

NATIONS AND ART: THE SHAPING OF ART IN COMMUNIST REGIMES

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Looking back at history, although art is not a necessity like water or food, it has always been an integral part in the development of all civilizations. So what part does it play in society and what is its impact on people? One way to look at art is to look at what guides its development and what are the results that follow. In the case of this paper, I am focusing specifically on how the arts are shaped by the political bodies that govern people, specifically focusing on Communist regimes. This is art of public nature and an integral part of all society, because it is created with the purpose of being seen by many. This of course is not something unique to the Communist regimes, or even their time period. Art has had public function throughout history, all one has to do is look at something like the Renaissance altar pieces, the drawings and carvings on the walls of Egyptian monuments or the murals commissioned in USA through the New Deal. In fact the idea of “art for art’s sake” only developed in the early 19th century. This means that historically art has been used for a particular function, or to convey a specific idea to the viewers. This does not mean that before the 19th century art was always done for some grand purpose, private commissions existed too of course; but artists mostly relied on patrons and the art that was available to the public was often commissioned for a purpose, and usually conveyed some sort of message. Museums where today the public can view art is also only a recent development, in the past the masses could only enjoy “high art” in a public location, usually of religious or political function. Thus how the Communist regimes used art is not a novel idea, they just took the control of art to a new level. It is important to remember however that the modernized concept of mass production of images and words contributed greatly to the possibilities the Communist regimes had, something that historically was never available on that grand of a scale to other “patrons” of art. Thus when looking at the case of

Communist regimes it is important to keep in mind the general context they existed in: a modernizing and fluctuating world.

This paper in particular focuses on Russia under Stalin from 1922 to 1953 and China under Mao from 1949 to 1976. Although there is a lot of literature on the art and culture of these periods, the sources tend to focus on one or the other, maybe on occasion referencing a connection between the two. The benefit of comparing the two in detail presents the opportunity to better understand what “Communist art” is and whether it can even be defined as that. Meaning was the art produced under Stalin and Mao a product of Communist ideology, or is there more to it. In order to look at this issue we first need to briefly address the nature of Communism; then take a close look at the development of art leading up to the regimes of Mao and Stalin, what visual culture these two regimes produced, how they shaped art, and what purpose art served for them. Finally, it is important to address how they controlled the population and employed the people to produce the art they needed: art of propagandistic nature. In order to assess these situations it is necessary to take a number of perspectives, not just look directly at the arts, although that is of course the main focus of the research. Thus in addition to using sources that focus on the relationship between arts and politics under these regimes, such as the books by Steven Heller, Gunter Hans and Maria Galikowski; it is important to look at sources that address other aspects of culture such as economics and psychology, such as the work done by Richard Curt Kraus and Robert C. Tucker. In relation to psychology in order to better understand the mentality of the artists, first-hand accounts by artists were looked at, such as the books by Czeslaw Milosz, Jerome Silbergeld and Melissa Chiu, as well as an interview conducted by the Un-American Activities Committee of the United States. And of course it is important to look at primary sources from the side of the government that express the ideas of

the people that controlled the arts. Overall the sources need to be a combination of primary and secondary sources looking at both the artist and the controlling regime; and in addition to directly related sources it is important to use sources that look at other aspects of culture in order to better understand the context of living under this regime, and the arts that were produced as a result.

COMMUNISM AND ITS RISE TO POWER: THEORY vs. PRACTICE

The birth of socialist ideas can be traced back to the French Revolution; however it was in 1848 that Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*. The Marx version of Communism is the solution to history's riddle and is the "positive transcendence of private property...it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man –the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species."¹ Thus Communism is the ultimate state for human society, it is what follows a revolutionary overthrow of Capitalism; after a period of transition, Communist society is classless and without government and control of production and good distribution is based on the idea that "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."² The role the arts play in this society is not that of passive and contemplative sensuous experience, but rather that of practical and active modes of experience.³ However, neither Marx nor Engle produced an official or unofficial theory on aesthetic, and although they made occasional comments about literature they never stated

¹ Marx, Karl. "Property and Alienation." *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetic and Criticism*. Ed. Berel Lang and Forrest Williams. New York: David McKay Company, 1972. 21-30. Page 21-22.

