

ART AND REVOLUTION II

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**CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION**

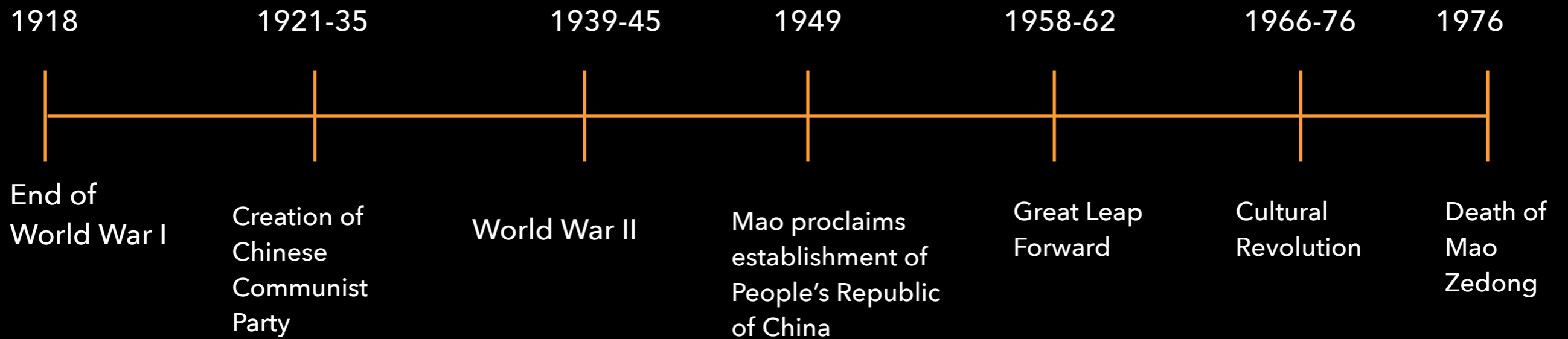
# ART AND REVOLUTION

- ▶ What role do artists play in furthering a revolution and spreading certain messages?
- ▶ How do these images permeate everyday life reach communities?
- ▶ In what ways are art forms tied to the social and historical contexts of their times?



Chinese red guards during the cultural revolution in China 1966

# TIMELINE OF CHINA IN THE 20TH CENTURY





# Who was Mao Zedong?



- ▶ Chinese communist revolutionary
- ▶ Born in 1893 to a peasant family in Hunan province (central China). Trained as a teacher and worked at a University Library in Beijing where he began to read Marxist literature.
- ▶ In 1921, he founded the Chinese Communist Party- set out to reshape Chinese society. Under his leadership, industry came under state ownership. Farmers were organised into collectives. All opposition was ruthlessly suppressed.
- ▶ Establishes the People's Republic of China (1949) after years of civil war in China. Over the next few years, he introduced several new ideas and campaigns to assert his ideologies over the people.



## Historical context:

### The Great Leap Forward

- ▶ Aim: to convert China's economy from an agricultural to an industrial one. Mao wanted to organise the peasant class to increase their output
- ▶ However, he relied on farming strategies that failed and destroyed the land
- ▶ He also wanted China to produce its own steel and encourage people to set up backyard furnaces and turn their scrap metal into reusable steel. The results were a complete failure- these backyard furnaces produced such low quality material that it was completely worthless.
- ▶ What was intended to be a revolutionary agricultural and industrial reform failed to produce the necessary yield leading to a famine that killed 56 million people.



Collecting old pots, pans and scrap metal for 'backyard furnaces' during the Great Leap Forward (1958-60)



Farming during the Great Leap Forward

# What was the Chinese Cultural Revolution?



- ▶ Economic, social and cultural campaign led by Mao Zedong in an effort to reassert his authority over the government after failure of Great Leap Forward
- ▶ Mao called upon youth and radical students to purge "impure" capitalist elements in the government, schools and arts.
- ▶ The students, who called themselves the Red Guards, attacked and harassed teachers, scholars and intellectual and destroyed the country's cultural heritage.
- ▶ They set out to destroy the four olds: ideas, customs, habits, and culture.





