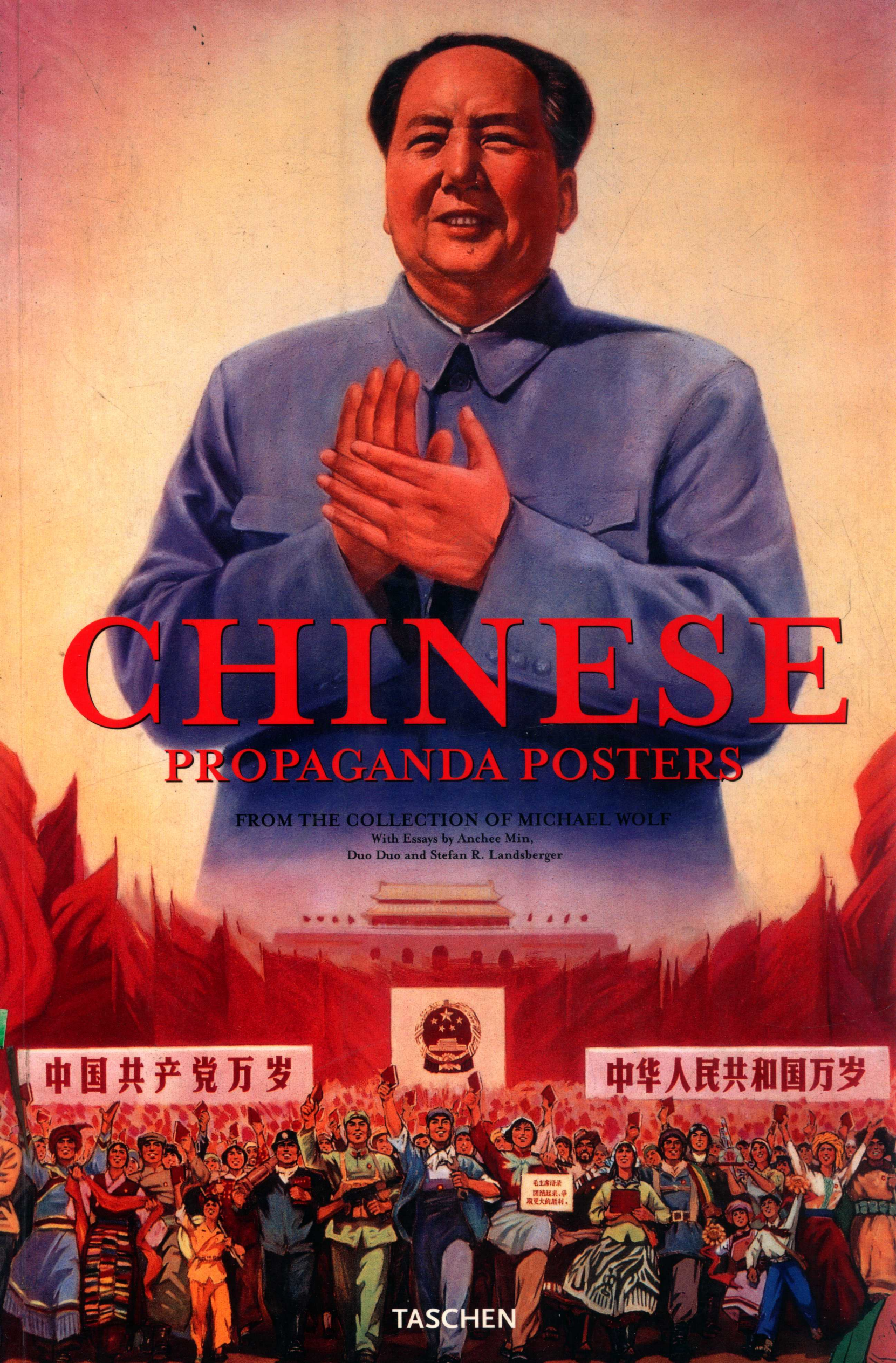




CHINESE

PROPAGANDA POSTERS

FROM THE COLLECTION OF MICHAEL WOLF

With Essays by Anchee Min,
Duo Duo and Stefan R. Landsberger

中国共产党万岁

中华人民共和国万岁

TASCHEN

J 238.1 / W4



CHINESE

PROPAGANDA POSTERS

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This book shows part of Michael Wolf's propaganda poster collection. The posters have been arranged in an order that corresponds with the chapters in *The Little Red Book* (or *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*). With such a huge variety of posters, this system was necessary to give the book a coherent structure and a logical narrative thread. The posters and quotations from the relevant chapters of *The Little Red Book*, together with the accompanying essays, all serve to illustrate just how much Chinese life was influenced by Mao's ideas and the visualization of those ideas in posters.

Für dieses Buch, das einen Teil von Michael Wolfs Sammlung chinesischer Propagandaposter zeigt, wurde die Einteilung nach den Kapiteln der *Worte des Vorsitzenden Mao Zedong* gewählt, um der Vielfalt der Plakate eine inhaltliche Struktur und einen roten Faden zu geben. Die Plakate und die Zitate aus den entsprechenden Kapiteln der *Maobibel* zeigen ebenso wie die begleitenden Essays, wie stark durchdrungen das chinesische Leben von den Ideen Maos und ihrer Visualisierung in Plakaten war.