² "Communism." *Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010. Web. 29 April 2010. <<http://www.search.eb.com.proxyau.wrlc.org/eb/article-9117284>>.

³ Lang, Berel, and Forrest Williams, Ed. *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetic and Criticism*. New York: David McKay Company, 1972. Page 21.

anything about its social implementations or made remarks about binding artists to a certain aesthetic.⁴

The ideas of Communism were taken by Lenin and in turn by Stalin, Mao and other leaders, but in the end their implementation of Communism does not match what Marx preached. The large gap can in part be accounted by the fact that Marx believed that Communism was an inevitable step for Europe, but in the end countries of different background and history took up the Communist ideology. In addition, practice of an ideology can never completely match with its theory, since the implementation depends on a multitude of human actions and decisions. So in the end the historical and cultural background of those countries, which affects the nature of the citizens, combined with the idiosyncratic personalities of the leaders shaped Marxist Communism into mutated versions: Stalinism and Maoism.

In order to better understand the relationship between art and government under Mao and Stalin we first need to study the context in which that type of art, and government, could exist. Basically we need to answer the questions, how and why this was possible. The contexts in Russia under Stalin and in China under Mao are not identical, there are a number of differences many of which are rooted in the diverse and unique history of the two countries but there are also common threads. So in order to understand the attitudes and policies these governments had towards the arts and why they were successful in their implementation we first need to understand why the people embraced this political ideology.

The reason for the emergence of Communist regimes is one of debate among the scholars, and in large depends on what factors one focuses on. When the Soviet Union was the

⁴ Rieser, Max. "The Aesthetic Theory of Social Realism." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16.2 (1957): 237-48. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/427602>>. Page 257.

only Communist state Slavophiles, whose most vocal exponent was Nicholas Berdiaev, believed that the reason Russia turned Communist was because of its unique character.⁵ However, as other countries, including China, turned Communist this argument could not hold and it began to fall apart. The question that then arose is why these particular countries ultimately embraced Communism, after all it can be said that practically every country in the world has been exposed to socialist ideas around this time.

It is important to note that the Communists were not the ones who destroyed the traditional imperial governments: they just undermined and overthrew the new governments that were trying to take root.⁶ The main similarity between what happened in China and in Russia is that the new institutions that were trying to run the country after the fall of the Imperial regimes were weakened by devastating wars, allowing the Communists to step in (something that is different from Western countries which underwent transformation prior to large scale wars and without bloody revolutions that were prophesized by Marx and Engels). Thus Communism was able to emerge victorious, but in the end the problem is that the Communist ideas that the people embraced were in fact masking the true nature of this party that ultimately took authoritarian hold of the nation. In this manner the choking hold the imperial powers historically had over its people, perpetuated a society which unwittingly fell into another authoritarian regime, and remained under its control for decades.⁷

When looking at the success of Communism both in China and in Russia it is interesting to consider the fact that Communist ideas are foreign to both; Communism did not emerge from

⁵ Pipes, Richard. "Communism and Russian History." *Soviet and Chinese Communism: Similarities and Differences*. Ed. Donald W. Treadgold. Seattle and London: University of Washington, 1967. 3-23. Page 4.

⁶ Taylor, George E. "Communism and Chinese History." *Soviet and Chinese Communism: Similarities and Differences*. Ed. Donald W. Treadgold. Seattle and London: University of Washington, 1967. 24-36. Page 36.

⁷ Pipes, 1967. Page 23.

their Imperial past but rather came from Western Europe.⁸ This is important because it accounts for the reason why Russian and Chinese Communism in practice turned out to be very different from the ideas of its creator Marx. Thus the two Communist Regimes appropriated and altered the Communist ideas to suit their needs. The original ideas of Communism did however play an important role; it is their appeal that blinded people and allowed dictators like Mao and Stalin to shape their countries to suit their goals while the countries believed they were shaping themselves. Ultimately the combination of a history of undemocratic governments, a time of war and the appeal of Communist ideas to the masses allowed for new authoritarian regimes under the pretense of Communism to emerge.

