in posters. Liu Hulan, who was captured and killed by the KMT army in a small village of Shanxi Province, became dramatically popular, after Mao Zedong published the slogan "A Great Life and a Glorious Death." When her life was dramatized at the Tianqiao Theater in 1954, her status was elevated from a mere village secretary to a CCP member, and her hardships were amplified in the drama by her grandmother and a farmer informing against the KMT, and a female comrade betraying her. These embellishments reinforced an image of her allegiance to the CCP, thereby illuminating her as an exemplary heroine.¹⁰ In 1957, a monument to commemorate her sacrifice was established in her hometown of Wenshui in the Shanxi Province.

Thus, revolutionary heroes and heroines were created under the influence of Socialist Realism.

⁸ Lu Pan and Pan Honghong, People's Art Publishing House, 1972.

⁹ Ying Xiaohe and Mu Li, People's Sports Publishing House, 1976.

¹⁰ Seki Hiroshi, "A Form and Change of Hero: An Image of Liu Hulan before and after 1949," *China-Society and Culture* 20 (2005), pp. 258-265. (in Japanese).

After Stalin's death, Khrushchev condemned Stalinist architecture as excessive, which led to an ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and China. As a result, the Soviet influence on Chinese art gradually waned and a unique style of art emerged.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

The Cultural Revolution and the Mao Cult

The start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 pushed Mao Zedong forward as the most frequently portrayed predominant figure in propaganda posters. He was depicted as a great leader, commander, teacher, and father, which would make his image sacrosanct. In 1966, the 73-year-old Mao Zedong swam the Yangtze River in Wuhan, ostentatiously flaunting his good health. On 25 July 1966, pictures of this event as well as him waving his right hand onboard a ship came out in the *Peoples' Daily* along with his poems. Soon after, the slogan *Great Wind and Great Wave* became a popular quote¹¹, as shown in Figure 4.

On 2 March 1969, the dispute over the Sino-Soviet border took an exceptionally violent turn when Chinese forces fired at the Soviet border troops patrolling the Zhenbao (Damanski) Island on the Ussuri River; some fifty Soviet soldiers were killed. *From Now on We Must Be Prepared* (Figure 5) is one of twenty nine slogans published in the *People's Daily* on 17 July 1969, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. It reads as follows: "People unite and oppose a war of aggression by imperialism, especially, a war with an atomic bomb. Even if the war happens, people should dispel it as a revolutionary war. From now on we must be prepared."¹²

Elementary school students are one of the most popular subjects of propaganda posters. The title of Figure 6 is *China must achieve great things for humanity*, which depicts four students whose eyes were fixed onward standing in front of the blackboard on which the slogan "Let's

¹¹ "Chairman Mao Swan the Yangtze River," *People's Daily* (24 July 1966); "Go Forwards in Great Wind and Great Wave Following Chairman Mao," *People's Daily* (25 July 1966) (in Chinese).

¹² "Commemorate the 20th Anniversary of Founding of the People's Republic of China," *People's Daily* (19 July 1969) (in Chinese).

study hard for the revolution” (*Wei ge ming qin fen xue xi*) was written with red chalk.¹³ Mao badges on their clothes and scarves around their necks were the inevitable properties in those days. Moreover, pre-elementary school children wearing red clothes are shown in the center of the posters *The Sprit of Yan’an is Passed on from Generation to Generation* (Figure 7).¹⁴ Boys often appear with weapons such as spears and guns and girls appear with books, scoops, loudspeakers, and straw hats. Mao Zedong appeared as a contemporaneous young man living in Jinggangshan and Yan’an.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.