Le principe retenu pour la composition de cet ouvrage, qui présente une partie de la collection d'affiches chinoises de propagande de Michael Wolf, est celui d'un alignement sur les chapitres du *Petit Livre Rouge de Mao*, les Citations du président Mao Zedong. Il s'agissait en effet d'organiser ces nombreuses images en fonction d'une structure interne, et de trouver un fil rouge. Les affiches et les citations empruntées à ces chapitres montrent,

tout autant que les textes qui les accompagnent, à quel point la vie en Chine était imprégnée des idées de Mao, dont les affiches donnaient une traduction graphique.

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PAGE 1

Celebrate with great joy fifty years of the Chinese Communist Party, 1971

Mit großer Freude das fünfzigjährige Bestehen der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas feiern, 1971

Fêtons dans l'allégresse le cinquantième anniversaire du Parti communiste chinois, 1971

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Samples of illustrations and decorative designs for newspapers and magazines

Design by: Tianjin Institute for Craft Design
Published by: Tianjin People's Art Publishing House, 1971

Illustrations- und Dekorationsmuster für Zeitungen und Zeitschriften

Entwurf: Institut für kunsthandwerkliches Design Tianjin
Herausgeber: Volkskunstverlag Tianjin, 1971

Modèles d'illustration et de décoration pour des journaux et des revues
Conception: Institut de design et d'artisanat d'art de Tianjin
Éditions Populaires d'Art de Tianjin, 1971

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Huang Jiguang the hero
Artist: Zhou Pengzhuang; Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1973; 0.15 Yuan

Der Held Huang Jiguang
Gemalt von Zhou Pengzhuang; Volksverlag Shanghai, 1973; 0.15 Yuan

Le héros Huang Jiguang
Peintre: Zhou Pengzhuang; Éditions Populaires de Shanghai, 1973; 0.15 yuan

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The east is red
Artist: Li Zongjian; People's Art Publishing House, 1953

Der Osten ist rot
Gemalt von Li Zongjian; Volkskunstverlag, 1953

L'Est est rouge
Peintre: Li Zongjian; Éditions Populaires d'Art, 1953

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Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts, September 1968
In the image: The east is red

Der Vorsitzende Mao ist die rote Sonne in unserem Herzen, September 1968
Im Bild: Der Osten ist rot

Le président Mao est le soleil rouge de notre cœur, Septembre 1968
Dans l'image: L'Est est rouge



TASCHEN

25th anniversary!

THE ART OF MAKING BOOKS

TASCHEN's Great Adventure began back in 1980, when eighteen-year-old Benedikt Taschen opened a shop in his native Cologne, Germany, to market his massive comics collection. Within a year he began publishing catalogues promoting his wares, but it wasn't until 1984 that his first art-book breakthrough occurred: he purchased 40,000 remainder copies of a Magritte book printed in English, reselling them for a fraction of their original price. From a young age, Taschen had been interested in art but found that art books were too expensive and hard to obtain, and the success of this daring move proved that Taschen was not alone in thinking that the art-book market should be democratized. Soon he began reprinting books under his own name for budget prices and the next year he published his first original title and the first book in the Basic Art series: *Picasso*. Before long, high-quality-yet-still-inexpensive hardcover books were added to the lineup and in 1989 the landmark double-jumbo *Van Gogh: The Complete Paintings* hit bookstores around the world.

Starting in the late 1980s, TASCHEN established subsidiaries across the globe and continued to cement its reputation as a publisher of excellent-value books while branching out into new areas such as architecture, design, photography, lifestyle and classics. In 2000, TASCHEN surprised the world by breaking the record for the most expensive book published in the 20th century: copy #1 of Helmut Newton's *SUMO*, signed by over 80 celebrities featured in it, fetched over \$300,000 at a charity auction. A year later TASCHEN launched its cinema collection with *Billy Wilder's Some Like it Hot*. Then, in 2003, TASCHEN tipped the scales with its massive, legendary Muhammad Ali tribute book, *GOAT*.

Twenty-five years after Benedikt Taschen opened his little comics shop, TASCHEN has grown into one of the most successful and unique publishers in the global market, publishing an eclectic variety of books for people of all tastes and budget ranges, distributed worldwide in over twenty languages. Within the space of the last few years, TASCHEN has opened bookshops in Paris, Los Angeles and New York, with plans to keep expanding to new cities as our Great Adventure continues. For the future of publishing, keep your eye on TASCHEN.

We love to love books.



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DU GE MING SHU XUAN GE MING REN DANG GE MING JIE BAN REN

读革命书 学革命人 当革命接班人

THE GIRL IN THE POSTER

I wanted to be the girl in the poster (opposite) when I was growing up. Every day I dressed up like that girl in a white cotton shirt with a red scarf around my neck, and I braided my hair the same way. I liked the fact that she was surrounded by the revolutionary martyrs, whom I was taught to worship since kindergarten. The one on the far right was Liu Hulan, the teenage girl whose head was chopped off by the Nationalists because she wouldn't betray her faith in Communism. The soldier above her was Huang Ji-guang (see page 7), who used his chest to block American machine-gun fire in the Korean War. The one next to him was Dong Cunrui, who used his own body as a post supporting explosives when blowing up an enemy bridge. The soldier on the far left was Cai Yong-xiang, who was run over by a train while rescuing others. The book, which the girl in the poster carries in her hands, is *The Story of Lei Feng*, a soldier/hero/martyr, who was a truck-driver who died protecting others (see page 28).