STALINISM, MAOISM AND ART

Now that we have addressed the reasons for why and how the Communist political party came to power in China and Russia it is time to see how the shaping of art started and where it led. However, we cannot start looking at what Mao and Stalin did when they were in full control, until we address the situations that preceded them. In the case of Russia we need to look at art under Lenin, and artists that were prominent right before the Communists rose to power. When looking at China we need to address the diversity of art movements prior to the rise of the Communism as well as the shaping of art during the turbulent war years. Thus it is first important to acknowledge that Socialist Realism, the type of art that is most associated with Communism, did not come into being simultaneously with the rise of the communists. Prior to the rise of Communism as well as during the early stage of the regimes, the art worlds in these two nations were anything but unanimous.

⁸ Taylor, 1967. Page 33.

Before Socialist Realism

The beginning of the 20th century in Russia, like in Europe, saw a rise to modern and avant-garde art. Artists like Malevich and Kandinsky, both of Russian origin but ultimately working in foreign countries, proposed radical new ideas about the aesthetic and purpose of art. Their ideas on art greatly influenced the Russian avant-garde artists of that time: some followed those ideas but other took them a step further and pushed them in different directions, but one thing they all had in common is the rejection of realism. With the rise of Communism, the avant-garde in Russia took a new turn, many of artists embraced certain Communist ideas and saw themselves as the champions that can lead Russia in its quest to reshape its society. To add to this self-proclaimed role the new Communist government granted the most extreme of modern art “comprehensive, officially sanctioned power.”⁹ Many artists voluntarily joined state-run organizations because they believed they should serve the regime, this was also a period of artistic freedom.¹⁰

Most of the style innovation preceded the revolution, artists such as Kandinsky, Malevich, Tatlin and Gabo had already experimented with modernism or developed their styles by early to mid-teens; Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism, and Fauvism were all movements that touched Russian art. From 1917 to 1922 all these radical movements became a part of institutions such as school and museums, as well as a part of publications and public decorations.¹¹ These artists welcomed the revolution for as Malevich said “Cubism and futurism were the revolutionary forms in art foreshadowing the revolution in political and economic life

⁹ Kramer, Hilton. "Art: A Return to Modernism." *The Soviet Union: The Fifty Years*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967. 158-74. Page 158.

¹⁰ Heller, Steven. *Iron fists: Branding the 20th Century Totalitarian State*. Hong Kong: Phaidon, 2008. Page 132.

¹¹ Kramer, 1967. Page 162.

of 1917.”¹² This enthusiasm was in line with the revolutionary nature of this art. In 1919 Aleksandr Rodchenko [fig.1] and a group of his followers proposed Constructivism; these artists believed that a work of art is self-sufficient and has no mimetic relationship to external reality. In the beginning it was not necessarily of Unitarian flavor, however the Constructivists themselves ultimately saw their works of art as models for a new world rather than just self-sufficient. They believe that it was their role and destiny to “undertake the aestheticopolitical organization of the country” to them the Bolsheviks were just a transitory necessity to help destroy the old and bring in the new.¹³

The Minister of Culture at the time, Anatolii Lunacharskii, even supported pluralism among artistic movements.¹⁴ He was in fact instrumental in allowing the avant-garde artists work to the extent they did and saved historic art and architecture from destruction.¹⁵ He also spent 2 million Rubles on the development of new museums and acquisitions of contemporary modern works for them.¹⁶ Under his authority technical school and art studios were established, and at this time practically every member of the avant-garde was involved in teaching or administration. In fact academies that rejected avant-garde art before the Bolshevik Revolution were closed and changed into State Free Art Studios where all artistic viewpoints were taught, from realism to avant-garde. These schools were open to all students, regardless of their prior education or skill. This period of artistic diversity also however marked the point when all of the

¹² Kramer, 1967. Page 162.

¹³ Groys, Boris. *Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Trans. Charles Rougle. Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 1988. Page 22.

¹⁴ Groys, 1988. Page 22.

¹⁵ Heller, 2008. Page 132.