The oil painting *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* created by Liu Chunhua, a student at the Central Academy of Industrial Art, was considered the most striking work during the Cultural Revolution. Collectively designed and planned by a group of university students, it was displayed at the exhibition with the title “Mao Thought and a Brilliant Revolutionary Movement of Anyuan Coal Miner” in the Chinese Revolutionary Museum in Beijing. Liu Chuhua was greatly impressed with the style of Valentin Aleksandrovich Serov (1865–1911), who belonged to a group of artists known as the Itinerants. Liu’s work was eulogized by Jiang Qing, Mao Zedong’s wife and one of the Gang of Four, who proclaimed on seeing his work “Red, Light and Bright” and “High, Great and Perfect.” These words were popular principles at that time.¹⁵ More than 900 million copies were made of Liu’s work, in the form of posters, cups, commemorative stamps, and badges, which boosted the image of a young Mao Zedong as a symbol of the Cultural Revolution. The painting *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* originally depicted Mao Zedong going to Anyuan in the Jiangxi Province in order to lead the miners’ strike. In fact, before the Cultural Revolution, it was Liu Shaoqi who had been recognized as the head of this act. Considered to be Mao Zedong’s successor, Liu Shaoqi was depicted as the leader in the 1960 oil painting *Liu Shaoqi and Anyuan Miners* by Hou Yimin, an adherent to Socialist Realism. In the 1960s, however, the spread of the Mao cult across the country and the increasing portrayal of Mao Zedong as the young leader of the peasant

¹³ Lingtong and Yuxin Middle School, Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1972.

¹⁴ Zuo Jianhua, Tianjin People’s Art Publishing House, 1974.

¹⁵ “A Great Art Flower Bloomed in the Proletariat Cultural Revolution: the Birth of the Grand Painting ‘Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan’” *People’s Daily* (July 9 1968) (in Chinese)

movement in the Hunan Province and Jinggangshan ousted Liu Shaoqi as the acme of leader.¹⁶ Various slogans created by Mao Zedong were deployed in posters including *Together the Workers and Peasants Sing the Song of the Plentiful Harvest, In Agriculture, Learn from Dazhai and Create Districts like Dazhai throughout the Land*, and *Learn from Daqing's Industry!* (Figure 8).¹⁷



Figure 8.

Reevaluation of Propaganda Posters

As the end of the Cultural Revolution made the Mao Style and Socialist Realism an object of constant criticism, artists changed their subject from revolutionary struggle and service to workers and soldiers to concept of beauty, self-expression and abstractism in art,¹⁸ and deliberately began to reconsider what was Socialist Realism. Consequently, they have noticed Socialist Realism could not establish a positive new art style for the proletariat, nor did the Mao style become avant-garde, ending up with a mere imitation of Soviet Socialist Realism, as the essential discussion about it had been neglected in the Soviet Union and China.¹⁹ *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* was one of highly controversial works. For example, Ye Qianyu unleashed a scathing attack stating that *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* was devoid of originality and a mere pastiche of Italian religious paintings from the Renaissance period, and that it was extremely absurd to depict communist leaders like a god or savior.²⁰

But these criticisms do not preclude propaganda posters from being sold, more often than not, for very high prices at auction today. While referring to the period of the Cultural Revolution as the “lost ten years” or a “cultural desert,” Chinese artists still continue to use its images in contemporary Chinese art.²¹ In addition, Chinese propaganda posters are highly evaluated in many countries. At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, for example, the Propaganda Poster Exhibition in 2002 featured *Chairman Mao Inspecting Fushun* and *The People's Army is the Root of Victory*. When “Eastern Illustration Posters: China, Korea, and Japan” opened at the Museum of Tama University in Tokyo, Aoyama Takashi, the chief producer of this exhibition, heaped praise on the aesthetic value of Chinese propaganda posters.²² Pan Gang, a collector of propaganda

¹⁶ Zhou Yuejin, p.137.

¹⁷ Heilongjiang People's Publishing House and People's Art Publishing House, 1971.

¹⁸ Maria Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China 1949-1984* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998), p. 188.

¹⁹ Maki Yoichi, Matsuura Tuneo, and Kawata Susumu, *Chinese Propaganda Art* (Tokyo: Iwanami Press, 2001), p. 144 (in Japanese).

²⁰ Ye Qianyu, “Talk on Oil Painting ‘Memory of War Comrades,’” *Peoples' Daily* (14 March 1979) (in Chinese).

²¹ Jiang Jiehong, “Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art,” in Jiang Jiehong, ed., *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), pp. 4-5.