My passion for the posters began when I was eight years old. One day I brought home from school a poster of Chairman Mao (see page 9). Although I did not know that the Cultural Revolution had started, my action made me a participant—I removed my mother's "Peace and Happiness" painting with children playing in a lotus pond from the wall, and replaced it with the Mao poster. My mother was not pleased but she tried not to show her disappointment. I remember my thoughts: why wasn't she happy about Mao looking down at us during every meal while others couldn't have enough of Mao?

The posters had a great impact on my life. They taught me to be selfless and to be loyal to Mao and Communism. To be able to feel closer to Mao, I filled my house with posters. I looked at Mao before I closed my eyes at night and again when I woke. When I saved a few pennies, I would go to the bookstores to buy new Mao posters.

The place where I lived in Shanghai became a war zone during the heat of the Cultural Revolution in the late sixties and early seventies. Violence between factions often led to death. Everyone fought in the name of Mao. To be a Maoist was the goal of the time. For ten years I was in charge of the "Blackboard Newspaper" in my school. For the head art, I copied every image from *Samples of illustrations and decorative designs for newspapers and magazines* (see page 6). Week after week, month after month and year after year, I tirelessly drew pictures. I put out extra editions of the blackboard newspaper during the summers and winters when the schools were out. I didn't mind that only a few people would see my work. My hands were swollen from frostbite and I could barely hold the chalk. But I was inspired by the heroes and heroines in the posters, and I believed that hardship would only toughen me and make me strong.

I continued to dream that one day I would be honored to have an opportunity to sacrifice myself for Mao, and become the girl in the poster. I graduated from middle school and was assigned by the government to work in a collective labor farm near the East China Sea. Life there was unbearable and many youths purposely injured themselves, for example, cut off their foot or hand in order to claim disability and be sent home. My strength and courage came from the posters that I grew up with. I believed in heroism and if I had to, I preferred to die like a martyr.

I slaved in the rice and cotton fields for three years until Madame Mao, Jiang Qing, changed my fate. In early 1976, no one knew that Mao was dying and Madame Mao was preparing herself to take over China after him. She was making a propaganda film to show the masses, and she had sent out talent scouts all over the country to look for a "proletarian face" to star in her film. I was chosen when hoeing in the cotton field.

I was brought to the Shanghai Film Studio to be trained to act in Madame Mao's film. It was there I encountered the famous poster-painter Mr. Ha Qiongwen from the Shanghai Art Institute *Hun-Yuan*. I was brush-

ing my teeth one morning in a public sink when Mr. Ha approached me. He showed me a piece of paper authorizing him to look for models for his posters. He said that he liked my look and asked if I would model for him. I was flattered but asked if my puffy eyes would be a bother because I had just woken up. He said no.

Mr. Ha followed me back to my dorm to choose costumes from my clothes. I was surprised that he picked my green-colored worn-out army jacket which I had brought back with me from the labor camp. I told him that it would only take a moment for me to wash off the muddy dirt on the shoulder. He stopped me and said that the dirt was the effect that he had been looking for.

I began posing after Mr. Ha set up the camera. I didn't know how to pose and was just doing what he asked of me, which was to look into the far distance with confidence. I apologized for my sun-beaten skin and hair, and I tried to hide my fungicide-stained fingernails. He said that he liked the fact that I looked like a real peasant.

He asked me what I would wear when working in the rice paddy. I replied that I would wear a strawhat, I wouldn't wear shoes, and I would have my sleeves rolled up to the elbows and the pants up to the knees. He told me to do that. I obeyed. I kicked off my shoes and he saw the fungicide-stained toenails. I was embarrassed, but he told me that I shouldn't be. Instead, I should be proud. "I have been painting posters featuring peasants for years," he said, "and I have never realized my mistake. From now on I will paint peasants' toenails in a brown color." A week later, Mr. Ha sent me a print of his favorite shot of me. I looked quite heroic, like the girl in the poster I had admired as a child. Months passed and I didn't hear from him. One day during the Chinese New Year, when I was walking near Shanghai's busiest street, Central Xi-Zang Road and East Yan-an Road, I saw myself in a poster on the front window of the largest bookstore. The woman in the poster had my face, my jacket, but her arms and legs were thicker. She wore a strawhat, her sleeves and pants were rolled up, and all her nails were brown-colored!

I rushed home to share the news with my family, and everyone was excited and proud. I wished that I could have purchased a print of that poster, but it was not for sale. The clerk in the bookstore told me that it was distributed by the government for displaying in public spaces.

Michael Wolf's collection of Chinese propaganda posters is unique and marvellous. The posters are a representation of a generation's fantasy. They reflect an important era in Chinese history, which has been falsely recorded for the most part.

A picture is worth a thousand words, so let them speak.