¹⁶ Kramer, 1967. Page 162.

cultural system, including museums, schools, publication and public decoration, were brought under full government control.¹⁷

However, by 1922 the privileged place of the avant-garde began to lose ground. This was in large due to the fact that all the artists couldn't agree on the aesthetic or questions of social or pedagogical nature.¹⁸ In combination with this it is important to remember that before and during this brief period of avant-garde power, academic styles flourished concurrently and there were multiple movements which drew on traditional aesthetic. Artists like Isaak Brodsky and Aleksandr Gerasimov, who in the 1930's were Stalin court painters, were acclaimed for their portraiture and landscapes prior to Revolution, and continued with their style unwaveringly during the avant-garde period.¹⁹ Interestingly enough, it was precisely at the time when avant-garde power began to wane, that a group of artists called Lef, who were associated with the journal *Lef*, proposed Productionism to replace Constructivism.²⁰ To them autonomous artists were reactionary and counterrevolutionary; and the members of this group, which were once again led by Rodchenko, denounced their former allies such as Tatlin for their backwardness. This radical group, among whom Boris Arvatov was a prime example, claimed that artists need to organize life of society down to every detail and thus bring art into harmony with progress; Arvatov even claimed that "Artists must become the colleagues of scholars, engineers, and administrators."²¹ The art ideal he proposed was "restricted to the purely social reality controlled by concrete political forces," thus the power had to lay within these political forces, in this case

¹⁷ Kramer, 1967. Page 162.

¹⁸ Kramer, 1967. Page 163.

¹⁹ Bowlit, John E. "Stalin as Isis and Ra: Socialist Realism and the Art of Design." *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 24 (2002): 35-63. JSTOR. Web. 14 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1504182>>. Page 38.

²⁰ Groys, 1988. Page 24.

²¹ Groys, 1988. Page 25.

the Communist Party, and the artists needed only to fulfill their function as it was established.²² Such ideas seem to be the precursor of the attitude Stalin later takes to art, the main difference of course being in the choice of aesthetic. Nikola Chuzhak, another member of Lef, in one of his articles refers to a Russian poet and philosopher of the later 19th century who at one point said that art needs to fulfill a new function, one of the transformation of reality, thus if the artists shows to everyone how things will be rather than be affected by how they are, only then will he be truly “popular”, meaning of all people (*vsenarodniy*).²³ These ideas are again in line with the direction Soviet art will eventually take; as artists will not be able to simply depict the truth of the moment, but rather they will glorify the “near” future or the present “reality.”

Ultimately, however all these avant-garde movements were brought to a screeching halt: although their popularity was in decline since 1922 it wasn’t until April 23, 1932 that Stalin officially put an end to it, disbanding all artistic groups, and declaring that all “creative workers” will be organized according to profession. This official subordination of all cultural activity to the Party marks the beginning of the Stalin phase in Society culture, and it was done in order to end the bickering and disunity on the cultural front.²⁴ Plus the state could not have an art policy that had the possibility of art for art’s sake, because then the individual influence of the artist will be inaccessible to the people, and available only to the elite. This goes against the principle of art that was developed fully under Stalin; all art had to be made for the people.²⁵ This idea which has strong Communist flavor also has another side to it, for by forbidding individuality and promoting the idea of art for the people, Stalin reinforced art’s role as solely of propagandistic

²² Groys, 1988. Page 26.

²³ Groys, 1988. Page 27.

²⁴ Groys, 1988. Page 33.

²⁵ London, Kurt. *The Seven Soviet Arts*. Trans. Eric S. Bensinger. Westport: Greenwood, 1970. Page 62.

nature, and so subordinate to the desires of the party. On top of that some artists of the avant-garde were considered Trotsky supporters, a political rival of Stalin's; thus in order to undermine the supporters of his oppositions Stalin took matters into his own hands.²⁶ Thus although aspects of "Productionism" were partially in line with the way art was ultimately handled by Stalin, the State did not forget the avant-garde's competition for leadership and put an end to its official status and left little room for it in Russia's new artistic culture under Stalin. One of the main reasons Stalin was able to do this was because by the late 20's key avant-garde artists like Marc Chagall, Vasily Kandinsky, Naum Gabo, Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny) and Pavel Mansurov had abandoned Russia to develop their art abroad. Plus the avant-garde movement was never united in the first place, thus it never had a chance to have true collective power.²⁷