²² Aoyama Takashi, *Chinese Posters* (Asahi Shinbun Publishing, 2008) (in Japanese).

posters, has pointed out the following four reasons for the high prices of Chinese propaganda posters sold in foreign countries. First of all, they are useful objects to study modern Chinese art because of their extensive motifs including political, economic, and diplomatic events; second, their style distinguishes so starkly with that of propaganda art in other countries; third, they have little association with today's political motivation or agenda; and finally, as the negative memories of the Cultural Revolution have faded away, they have acquired a commercial value, if preserved in good condition.²³

Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan remains as controversial as ever. When the original painting of the poster was at auction on 7 October 1995, the Guangzhou Branch of the Construction Bank bid 5.5 million yuan for it and paid an extra 550 thousand yuan (as a service cost) to the China Guardian International Auction Co. Ltd. While now under the auspices of the Construction Bank, this picture remains state-owned according to a court decision rejecting an appeal from the Chinese Revolutionary Museum that Liu Chunhua, the former Dean of Beijing Art Academy, and the Construction Bank return the painting. On 1 April 2002, Beijing No. 2 Intermediate People's Court announced that the state should have the proprietary right with Liu Chunhua enjoying the copyright.²⁴

A significant impetus for the growing popularity in today's China of propaganda posters generated during the Cultural Revolution is the official promotion of Red tourism, which takes form as a "political pilgrimage" or "battlefield tourism" based on the Red spirit, namely, the collective memory of revolutionary history. Important historical events commemorated through this tour encompass the 1927 Nanchang Uprising in the Jiangxi Province, the establishment of the Chinese Soviet in Ruijin in 1931, the 1935 Zhunyi conference having resolved Mao Zedong's primacy in the CCP, the Long March, and the foundation of Yan'an headquarters in 1937. These regions represent sacred revolutionary places where the Chinese Communist Party has energetically invested in and developed tourist attractions.

Red Tourism and Red Souvenirs

After the CCP promulgated the "Outline on Implementing Patriotic Education" and requested local government to establish Patriotic Education Bases in 1991, 100 sites were selected to be Patriotic Education Bases, which are mainly comprised of the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Civil Wars between the CCP and the KMT, the Korean War, the Arrow War and the Opium War. That also includes some archaeological and historical sites such as the Forbidden Palace and the Great Wall of China. Another selection of 100 sites was held in 2001, following by 66 more in 2006.²⁵ These revolutionary sites have been considered as potential tourist resources since the

²³ Pan Gang, "Chinese Propaganda Posters are sold at foreign markets much more expensive at domestic markets," *Art Market*, 2004 (in Chinese) <http://www.finance.sina.com.cn/roll/20040923/14231044001.shtml>

²⁴ "Oil Painting 'Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan' State Owned," *People's Daily* (3 April 2002), http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200204/02/eng20020402_93323.shtml

²⁵ Li Yiping and Hu Zhiyini, "Red Tourism in China," *Journal of China Tourism Research* 4 (2008), pp. 156-171; Azuma Harumi, "Revolutionary Representation and Tourism: From the Perspective of the Nostalgia," in Han Min,

Chinese Government issued the “National Red Tourism Developing Plan 2004–2010” in 2004. Although numerous people had made a type of political pilgrimage, visiting a revolutionary site like Mao’s home town of Shaoshan, located in the Hunan Province, this was seldom called the “Red tourism” during the Cultural Revolution. It was the Red tourism developing plan in 2004 that promulgated this word across the country and stimulated the tourism in some rural areas. Therefore Nanchang, Jinggangshan, and Yan’an suddenly received benefit from the plan. The Jiangxi Grand Hotel, which served as the headquarters for the Nanchang Uprising in 1927, was renovated to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the uprising in 2007. When this site originally opened as a revolutionary museum in 1957, Chen Yi, the first mayor of Shanghai, inscribed the name of the museum on a plaque in front of the building. In China, such inscriptions by famous leaders are considered to have special significance because of the authority they convey on the building or place. Inside the museum, exhibits include old furniture, weapons, pictures, and reconstructed revolutionary scenes using mannequins. Jinggangshan, otherwise known as the “cradle of the revolution,” is one of the most important Red tourism sites. The place used to be in an impoverished area in the rugged and remote mountains of the Jiangxi Province. But it began to flourish after the beginning of the Red tourism development in 2004 with the expansion of highways, the construction of three-star hotels and restaurants,²⁶ and the restoration of the former houses of Mao Zedong (Figure 9) and Zhu De as well as the graves of the revolutionary heroes.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

Red tourism is not only a form of political pilgrimage but also battlefield tourism or “dark tourism.” Dark tourism is a tour to battle sites, graves of the famous, infamous, and the rich, and to locations of infamous deeds; in short, places associated with death. Such activities, as pointed out by Lennon and Foley, are an intimation of post-modernity. Dark tourism throws doubt on the project of modernity, e.g. the failure of infallible technology at the sinking of the *Titanic*, technological innovation to undertake the Jewish Holocaust, and the impact upon liberal

ed., *Representation and Practice: Anthropological Approach to Modern China* (Tokyo: Fukyo Press, 2009), pp. 345-365 (in Japanese).