Anchee Min, California 2003



Anchee Min, 1976

**Read revolutionary books,
learn from revolutionaries and
become an heir of the revolution**

Book title: *The Story of Lei Feng* Artist: Mo Shuzi;
Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 1974

**Revolutionäre Bücher lesen,
von Revolutionären lernen und
Erbe der Revolution werden**

Buchtitel: *Geschichten von Lei Feng*
Gemalt von Mo Shuzi, Volksverlag Jiangsu, 1974

**Lisez des livres révolutionnaires,
instruisez-vous des actes des
révolutionnaires et devenez les
héritiers de la révolution**

Titre du livre: *Histoires de Lei Feng* Peintre: Mo Shuzi,
Editions Populaires du Jiangsu, 1974

DAS MÄDCHEN AUF DEM POSTER

Als Kind wollte ich das Mädchen auf dem Poster (Seite 4) sein. Tag für Tag kleidete ich mich wie dieses Mädchen, trug ein weißes Baumwollhemd, ein rotes Tuch um den Hals und Zöpfe wie sie. Es gefiel mir, dass sie von den Märtyrern der Revolution umgeben war, zu deren Verehrung man mich seit dem Kindergarten angehalten hatte. Ganz rechts war Liu Hulan zu sehen, eine Jugendliche, die von den Nationalisten geköpft worden war, weil sie ihrem Glauben an den Kommunismus nicht abschwören wollte. Der Soldat über ihr war Huang Jiguang (siehe auch Seite 7), der sich im Koreakrieg mit seiner Brust in das Maschinengewehrfeuer der Amerikaner stellte. Der Mann neben ihm war Dong Chunrui, der mit Sprengstoff am eigenen Körper eine feindliche Brücke in die Luft fliegen ließ. Der Soldat ganz links war Cai Yong-xiang, der von einem Zug überfahren wurde, als er anderen das Leben rettete. Das Buch, das das Mädchen auf dem Poster in den Händen hält, *Geschichten von Lei Feng*, handelt von einem Soldaten, der als Lastwagenfahrer ums Leben kam, als er andere schützte (siehe Seite 28).

Meine Leidenschaft für die Plakate wurde geweckt, als ich acht Jahre alt war. Eines Tages brachte ich ein Bild des Vorsitzenden Mao (Seite 9) aus der Schule mit nach Hause. Obwohl ich nicht wusste, dass die Kulturrevolution begonnen hatte, nahm ich durch diese Handlung daran teil – ich nahm das „Frieden und Glück“-Gemälde meiner Mutter mit Kindern, die in einem Lotus-Teich spielen, von der Wand und ersetzte es durch das Mao-Poster. Meiner Mutter gefiel das nicht, doch sie versuchte, ihre Enttäuschung zu verbergen. Ich erinnere mich noch, wie ich damals dachte: Warum freut sie sich nicht, dass Mao bei jeder Mahlzeit auf uns herabblickt, wo doch andere von Mao nie genug bekommen können?

Die Plakate hatten großen Einfluss auf mein Leben. Sie lehrten mich, selbstlos zu sein und Mao und dem Kommunismus treu ergeben. Um mich Mao näher zu fühlen, hängte ich weitere Poster in der Wohnung auf. Vor dem Einschlafen und beim Aufwachen schaute ich auf Mao. Wenn ich etwas Geld gespart hatte, ging ich in die Buchhandlung und kaufte mir neue Mao-Bilder.

Der Ort, an dem ich in Shanghai lebte, wurde im Eifer der Kulturrevolution in den späten sechziger und den frühen siebziger Jahren zum Kriegsgebiet. Die Gewalt zwischen den Splittergruppen hatte oft tödliche Folgen. Jeder kämpfte im Namen Maos. Höchstes Ziel war es in dieser Zeit, Maoist zu sein. Zehn Jahre lang war ich für die Wandzeitung an unserer Schule verantwortlich. Für Illustrationen sorgte ich, indem ich alle Abbildungen aus dem Heftchen *Illustrations- und Dekorationsmuster für Zeitungen und Zeitschriften* (siehe rechts) kopierte. Wochen-, monate-, ja jahrelang zeichnete ich unermüdlich Bilder. Während im Sommer und Winter die Schulen geschlossen waren, brachte ich Sonderausgaben der Wandzeitung heraus. Es machte mir nichts aus, dass nur wenige Menschen mein Werk sahen. Frostbeulen ließen meine Hände anschwellen und ich konnte kaum die Kreide halten. Doch die Helden und Heldinnen auf den Plakaten inspirierten mich und ich war der Überzeugung, dass mich Entbehrungen nur abhärteten und stärker machten.

Es war immer noch mein Traum, eines Tages die Ehre zu haben, mich für Mao zu opfern und das Mädchen auf dem Poster zu werden. Ich schloss die Mittelschule ab und wurde von der Regierung dazu bestimmt, in der Nähe des Ostchinesischen Meers in einem Arbeitslager auf dem Land zu arbeiten. Das Leben dort war unerträglich und viele Jugendliche fügten sich absichtlich Verletzungen zu. Sie schlugen sich zum Beispiel den Fuß oder die Hand ab, damit sie als Behinderte nach Hause geschickt wurden. Meine Kraft und Tapferkeit verdanke ich den Plakaten, mit denen ich aufgewachsen war. Ich glaubte an das Heldentum, und wenn es denn sein musste, wollte ich lieber als Märtyrerin sterben.