And so Socialist Realism became the official style and anything else was considered an attack on the state, all the various artistic and literary groups were combined into a single Union of Soviet Artists, whose purpose was to now actively take part in building Socialism and supporting the Soviet system.²⁸ The citizens of Russia weren't sad to see the avant-garde go, for they found avant-garde alien to begin with, they preferred and were familiar with the nineteenth-century concept of art one that "favored narrative paintings, florid ornament, sentimental movies and melodrama."²⁹ A visiting Croatian writer, August Cesarec, noticed a similar preference in 1922, when upon his return home he published a series of reports in which he noted that there was not a single worker at the avant-garde exhibit of Larionov, Malevich and Tatlin, but rather

²⁶ Clark, Katerina, E. A. Dobrenko, Andrei Artizov, and Oleg V. Naumov. *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. Page 50.

²⁷ Bowlit, 2002. Page 38.

²⁸ Kramer, 1967. Page 165.

²⁹ Bowlit, 2002. Page 40.

the common public was drawn to Repin, a realist artist of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who was eventually held up as a model for Socialist Realism.³⁰ Thus in the end the preference of the people and the government lined up, although for different reasons: the people who could not relate to the avant-garde art wanted an aesthetic closer to their heart and taste, the government on the other hand wanted to get rid of factional art that vied for power and replaced it with art that was subordinate and could fulfill its propagandistic purpose. So the people approved because art that surrounded them took on the aesthetic they preferred; for the Communist Party this was a large step in the direction they wanted, now art could be better implemented in the control of the public.

But it is also important to mention that avant-garde artists such as El Lissitzky, Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova adjusted their styles and created within the framework of Socialist Realism; designing propaganda magazine *USSR in Construction* using photomontage, collage and typography, they promoted Soviet triumphs (something Socialist Realism calls for) through avant-garde experimentation [fig. 2].³¹ In this manner some avant-garde aesthetic found a role in the design of modern materials such as magazines, while Socialist Realism took over as official art.

Art in China underwent a similar trend; from a muddle of styles and ideas, many of them radical, to an art of prescribed aesthetic and purpose. The early years of 20th century in China are marked by its encounter with Western art, both modern and traditional. With this influx of new styles also came the new medium of oil paint, a completely novel thing to China whose traditional elite art was done mostly in ink. Li Shutong, an artist who traveled to Japan, came

³⁰ Flaker, Aleksandar. "Presuppositions of Socialist Realism." *The Culture of the Stalin Period*. Ed. Hans Gunther. New York: St. Martin's, 1990. 97-109. Page 97.

³¹ Bowlit, 2002. Page 38.

back and introduced ideas of Western painting into art education, such as the practices of painting still life and figure nudes. Overall at this time numerous artists traveled to Europe and Japan and were exposed to new art and ideas they then brought home. Artists were influenced by traditional art, like that of the Renaissance and other realist European movements, but also Modern European painters like Matisse or Picasso. Some embraced the European art styles completely, others tried to integrate them into traditional Chinese art, and of course there were those that stuck to reforming Chinese art from within; but a mood of novelty and reform was in the Chinese art world. Numerous Chinese artists as well as intellectuals traveled outside of the country to study or just visit to see the outside world first hand. Schools were also reformed bringing in Western ideas so that people who weren't able to travel were still exposed to them. This period produced traditional style oil paintings like *Slave and Lion* [fig. 3] by Xu Beihong, Modern art influenced paintings like *Portrait of Miss L* [fig. 4] by Guan Zilan that is reminiscent of Matisse's *Girl with a Black Cat* as well as paintings like *Rustic Scene* [fig. 5] by Cheng Zhang of the Reformist School which combined tradition with Western ideas.