Portrait of Jiang Qing

- ▶ Also known as Madame Mao
- ▶ Fourth wife of Mao Zedong: Chinese Communist revolutionary, actress and major leader of the Chinese Cultural Revolution
- ▶ One of the most powerful and controversial figures in China during Mao's years
- ▶ Controlled a lot of the art, particularly theatre plays and ballets with Communist revolutionary content
- ▶ She developed a new form of art called the **Eight model plays** or "**revolutionary opera**" which depicted the world in simple, binary terms: the positive characters ("good guys") were predominantly farmers, workers and revolutionary soldiers, whilst the negative characters ("bad guys") were landlords and anti-revolutionaries.



# Art of the Chinese Cultural Revolution



Jiasheng Ding

*Characters from the revolutionary operas*

1974

The slogan reads: "Long live the triumph of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line of literature and art!"

- ▶ Directed by Jiang Qing: aimed to destroy any criticism of Mao through art, literature, drama etc. Only one art form was permitted - the praise of Mao and his reforms.
- ▶ It aimed to correct political fallout from the disasters of the 1950s, especially the widespread famine and deaths that resulted from the Great Leap Forward
- ▶ Characterised by "Mao Paintings"
- ▶ Sought to purge the country of its capitalist ideology through a destruction of traditional art and culture
- ▶ All art and design now was designed to serve the state and cater to the "worker, peasant and soldier"



# Visual Style: Socialist Realism

A style of idealised realistic art that was developed in the Soviet Union and used in socialist countries after World War II.



**团结起来，争取更大的胜利！**

Yan Yongsheng  
*Unite for Greater Victory!*  
1974



# Visual Style: Socialist Realism

A style of idealised realistic art that was developed in the Soviet Union and used in socialist countries after World War II.



Yan Yongsheng  
*Unite for Greater Victory!*  
1974

- ▶ Socialist realism was introduced to China in the 1950s in order to address the lives of the working class.
- ▶ Suitable for propaganda, socialist realism aimed for clear, intelligible subjects and emotionally moving themes.
- ▶ Subjects often included peasants, soldiers, and workers—all of whom represented the central concern of Mao Zedong and the Communist Party.