Drei Jahre lang wurde ich in den Reis- und Baumwollfeldern geknechtet, bis sich mein Schicksal durch Madame Mao, Jiang Qing, wendete. Anfang 1976 ahnte niemand, dass Maos Tod bevorstand und dass

Madame Mao sich darauf vorbereitete, die Macht in China zu übernehmen. Sie arbeitete an einem Propagandafilm für die Massen. In ihrem Auftrag waren Talentsucher im ganzen Land unterwegs, um „proletarische Gesichter“ aufzuspüren, die die Hauptrollen in ihrem Film spielen sollten. Während ich in den Baumwollfeldern schuftete, wurde ich ausgewählt.

Man brachte mich zum Shanghai-Filmstudio, wo ich für den Auftritt in Jiang Qings Film geschult wurde. Dort begegnete ich dem berühmten Plakatmaler Ha Qiongwen vom Shanghai Kunstinstitut Hua-Yuan. Als ich mir eines Morgens an einer öffentlichen Waschrinne die Zähne putzte, kam Herr Ha näher. Er zeigte mir ein Papier, das ihn dazu berechtigte, Modelle für seine Plakate zu suchen. Er sagte, dass ihm mein Aussehen gefalle, und bat mich, ihm Modell zu sitzen. Ich fühlte mich geschmeichelt, fragte aber, ob meine geschwellenen Augen – ich war gerade aufgestanden – nicht störend seien. Er verneinte.

Herr Ha ging mit mir in den Schlafsaal, um aus meiner Kleidung die passenden Stücke auszusuchen. Ich war erstaunt, dass er meine grüne, abgetragene Armeejacke auswählte, die ich aus dem Arbeitslager mitgebracht hatte. Ich sagte, es würde nur ein paar Minuten dauern, den Dreck von der Schulter abzuwaschen. Doch er hielt mich zurück und sagte, gerade auf den Schmutz komme es ihm an.

Nachdem Herr Ha die Kamera aufgestellt hatte, saß ich ihm Modell. Ich wusste nicht, welche Pose ich einnehmen sollte, und folgte einfach seiner Anweisung, zuversichtlich in die Ferne zu schauen. Ich entschuldigte mich für meine sonnenverbrannte Haut und mein ausgebleichenes Haar und versuchte meine von den Pflanzenschutzmitteln verfärbten Fingernägel zu verstecken. Er meinte, es gefalle ihm, dass ich wie eine echte Bäuerin aussähe. Er fragte, wie ich denn bei meiner Arbeit im Reisfeld gekleidet gewesen sei. Ich antwortete, dass ich normalerweise einen Strohhut auf gehabt, aber keine Schuhe getragen hätte, die Ärmel hätte ich bis zu den Ellenbogen, die Hosenbeine bis zu den Knien hochgekrempelt. Er bat mich, das auch jetzt zu tun. Ich zog meine Schuhe aus und er sah meine von den Pflanzenschutzmitteln verfärbten Fußnägel. Ich war ver-

legen, doch er meinte, ich sollte lieber stolz darauf sein. „Seit Jahren male ich Bilder von Bauern“, sagte er, „und erst jetzt fällt mir der Fehler auf. Von nun an werde ich die Fußnägel der Bauern braun malen.“

Eine Woche später schickte mir Herr Ha einen Druck seiner Lieblingsaufnahme von mir. Ich sah recht heldenhaft aus, wie das Mädchen auf dem Plakat, das ich als Kind angebetet hatte. Monate gingen ins Land, ohne dass ich etwas von Herrn Ha hörte. Als ich eines Tages während des chinesischen Neujahrsfestes auf der belebtesten Straße von Shanghai, der Mittleren Xi-Zang-Straße und der Östlichen Yan-An-Straße, unterwegs war, entdeckte ich mich auf einem Poster im Schaufenster

der größten Buchhandlung. Die Frau auf dem Poster hatte mein Gesicht, sie trug meine Jacke, aber ihre Arme und Beine waren dicker. Sie hatte einen Strohhut auf, ihre Ärmel und Hosenbeine waren hochgekrempelt und ihre Nägel waren alle braun!

Ich eilte nach Hause, um die Neuigkeiten meiner Familie mitzuteilen, und alle waren aufgeregt und stolz. Ich hätte zu gern einen Druck dieses Plakats erworben, doch es war unverkäuflich. Der Buchhändler erzählte mir, dass die Regierung es verteile, damit es öffentlich ausgestellt werde.

Michael Wolfs Sammlung chinesischer Propagandaplakate ist einzigartig und beeindruckend. Die Plakate zeigen die Vorstellungswelt einer ganzen Generation und spiegeln einen wichtigen Abschnitt chinesischer Geschichte wider, der oft falsch dargestellt wird.

Ein Bild ist mehr wert als tausend Worte, deshalb lasst die Bilder sprechen!





