

ART AND REVOLUTION II

CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

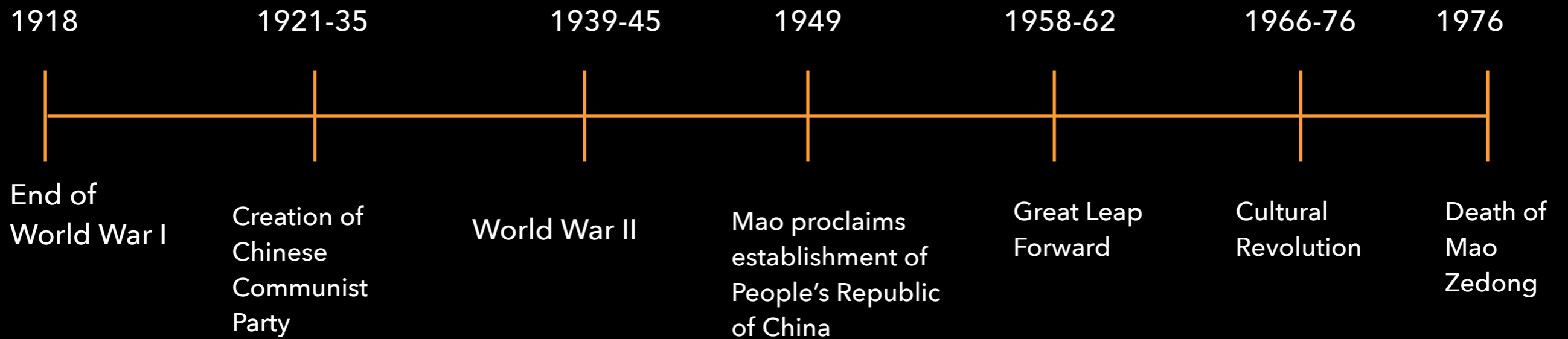
ART AND REVOLUTION

- ▶ What role do artists play in furthering a revolution and perpetuating certain ideals?
- ▶ How do these images permeated everyday life and were embedded into communities?
- ▶ How are art forms inextricably tied to the social and historical contexts of their times?

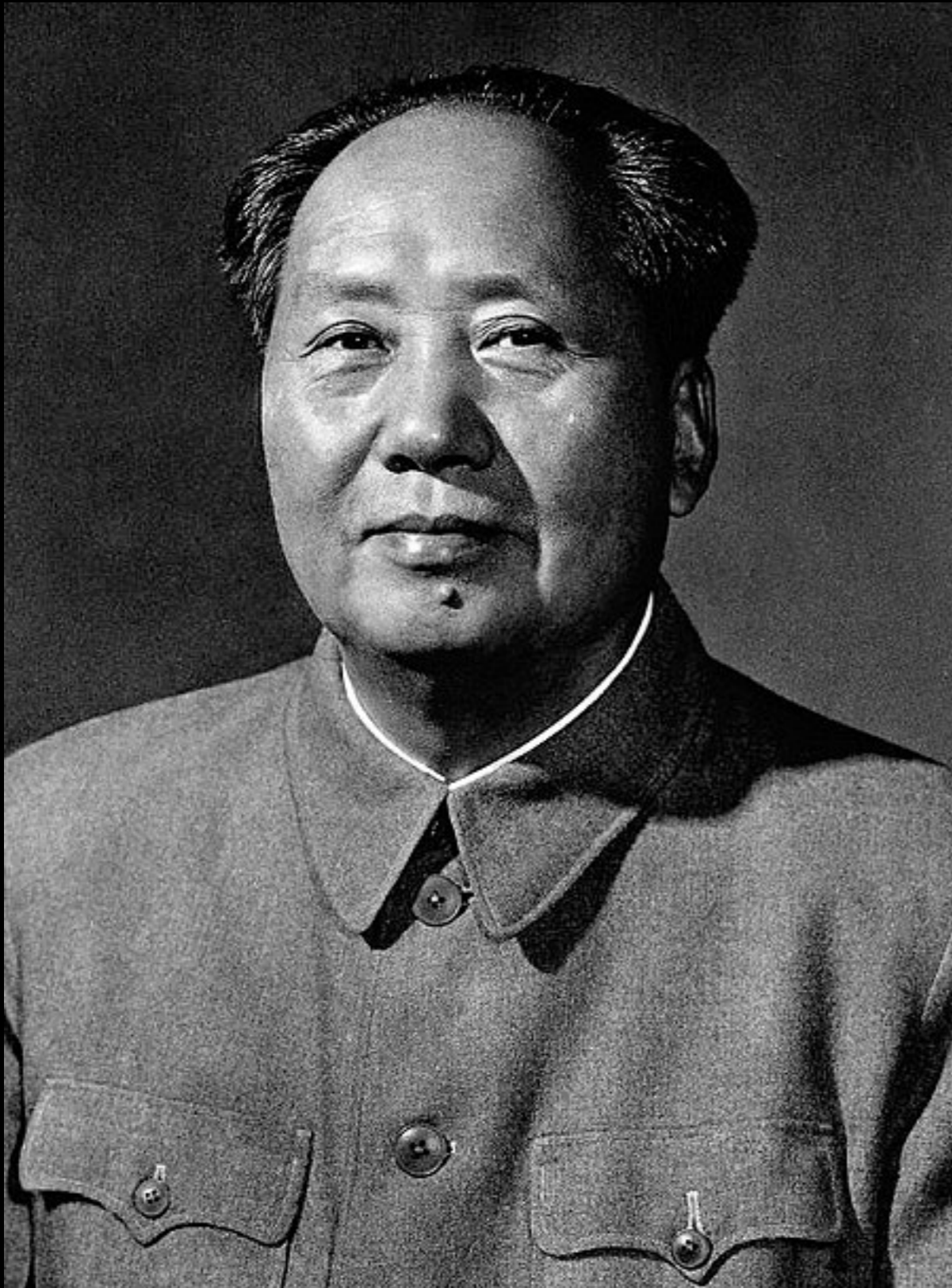


Chinese red guards during the cultural revolution in China 1966

TIMELINE OF CHINA IN THE 20TH CENTURY



Who was Mao Zedong?