*Scholar viewing a waterfall*  
late 12th-early 13th century  
Ma Yuan

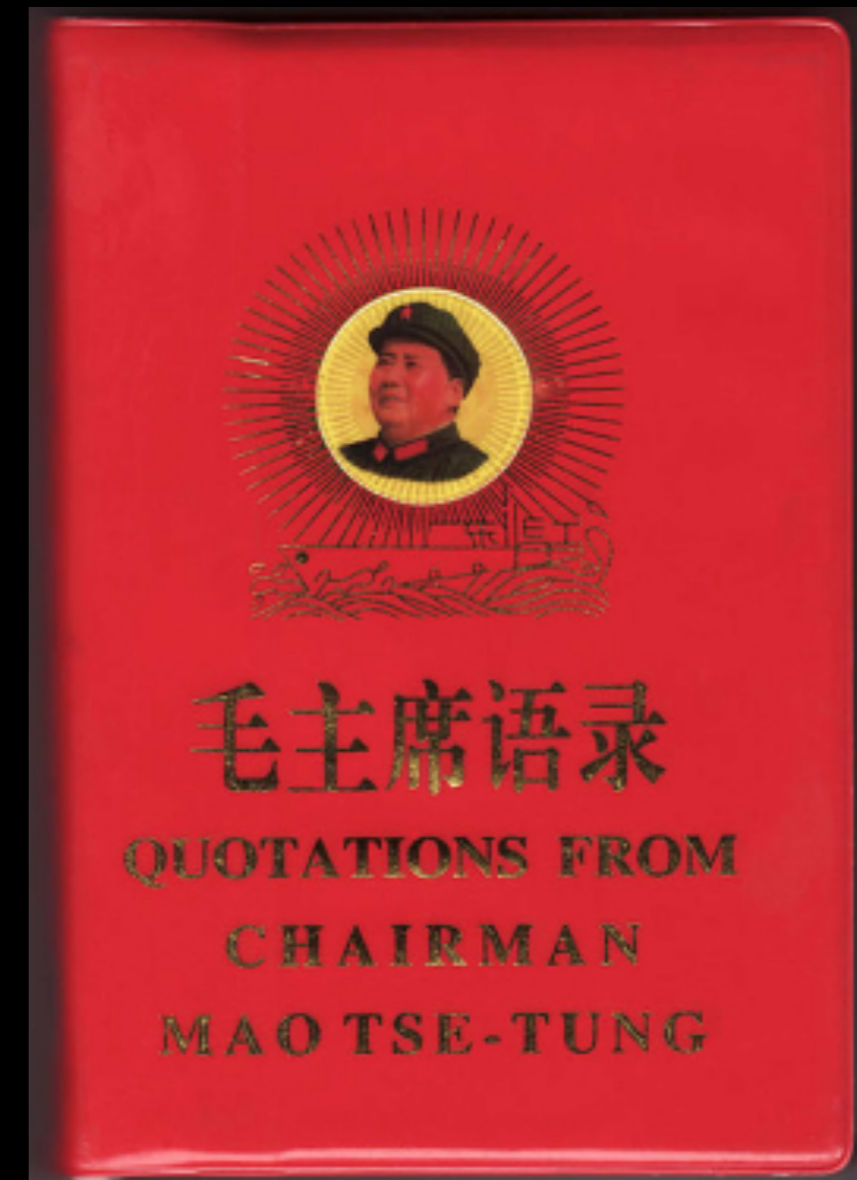


I want to live like her (Carry on the revolution to the End), by Shan Lianxiao, 1968.



# SYMBOLISM OF THE COLOUR RED

Jiang Qing insisted that the posters should be of the 'reddest of reds' – the colour of the revolution and the one to have the biggest impact with the illiterate masses.



Cover of the Little Red Book



# The Cult of Mao

- ▶ Earlier, portraits of Mao were most often woodblock prints and varied greatly in style.
- ▶ When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, portraits of Mao were standardized by the Central Propaganda Department.
- ▶ When the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, representations of Mao became more idealized.



Poster of Chairman Mao, 1967





毛主席视察广东农村

Chen Yanning  
Chairman Mao Inspects the Guangdong Countryside  
1972





毛主席视察广东农村

Chen Yanning  
Chairman Mao  
Inspects the  
Guangdong  
Countryside  
1972

Mao paintings typically depicted the leader in a scenes interacting with the communities and people, such as images of him strolling through lush fields alongside smiling peasants. He was depicted in an idealized fashion, as a luminous presence at the center of the composition.