英雄黄继光



LA FILLE DE L’AFFICHE

Toute mon enfance, j’ai voulu être la fille de l’affiche (page 4). Jour après jour, je m’habillais comme cette fille : robe de coton blanc, petit foulard rouge noué autour du cou et, comme elle, je me faisais des nattes. Le fait qu’elle était entourée des martyrs de la révolution, que j’avais appris à vénérer au jardin d’enfants, me plaisait énormément. Celle qui se trouvait tout à fait à droite était Liu Hu-lan, l’adolescente qui avait été décapitée parce qu’elle refusait d’abjurer sa foi dans le communisme. Le soldat qui la surplombait s’appelait Huang Ji-guang (voir aussi page 7) ; pendant la guerre de Corée, avec sa poitrine, il avait intercepté le tir d’une mitrailleuse américaine. À côté de lui se tenait Dong Chun-rui, qui s’était couvert le corps d’explosifs pour faire sauter un pont ennemi. Tout à fait à gauche, il y avait Cai Yong-xiang, le soldat qui fut écrasé par un train en secourant des camarades. La fille de l’affiche tenait à la main un livre, *L’Histoire de Lei Feng* – soldat, héros et martyr –, qui racontait le destin de ce conducteur de camion, mort en voulant protéger les autres (voir aussi page 28).

C’est à l’âge de huit ans que je me pris de passion pour les affiches. Un jour, je rapportai de l’école un portrait du président Mao Zedong (page 9). Même si j’ignorais à ce moment-là que la Révolution culturelle avait commencé, mon acte faisait de moi une activiste : je retirai du mur le tableau de ma mère, « Paix et Bonheur », qui représentait des enfants jouant dans un étang couvert de lotus, et le remplaçai par le portrait de Mao. Cela ne plut guère à ma mère, mais elle essaya de cacher sa déception. Je me souviens de ce que je pensais alors : comment ne pas être heureux que Mao daigne baisser les yeux pour nous regarder manger, alors que d’autres n’avaient pas leur content de lui ?

Les affiches eurent une profonde influence sur ma vie. Elles m’ont appris à être dévouée et loyale envers Mao et le communisme. Pour me sentir plus proche de lui, je remplissais la maison de ses portraits.

Je regardais le Grand Timonier le soir avant de m’endormir et le matin à mon réveil. Quand j’arrivais à économiser quelques sous, je courais les librairies pour m’acheter d’autres affiches de lui.

L’endroit où j’habitais à Shanghai devint une zone de combats au plus fort de la Révolution culturelle, fin des années 60, début des années 70. La violence entre factions était telle que beaucoup mouraient. Tout le monde se battait au nom de la pensée de Mao. Être maoïste – tel était alors le but suprême. Pendant dix ans, je fus responsable du journal de l’école, le « Blackboard Newspaper » ; je recopiais chaque dessin paru dans le « Head Art for Propaganda Publishing » (page 6). Je dessinais à longueur de journée, de semaine, d’année. Je publiais des éditions spéciales du journal, même pendant la fermeture estivale et hivernale de l’école. Une poignée de personnes seulement voyaient mon travail, mais peu m’importait. Mes mains enflaient sous les gelures et je pouvais à peine tenir un bout de craie. Mais j’étais inspirée par les héros et les héroïnes des affiches, et je croyais que les privations ne feraient que m’endurcir et me rendre forte.

Je continuais de rêver qu’un jour j’aurais l’insigne honneur de pouvoir me sacrifier pour Mao, et de devenir la fille de l’affiche. Ma scolarité primaire achevée, le gouvernement m’envoya travailler dans une ferme collective située non loin de la mer de Chine orientale. La vie y était si dure, si insoutenable que nombre de jeunes se blessaient à dessein, en se coupant un pied ou une main par exemple, pour être déclarés inaptes au travail et être renvoyés chez eux. Quant à moi, je tirais ma force et mon courage des affiches qui avaient enchanté mon enfance. Je croyais dur comme fer à l’héroïsme, et tant qu’à faire, je préférais mourir en martyr.

Je travaillais comme un forçat dans les champs de riz et de coton pendant trois ans, jusqu’au jour où Madame Mao, Jiang Qing, donna un autre cours à mon destin. Début 1976, personne ne savait que Mao agonisait et que son épouse se préparait à prendre le pouvoir après sa dispari-

tion. Elle était en train de réaliser un film de propagande pour les masses, et elle avait envoyé partout dans le pays des découvreurs de talents pour dénicher le « visage prolétarien » convenant au premier rôle du film. Je fus choisie un jour que je binais dans un champ de coton.

On m’emmena au studio de cinéma de Shanghai pour m’apprendre à jouer dans le film. C’est là que je fis la connaissance du célèbre peintre d’affiches Ha Quiongwan du Hua-Yuan, l’institut des Arts de Shanghai. Un matin que je me brossais les dents au-dessus du lavabo public, monsieur Ha m’aborda. Il me montra un papier officiel l’autorisant à recruter des modèles pour ses affiches. Il me dit qu’il aimait mon allure et me demanda si je voulais poser pour lui. J’étais flattée bien entendu, mais je lui demandai si mes yeux bouffis de sommeil ne le dérangeaient pas. Il me dit que non.