This multitude and diversity of styles continued into the 1930's as Chinese art transformed, reformed, pushed forward, went back to its roots and all in all explored its possibilities. This period also saw the rise of the Modern Woodcut Movement, led by Lu Xun, its origins date to 1927, a time of violence, occupation and death. Although it was Li Shutong who designed and carved his own blocks by 1912 (it is traditional for an artist to do the design and for craftsmen to carve) and exhibited European prints in 1918, Lu Xun was the one to see the education and propaganda potential of woodblock.³² He had great interest in European, American and Russian woodcarvings; collecting and studying them, exhibiting them, creating his

³² Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*. Berkeley: University of California, 1996. Page 80.

own and teaching the technique to others. In the late 1920's he with five young writers founded the Morning Flower Society that produced five volumes introducing foreign woodcuts. The last volume was on the topic of Soviet graphic arts, including the avant-garde art of the pre-Stalin era, in it he points out that avant-garde art has an appropriate place during the time of destruction of the old, while the time of reconstruction that follows needs Realism.³³ Although he did not believe that art should only have a revolutionary message, it was the Soviet works that inspired the idea that art and politics can be combined. He spread these ideas in China by translating numerous Russian texts that stressed realism in art and the need for unity in art and in production, and was also involved with a small show of Soviet revolutionary prints, cartoons and posters (most of which he supplied from his collection). This precursor to what art came to be under the Communist regime of Mao, was one of the first main channels that brought Soviet ideas of art into China, and stressed the political possibility of art.

The early thirties saw a rise of numerous woodcut groups creating rebellious art and organizing exhibitions to show foreign woodcuts. The ideas spread and although numerous groups were extinguished, often brutally, other sprang up to take their place. This movement also had factions and competition, which sometimes led to betrayal of one group by another, but that didn't prevent this movement from having force, and so the ideas and new technique spread. Some artists produced very crude prints while other developed a fine technique influenced by artists like Gibbings, Favorsky and Kravchenko, it often depended on what training was accessible, but this shows that even within the same medium there was room for different

³³ Sullivan, 1996. Page 80-81.

aesthetics. Artists expressed themselves in whatever means they could, despite the possible threat of imprisonment or death.³⁴

This movement demonstrates a parallel between the situation in Russia and China, although numerous circumstances and details are obviously different, the important similarity is that a large number of artists wanted to be active in the reform of society and although there wasn't agreement on how to do that, the artists saw new potential for their art to fulfill an important role. This desire to be an active part of something greater and something that helps all of society will eventually be harnessed by Mao and Stalin, however they will trick the artists into believing they are doing something for the common good and are influencing the course of change while in reality they are propagating ideas and reinforcing the power of a dictator.

The ideas of art with a new purpose were given the possibility to evolve even further during the years of the war. In 1937 the Sino-Japanese War began, and China which barely had a chance to get on its feet was thrown into chaos again, this obviously had a large impact on all aspects of society, including the arts. From the start of the war the art world of China was thrown into chaos with the closing and relocation of art school to the Interior; the cultural centers of China's East coast which have seen the most art development in the recent years were invaded, creating a mass exodus. This exodus had a large impact because artists and all the new ideas were scattered across the country. However, the spread of ideas wasn't even since numerous artists of course chose to stay and schools migrated in groups taking their ideas from one place to another; this accounts for the differences in the development that took place in the various cities at this time.

³⁴ Sullivan, 1996. Page 83, 87.

The beginning of the war marks another important change as the staff and students of closed art schools mobilized to produce propaganda paintings against the war. An unfinished painting by Tang Yihe titled *Propagating Resistance against Japan, July 1937* shows numerous people with tools in hand walking in a line, united against the enemy and ready to do their part by creating propaganda to unite the people.³⁵ Paintings were commissioned in Hankou that depicted the Chinese leader at the time, Chiang Kaishek, on horseback leading his united people against the enemy. Liu Zian's woodcut titled *Consolidate Our Unity Fight the Japanese Aggressors to the End* [fig. 6] is an example of both propaganda art and Modern Woodcut movement art. Other propaganda groups emerged and the members strongly encouraged all artists to join; one artist Wu Dayu painted a large bloodstained hand with the caption "Our nation's defense is not in our northern mountains nor in our eastern seas, but in our hands!" this call for patriotism and participation was echoed across the country.³⁶ Propaganda is nothing new to humanity and is not an invention of a society of Communist ties, but this positive attitude towards propaganda is very important to note, for it will eventually be used both in Communist Russia and Communist China in relation to every aspect of life, and not just during a time of war. So it is important to remember that in these cultures, propaganda had a very positive connotation and was seen as a way of mobilizing the people.