Tang Xiaohe  
Strive Forward in the Wind and Tides  
1971

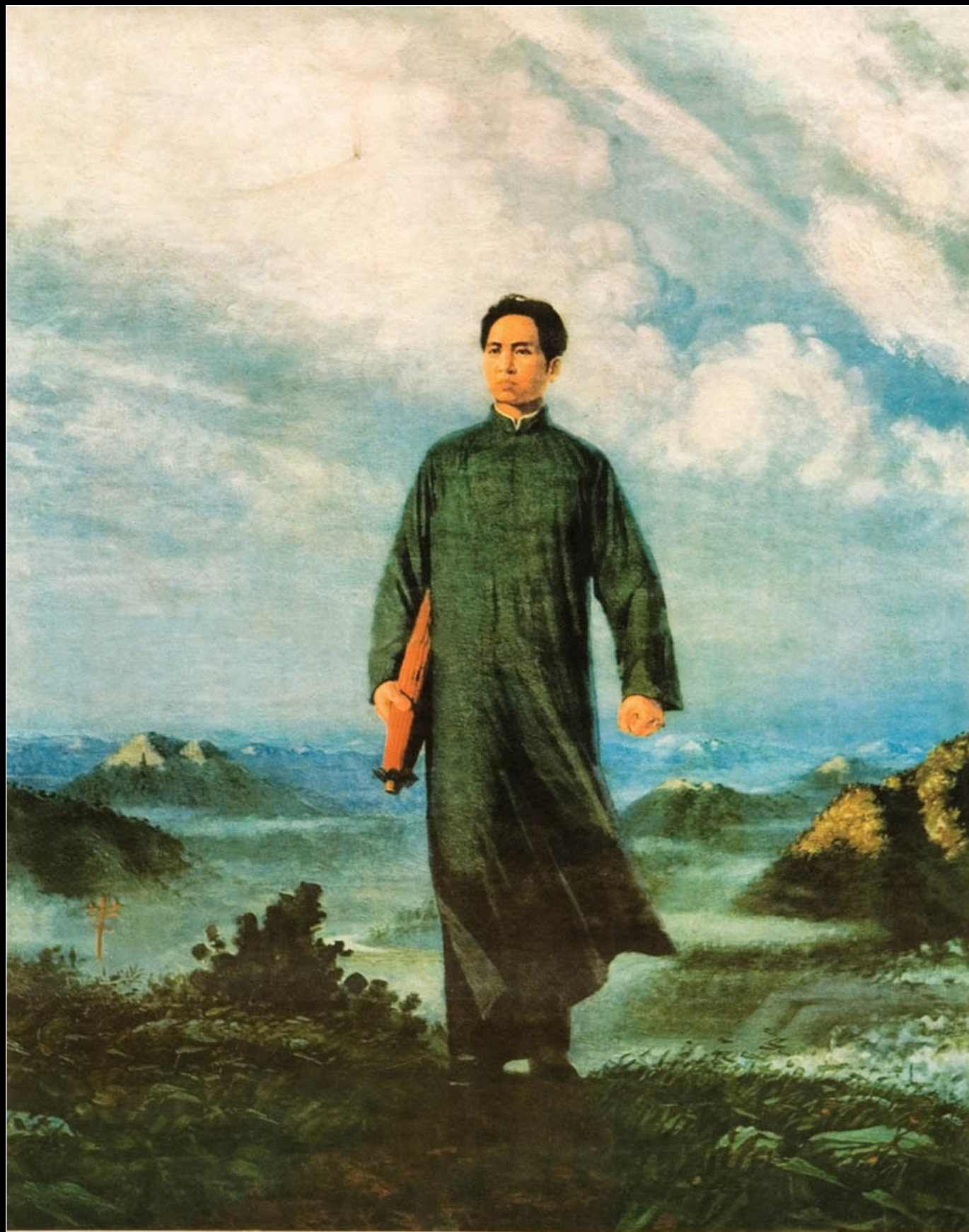




Tang Xiaohe  
Strive Forward in the  
Wind and Tides  
1971

Mao Zedong is shown here standing on a barge after his historic swim in the Yangtze River on July 16, 1966. In what many believe was an attempt to assert his political power through a demonstration of physical strength, Mao swam in the strong current of the river for more than one hour at the age of seventy-three. Posters of this painting were widely distributed in the early part of the Cultural Revolution.