Il me suivit jusqu’à mon dortoir pour y choisir des costumes parmi mes vêtements. Je fus surprise de le voir prendre ma veste verte et déchirée de l’armée, que je portais au camp de travail. Je lui dis d’attendre quelques secondes, le temps d’enlever la boue sur l’épaule. Il m’arrêta net et me dit qu’un peu de saleté était exactement l’effet qu’il recherchait.

La séance de pose commença dès que monsieur Ha eut installé l’appareil photo. Ne sachant pas poser, je me contentai de prendre l’attitude voulue par lui, qui était de regarder droit dans le lointain, avec assurance. Je m’excusai pour ma peau et mes cheveux abîmés par le soleil, et essayai de cacher mes ongles teints par les fongicides. Il me dit beaucoup apprécier mon authentique allure de paysanne. Il voulut savoir ce que je portais pour travailler dans les rizières. Un chapeau de paille, mais pas de chaussures, lui répondis-je, et puis je roulais mes manches jusqu’aux coudes et les jambes de mon pantalon jusqu’aux genoux. Il me dit de le faire. J’obéis. J’ôtai mes chaussures et vis mes ongles de pied brunis par les fongicides. J’étais très gênée, mais il me dit de ne pas l’être.

Au contraire, j’avais, d’après lui, toutes les raisons d’être fière. « Je peins des affiches de paysans depuis des années », dit-il, « et je ne me suis jamais rendu compte de mon erreur. Dorénavant, je peindrai en brun les ongles de pied des paysans. »

Une semaine plus tard, monsieur Ha m’envoya une épreuve de la photo de moi qu’il préférait. J’arborais un air vraiment héroïque, à l’instar de la fille de l’affiche, que j’avais admirée enfant. Les mois passèrent et je n’entendis plus parler de lui. Un jour, pendant le Nouvel An chinois, je marchais non loin de la rue la plus commerçante de Shanghai, Central Xi-Zang Road et East Yan-an Road, quand j’aperçus une affiche dans la vitrine de la plus grande librairie du quartier : la jeune femme représentée avait mon visage, ma veste, mais ses bras et ses jambes étaient nettement plus forts. Elle portait un chapeau de paille, ses manches et les jambes de son pantalon étaient relevées, et ses ongles étaient bruns !

Je rentrai vite à la maison pour annoncer la nouvelle à ma famille. Mes parents étaient tout excités et fiers. J’aurais voulu acheter un exemplaire de l’affiche, mais elle n’était pas en vente. L’employé de la librairie m’expliqua que le gouvernement distribuait les affiches pour qu’elles soient exposées dans les lieux publics.

La collection d’affiches de propagande chinoises que possède Michael Wolf est unique et merveilleuse. Les affiches représentent le rêve de toute une génération et sont le reflet d’une période capitale de l’histoire de la Chine, qui a été en grande partie mal documentée.

Les images en disent souvent plus que les mots, alors laissons-leur la parole.



LOOKING AT THE PROPAGANDA POSTERS

Four hundred propaganda posters to look at. After about two minutes I feel kind of numb. I try to be patient and flick through them all again from the beginning. Suddenly 10,000 eternally blooming red flowers float before my eyes—each one exactly the same as the others. Suddenly I discover myself among them; I see my family, my neighbors, millions of people. A whole era comes flooding back. I keep looking at the posters. The person I am today observes the first half of my life. What emotions am I feeling? Apathy? Shame? Disgust? Abhorrence? Or nostalgia? None of the above? Or maybe a mixture of all of them?

Could that be me, that pale-skinned, chubby little chap in the red apron sitting on a lotus leaf holding up a large carp? From earliest memories to an old New Year picture. I sit on my father's shoulder. In my hand I am clutching some candied fruit on a long stick. Past the huge cooking pots of porridge made from wheat flour fried in fat, past the entertainers turning somersaults, we stroll through Beijing's New Year Market. (In those days, the city walls and their towers were still there. So were the Siheyuan, the rectangular courtyard houses.) The pictures of Sun Wukong and Zhao Zilong, which I painted at the age of five, reappear before my eyes. And suddenly, I see myself with the red neckerchief of the Young Pioneers, sitting on a tractor, and hear myself singing a song in praise of the high voltage power line. I run along behind the heroic-looking comrade worker as he climbs a ladder and builds a rainbow.



Playing with the fish, 1981
Mit dem Fisch spielen, 1981
Jouer avec le poisson, 1981

The childhood memories gradually blur. Cut to another image. From an old New Year poster to a propaganda poster.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" a nursery-school teacher asks me.

"I would like to be a member of a geological exploration team and search for treasure for the fatherland." I am shy and do not trust myself to say the second half of the sentence out loud.

The picture of myself changes. I see a helmeted artilleryman gazing angrily in the direction of Taiwan.

A neighbor's son shouts at the top of his voice: "I have three arrows that can work miracles. When I shoot the first arrow, our building will turn into a 30-story skyscraper. When I shoot the second, skyscrapers will spring up all over China. When I shoot the third, Communism will be implemented all over the world!"

I am impressed and I admire him, so much so that I want to paint his picture.

Had I really painted him, it would have been my first propaganda poster. Perhaps I might have won first prize in an all-China children's painting competition.