During this time of war and propaganda art, the art world was still fractured and not unanimous as each city had its own variations and influences. For the purpose of the paper I will focus on the art produced in Yan'an which by 1936 was an established Communist base. By 1938 numerous artists made their way here, many of whom were part of the radical woodcut groups just discussed. In their company was Wang Junchu who in 1930 was fired from his

³⁵ Sullivan, 1996. Page 91.

³⁶ Sullivan, 1996. Page 91.

teaching post at the Beijing Academy due to his leftist activity, and Liu Xian a protégé of Lu Xun who upon his arrival to Yan'an soon became an art administrator. The Lu Xun Academy of Arts and Literature or “Lu Yi” was established here, its dean Zhou Yang later claimed: “I put forth every effort to make myself an interpreter, propagandist and practitioner of Mao Zedong’s ideas and policies” even though at this time Mao’s policies weren’t fully shaped yet. Artists who taught at this school gained full control of art and art schools once the Communist Party took over all of China.³⁷

During the early years of the war the Communists were careful not to be too rigid as communication with government controlled areas were open and they had to be careful not to scare people away. During this time there was liberal debate among the artists and intellectuals about numerous questions on art including aesthetic, new influences and how to maintain a standard while providing imagery peasants could understand. The art education as administered in this city has numerous parallels with how education was ultimately shaped in the Communist party. While being trained in woodcuts, propaganda wall paintings and New Year prints (traditional prints that common people used to decorate their houses, for example the door god print was put on doors for good luck), artists were also encouraged to take their works to peasants to get feedback. One artist Gu Yuan, recalls how he went to live with a family and did woodcuts of their daily life for them to see and criticize. If they did not understand something he would make notes and try to modify his technique or approach, he would also label some images with words so that the peasants could learn to read.³⁸ Later under Mao’s regime it was mandatory for art students to go live and work with the people. Sometimes for as long as a few years artists were sent into the rural areas of China to learn how to draw art for the people as well as teach art

³⁷ Sullivan, 1996. Page 101.

³⁸ Sullivan, 1996. Page 102.

to the people. This practice was beneficial to the government for many reasons: it increased the number of artists producing art for the people, artists worked for free with the peasants thus increasing productivity and it reinforced the idea that art needs to fulfill a purpose and be accessible to the masses. Thus it is important to note that this practice had early beginnings and wasn't implemented out of the blue after Mao came into power, even before the Communist regime completely took over a certain attitude was establishing among the artists that they need to create art that is not elitist and serves the people.

By 1942 however, the liberal atmosphere was extinguished in the Communist capital: there was no more debates and Mao began implementing a radical and uncompromising policy. The transition was not smooth but the Communists even then did not accept questioning of their policies. A number of writers spoke out, among who was Wang Shiwei, who insisted that art and politics need to be kept apart, in 1944 he was shot. The writers' claim for creative independence led to Mao's Rectification Campaign, during which his famous Talks on Art and Literature were given on May 2nd and 4th of 1942.³⁹ In them he stressed the importance of creating art for the people, which he lists as workers, peasants, soldiers and revolutionary cadres. He spoke of the struggle to liberate the Chinese people and the need to enlighten them, while stressing that by refusing to learn of the lives of these people through experience the artist or writer will be unable to create effective art that will help enlighten and free them. Failure to do so results in meaningless art and ignorance on the part of its creator.⁴⁰ This talk had great impact, and ideas expressed here will later be translated into policies Mao enforces on all creative workers of China.

³⁹ Sullivan, 1996. Page 102.

⁴⁰ Zedong, Mao. "On Literature and Art" *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetic and Criticism*. Ed. Berel Lang and Forrest Williams. New York: David McKay Company, 1972. 108-119.