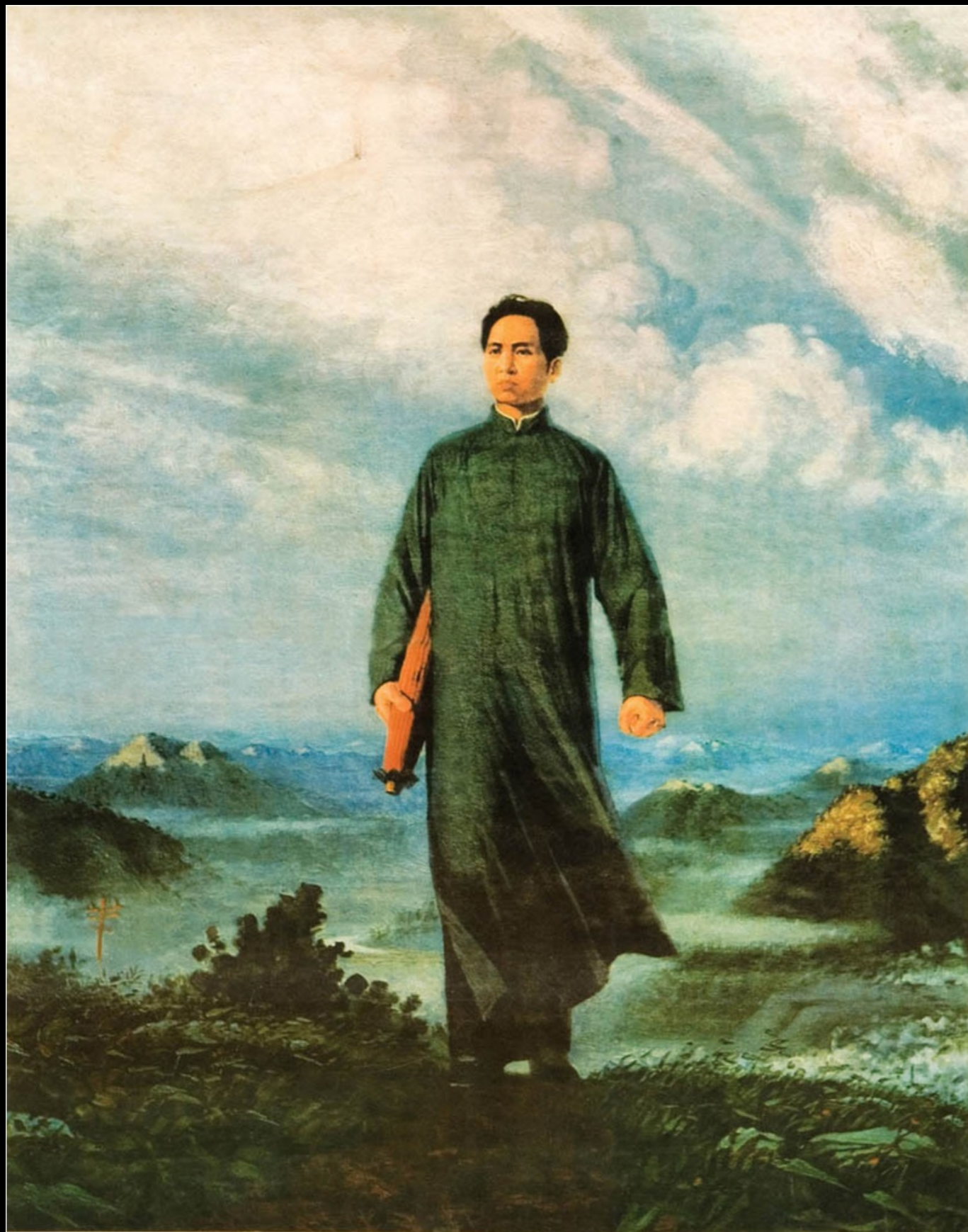


毛主席去安源

一九二一年秋，我們偉大的導師毛主席去安源，當會点燃了安源的革命烈火。

Liu Chunhua  
Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan  
1967  
Poster reproduction of an oil painting





毛主席去安源

一九二一年秋，伟大的领袖毛主席去安源，领导了安源的革命斗争。

- ▶ Anyuan was the site of a 1922 miners strike in Jiangxi Province, to which Mao famously travelled in order to support the miners' cause and organize workers' rights shortly after the founding of the Chinese Communist Party.
- ▶ Mao is shown making a journey through a mountainous landscape with his fist clenched
- ▶ This work was painted in 1967, when Chairman Mao was in his seventies. And yet, Chen depicts him as youthful and strong, with a look of determination on his face, therefore celebrates Mao as a revolutionary leader of the movement. Printed on 900 million posters during the Cultural Revolution, it remains the most reproduced painting in history.

Liu Chunhua

Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan  
1967

Poster reproduction of an oil painting





Zhang Wei, At the Happy Hearth of the Motherland , 1964, Lithograph





太湖新装

Song Wenzhi  
New Aspects of Lake Tai  
1973



“In the red army soldier’s rifle shoulder strap was a little piece of red fabric, like a blossoming fresh flower... I felt it was so beautiful, and heroic, as well as romantic.”  
-Chen Yifei



Chen Yifei  
Eulogy to the Yellow River. Oil on canvas  
1972



# The ubiquity of images



Matchbox depicting new construction in Hebei



Matchbox depicting figures singing revolutionary songs



# The Aftermath of the Cultural Revolution



Luo Zhongli  
*Father*  
1980  
Oil on canvas



# Discussion Questions

- ▶ **Art as Propaganda:** In what ways can artworks perpetuate a certain reality or create certain falsehoods?
- ▶ **Art and Power:** In what ways might artists be able to exert their agency or power in times of revolution?
- ▶ What is the impact of the ubiquity of artworks? What is the significance of the context in which you see a work?
- ▶ Based on the art movements we have seen so far, in what ways does the style of an artwork impact its messaging?