- ▶ Chinese communist revolutionary. He emerges as the founder of 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.
- ▶ 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 CCP- set out to reshape Chinese society. Under his leadership, industry came under state ownership. Farmers were organised into collectives. All opposition was ruthlessly suppressed.

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.



- ▶ 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.

Portrait of Jiang Qing

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.



- ▶ 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.

Yan Yongsheng
Unite for Greater Victory!
1974



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

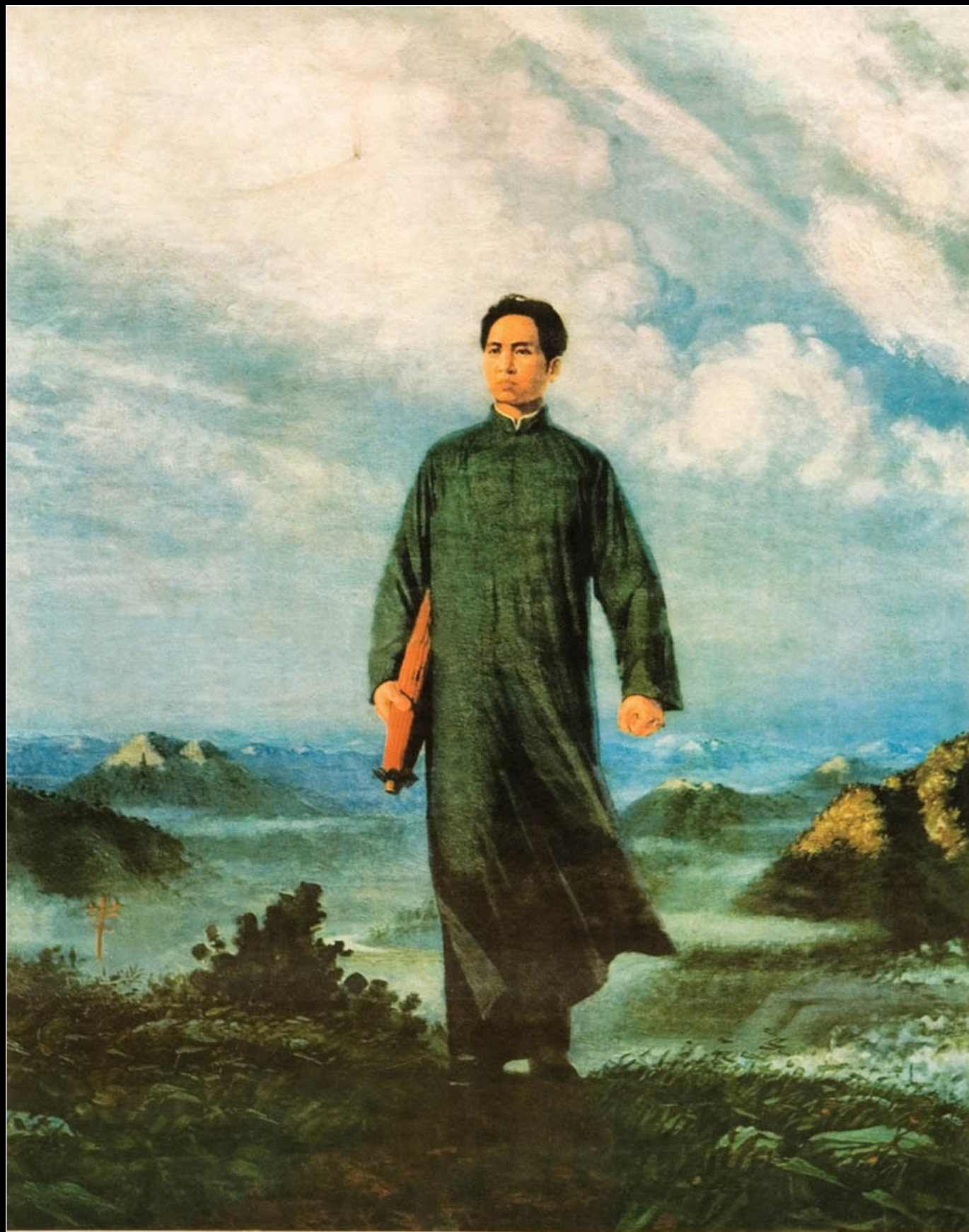


毛主席视察广东农村

Chen Yanning
Chairman Mao Inspects the Guangdong Countryside
1972



Tang Xiaohe
Strive Forward in the Wind and Tides
1971



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



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

“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



太湖新装

Song Wenzhi
New Aspects of Lake Tai
1973

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 are the implications/impact of the ubiquity of artworks? How does the medium of the work affect its access?

Based on the art movements we have seen so far, in what ways do the visual language impact its messaging?