²⁶ Gu Huimin, Chris Ryan and Zhang Wei, “Jinggangshan Mountain: A Paradigm of China’s Red Tourism,” in Chris Ryan, ed., *Battlefield Tourism: History, Place and Interpretation* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), pp. 59-65.

democracy of assassination such as those of Kennedy or King. It also reveals that these instructive sites having received benefit from tourism development are inseparable from commodification and commercialism.²⁷ Red tourist attractions offer tourists a quasi-experience of the revolution. Red tourism derives from the Red spirit, the collective memory exalting the origins of the CCP and thereby pushing aside people's discontent over present political corruption and economic disparities. Many people believe in the bright future that the CCP has represented and promised. This zeal is clearly visible when they visit Red tourist spots and wear the Red Army uniforms to fully identify with the Red spirit.

The promulgation of the guidelines of Red tourism led to the restoration of martyrs' memorial museums and monuments across the nation, with tourist-related facilities, such as hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops, set up in sacred revolutionary areas (Figure 10). These shops are selling Replica Mao badges, propaganda posters, key rings, and cell phone straps with prints of Mao Zedong. One of the most popular souvenirs is playing cards featuring fifty four illustrations with a different image printed on each card. A company called Huangchenggen²⁸ manufactures the cards known as the "Red sacred series" (Figure 11). The package gives us the following explanation in English of why the company made the cards:

The Cultural Revolution has ended 30 years. The discussion about it has lasting for 30 years. Obviously it is not acceptable that we comment the resentment, right or wrongs of the former times. So just let us review some photos about it. The set of Red Series classical poker, the first one is "Red Memory," the second one is "Red Eras," the third "Red Years", contains 162 pieces of paintings which is chosen carefully. Let someone who has experienced can recollect. Let someone who hasn't experienced can be thoughts and feelings. The historical sense of the paintings is for remembrance and forgetting.



Figure 11.

²⁷ John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: the Attraction of Death and Disaster* (Australia: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2002), p. 11.

²⁸ Huangchenggen Website, <http://www.hcgpk.com/>



Figure 12.

Figure 12 shows three cards from the Red sacred series. A poster *Learn from Daqing Industry!* is framed setting the worker into the center, on the king of heart. While factory towers on the background and a slogan “Learn from Daqing Industry” are totally deleted, some socialist items, such as a Mao badge on the jacket, *The Little Red Book* on the pocket, an arctic cap, and a big red wrench, can be seen in a small frame, which still creates an atmosphere of the worker’s masculinity. The 6 of diamond focusing one student of the four adds the student into some childlike innocence that had lacked in the original poster (Figure 6) by being framed in a playing card. The jack of diamonds depicts an image from the poster *The Spirit of Yan’an is Passed on from Generation to Generation* (Figure 7). It is put together in such a way that the figure of Mao Zedong at the study in Yan’an occupies the central place. Although the cards shown in Figures 13²⁹ and 14 depict the posters shown in Figures 4 and 5, they differ slightly, because of the presence of printed words. The cards in Figure 13 display Red slogans, reprinted for commodification, while those of Figure 14 have no slogans. To provide a more dramatic interpretation of the Cultural Revolution, the former uses prominent slogans, whereas the latter emphasizes the influence of Socialist Realism. The underlying assumption is that people who see fat-lettered slogans or images influenced by Socialist Realism might remember and/or then cultivate patriotic fervor and enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution. Until the Cultural Revolution, calligraphy was the most sophisticated visual art form in Chinese tradition. During the Cultural Revolution, a decisive transition in the visual language of power occurred, and China, ironically, arrived into a Westernized world.³⁰

In contrast to the vibrant and lively movement of the female Red Guard and the soldier with severe facial expression (Figure 13, 14), young Mao is walking alone gallantly on the vast land with his coat flaring in the wind. Figure 15 shows the 7 of the clubs that features a young Mao in

²⁹ The Cultural Revolution Propaganda Poster cards manufactured by *Zhongguo Pukeguan* (China Playing Card House)

³⁰ Chong Tsong-zung, “Mesmerized by Power,” in Jiang, *Burden or Legacy*, p. 61.

