



Chinese Propaganda Posters

Min, Anchee, Duo, Duo. Landsberger, Dr. Stefan R. Taschen.

Taschen's latest offering is a rather comprehensive look at Chinese political prints produced between the birth of the People's Republic in 1949 and the very early 1980s. Around 2.2 billion posters were produced during China's Cultural Revolution. That means nearly three posters for each person, and bucketsful of Mao.

Through government-sanctioned political posters, Mao was everywhere at once. He was bigger than big brother, with a paternal gaze that reached into every home and public institution. Mao beamed over China with his rosy jowls, saintly glow and the composure of a Hindu cow. Often he was surrounded by a coupe of smiling, angular, and adoring proletarian supermen and women.

These posters allowed Mao to regulate the behavior of an entire people. The posters' simple visual language allowed him to communicate effectively with everyone, including the illiterate. And they are also beautiful works.

Laid out as the chapters of Mao's "little red book," Taschen has filled this tome with giant ears of corn, androgynous workers, diligent children and, of course, Mao. There is information on how to protect your horse from a gas attack. There are plump, cherubic, little children bearing giant peaches (think Tim Burton directing *The Last Emperor*).

The book is a visual spray of warmth, strength, and glorious forward-moving positives – which makes you slightly uncomfortable when you disengage and think of the Cultural Revolution's bloody subtext. However, this never set out to be an apologist's book. There is no diatribe in here on the tyranny of Mao's violent authoritarianism. Rather the first short essay by Anchee Min – born and raised in Mao's China – tells the personal tale of a little girl wanting to be like the smiling heroic workers in her bedroom poster.

Political "prints" is an area that has generally only been explored by academic circles, which is unfortunate considering the enormous impact of the poster on society at large. This book welcomes a wider audience. It is extensive and the reproductions are gloriously oversized. Three pithy essays are topical and insightful without trying to lay down too much historical groundwork. And of Mao, there are buckets.

Intelligent coffee-table candy. ADAM KOLBERG