From the day I was born in 1951, I was subjected to a visual education from children's picture books, through school textbooks and books for teenagers, to the huge number of other images and propaganda posters. They all dealt with similar subjects and were my signposts through life. They made sure we did not make mistakes. They showed rich green meadows across which fat sheep rolled towards us like pearl beads. In 1958 green trees appeared in the same pictures. Children dangled from the branches like pears, armed with catapults and brooms to hunt sparrows. Destroy them! Everyone went on banging the gong until the sparrows fell down dead.

Only once did I just happen to paint a garden with artificial mountains, pavilions, and winter flowers. I was immediately told off by my brother. "That is a garden of the land-owning class!" he said. Then I was only painting what I had done on holiday (watch goldfish). The teacher's comment: "Of absolutely no educational value."

Time to get back to business and turn my attention to propaganda posters. I notice that the hands on the posters grow bigger and bigger. The hands that harvested corn-on-the-cob and carried watermelons now caress rockets. Looming over the enormous hands of the working class are the even more enormous hands of the Great Leader. Thousands upon thousands of waving hands, among them my own, moving vigorously back and forth in the air, imitating Lenin in 1918: "Bolsheviks, comrade sailors, forward!" Commands, slogans, huge hands wiping away sweat, patting the shoulder of a comrade, hurling hand grenades at the heads of the enemy. Hand in hand we formed a large circle and played hide-and-seek when we were small. Hand in hand, we would later defeat imperialism.

I do not know who invented propaganda posters. One thing I do know: my life is reflected in them. There was never any doubt about it until a certain event happened.

It was shortly before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. On the wall next to my bed hung a poster with a quotation from Mao Zedong: "While working the fields during the high season, eat solid food; in the time when there is not much to do, eat half solid and half liquid food, supplemented by potatoes and sweet potatoes." I knew every word but even so I did not understand what it meant. Every day before going to sleep and after getting up, I stared at the poster and reread it. No way could I grasp the meaning. Why was our leader lecturing us about what we should eat? I now think if this quotation had been turned into a visual image, it would have been understandable to anyone. In the vast fields there was nothing to harvest; 20 million peasants were starving because they had nothing to eat. Therefore ... therefore it should not be expressed in pictorial language, only in words.

When I was 16, I was sent to work on the land. For the first time I learnt about how peasants lived. The physical work was very hard. People barely had enough to eat. In that poverty-stricken village I once saw the bedroom of a newly married peasant couple. On the wall was a poster with



胜利的航程

The victorious journey, 1972
Die siegreiche Fahrt, 1972
La traversée de la victoire, 1972

good luck symbols like the phoenix and the dragon and a scroll bearing the words: "The Mandarin duck and his mate swim in the revolutionary ocean, married couples are comrades." For me it was terribly depressing but at the same time something to be envied. I walked along the muddy track and saw the propaganda poster on the clay wall. In it, thick smoke rose from the chimneys, carrying within it the hope that poverty could be overcome by work! How romantic the painted smoke was! Like clouds in paradise. In a village where people and livestock lived together, what comfort was there in looking at a picture of chimneys rising up into the sky? I am sure that if, at that time, I had seen pictures of Jesus or Buddha, they would have been just as meaningless to me, since I knew nothing about them.

I am a city-dweller and that was the way it struck me. How would it have appeared to a country child who had never seen any pictures other than propaganda posters? In the country I came across many very gifted young local artists. All they ever painted were propaganda posters like these. All their love, all their yearnings went into their pictures. Their highest ambition was to become a professional propaganda poster artist.

What might they paint today? Perhaps pretty pictures for advertising posters. Perhaps they have long since returned to traditional Chinese landscape painting. I believe that under the surface of the political propaganda poster there has always been an undercurrent. It is folk art's hidden gene. It has its roots in traditional myths and legends and in the notion of bringing together ancient history, people, and nature. It is the source from which the soul of a nation springs. If we look more closely at the posters we

recognize that, despite constraints, many images persistently try to express themselves. Perhaps it is precisely because a few of these weak, even distorted, beams of light shine through in the pictures that I felt a touch of nostalgia. It cannot be said that that era was a complete wasteland.

I am a lucky man. At the age of 20 I got to know Vincent van Gogh and Picasso. Since then no one can force me to relate to a poster. When, under the permanently watchful eye of our leader, I cycled alone past walls covered with posters of big, strong workers, peasants, and soldiers, I saw myself as a figure from a Kafka novel. That is when I began to write and to feel lonely. That was the beginning of my life in exile.

Today, political propaganda posters have become expensive antiques. But I will never be a collector. For, the moment I look at them, 10,000 red flowers appear before my eyes. One of them is my father. He is nearly 90 years old. He often falls out of bed, yelling and thrashing about like mad, because in his dreams he is fighting against class enemies and probably still defending Chairman Mao. I believe, at least for the next few decades, several generations of leaders will continue to appear in living rooms and bedrooms, and on the street. They will demand that we feel good, be grateful, and smile, smile like the people in the posters, broadly enough to show all our white teeth, right down to our molars.

My sofa is covered with a throw of brightly colored, traditional Chinese cotton cloth, with a phoenix and peony pattern. I am waiting for the phoenix to come flying out of the distance.

Duo Duo, 2003