Yan'an with the slogan *Cheer! Yan'an Spirit*, accompanied by the Bao Tower, an iconic building in Yan'an in the background (Figure 1), and a woodcut version of *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* on the ace of clubs. Young Mao, as seen at some revolutionary sites in Jinggangshan and Yan'an, is a suitable icon to symbolize the first generation of Chinese socialism, which can awake a collective memory and inspire the Red spirit in younger generation.



Figure 13.



Figure 14.



Figure 15.

The commodification of propaganda posters inevitably led to the disconnection of their meanings from the original context of socialist ideology during the Cultural Revolution, with souvenir producers selecting and cutting the “red” icons, such as *The Little Red Book*, a red scarf,

and a red armband, so as to make commodities more attractive from a commercial viewpoint. Benewick points out that the transformation of Mao from revolutionary icon to pop icon took place in 1993, with the market flooded with brand-new items of Mao encompassing watches, alarm clocks with Red Guard waving copies of *The Little Red Book*, medallions, commemorative plates and plaques, and cigarette lighters.³¹ While Mao's images might have become quite kitsch to some degree, this does not necessarily mean that the purchasers intend to desecrate the history of the revolution or communist leaders. The meteoric transition to capitalist consumerism does not result in the end of the visual imagery of the Mao era.³² Given that this ambivalence toward propaganda posters appears on various scenes, it is not easy to discern which inclination is close to people in contemporary China.

Conclusion

Propaganda posters have acquired commercial value when they lost their original fundamental purpose. Having been an amalgam of politics and art, the Mao style has evolved from a forceful political medium to that of a new aesthetic value compatible with different cultural and social conditions after the Cultural Revolution. Obviously China today witnesses a revival of Mao Zedong. This has happened as a result of the disappointment among the people concerning the widespread corruption and economic disparities stemming from the rapid economic growth. Now they are looking back with nostalgia to those "good old days" of the early CCP. Barmé argues that the environment in which the "totalitarian nostalgia" has taken form is comparable to that of Russia in the 1990s, where culture was forced to go through a balancing act between old ideologies and mentalities, the demands of art, and new commercial imperatives.³³

Nevertheless, it was not only nostalgia but also respect for Mao Zedong that has fueled the reevaluation of propaganda posters. Although the slogans have become old-fashioned, Mao Zedong remains to be a national symbol. Producers of the Red souvenirs carefully select and represent positive memories of the Red spirit, such as a passionate devotion to the building of the socialist country. Once socialist ideology was eliminated from propaganda posters, nostalgia took its place. With the rapid economic development, old-fashioned socialist ideology has been progressively replaced by patriotic education buttressed by nostalgia and selective memories (Figure 16). Thus, the effective use of political posters during the Cultural Revolution in a way that suits contemporary Chinese morals generates a new form of propaganda art and its commodification embodied in the Red souvenirs.

³¹ Robert Benewick, "Icon of Power: Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution," in Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, eds., *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), p. 134.

³² Julia F. Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution," in Richard King, ed., *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-76* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), pp.16-17.

³³ Geremie R. Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 316.

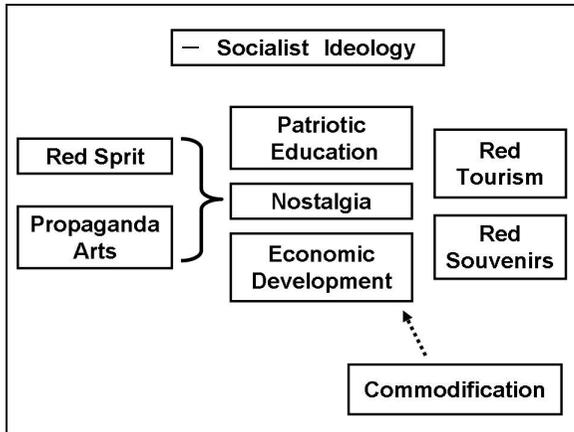


Figure 16.