As mentioned earlier different regions had different developments, thus it is important to note that Communist control at this time was not all encompassing. For example images of suffering refugees and other war art depicting the devastation of war were showcased in a series of exhibitions which drew thousands of viewers, and even led to an exhibit exchange with Moscow. The Communist regime considered these images negative, since only positive images were allowed unless they were depicting hardships in non-Communist occupied areas.⁴¹ Thus although the Communists have claimed the Woodcut movement for their own, the more accomplished woodcuts were created in areas that have not yet been “liberated” by Communists.⁴² Another important factor to note is that at this time of war, China was cut off from the West and the art movements there, oil paint was scarce and the artists had to rely on Chinese methods to express themselves.⁴³

Following the end of the war with Japan in 1945, Chinese artists and intellectuals saw this time as the opportune moment for reconstruction.⁴⁴ However, by this time Communism has been able to gain power to rival the central government, and of course there was dispute among the different groups about who is the best leader for China, and so the Civil War ensued. This period once again was one of suffering and poverty for the majority of people, and the art still reflected this sorrowful tone. This can be seen in woodcuts such as the ones by Yang Keyang, titled *The Professor Sells his Books* or *Morning, Teacher Zhang* of 1947, these depict the impoverished state of intellectuals. The first one, as the title describes, depicts a professor selling his books and shows how dire things were, that a respectable man must sell the tools of his trade in order to survive. The second one carries a similar message, as two young school boys greet

⁴¹ Sullivan, 1996. Page 104.

⁴² Sullivan, 1996. Page 103.

⁴³ Sullivan, 1996. Page 112.

⁴⁴ Sullivan, 1996. Page 113.

their teacher with respect as is proper; however they find their teacher partaking in the demeaning act of begging for money. However, these images of sorrow, pain and horrible state of society become a thing of the past as the Communists finally emerge victorious, declare the People's Republic, liberate all of China, and usher in the beginning of a new and glorious age for China; or at least that is how art will depict history from now on under the strong guiding hand of Mao.

Art with a Purpose

The art cultures of China and Russia prior to the rise of Mao and Stalin have a number of similarities. The main one being that both countries had a diverse and experimental art culture in which numerous artists wanted to be an active part in the reform of society, either by being open to exploring new methods and artistic styles or by embracing art of political nature in order to mobilize the masses, whether to fight in a war, or just participate in improving society. One difference of course is that Russia has a longer history of art that is influenced by European styles such as classical and realist oil paintings, while China only had a brief encounter with oil and Western painting before it was thrown into turmoil that ultimately led to the rise of Communism. However, the rise of Socialist Realism as official art in both countries can be explained by these similarities and difference. In the case of Russia realism and classicism dated back to the 18th century, thus this style as already mentioned was closer to the hearts of Russian people than the avant-garde. When Socialist Realism was proclaimed the official art in the early 1930's many artists and writers believed it to be a viable means of communicating with the masses. In the case of China, the turbulent years of war cut off China from Western Art of oil paint, however foreign ideas, especially those of Soviet art were rampant, as was already discussed in relation to the Modern Woodcut movement. Thus, when Mao came to power, he

borrowed from the Soviet model, which has embraced Socialist Realism almost 20 years prior; although China's art inevitably developed different aesthetic due to its history of art.

Nevertheless, despite the aesthetic differences both Chinese and Russian art under the regimes of Mao and Stalin was art with a purpose.

The Cult of the Leader and Rewriting History

One of the main ways both Stalin and Mao used art is to reaffirm their right to power. In Russia the cult of the leader started with Lenin. Although he was reluctant to promote his image, his supporters and friends saw it as a way to create prophetic stature for him and gain power for the Communist Party. During his life time numerous official portrait were produced, and as his health declined reproductions of his images increased. In the homes and offices of the citizens Lenin's image occupied corners where religious icons once hung, such spaces were known as "Red Corners." After Lenin's death Stalin took the cult of Lenin even further and had his body embalmed and put into a mausoleum despite the wishes of Lenin himself and his family.⁴⁵ At this time he also increased the production of all sorts of public art in the form of busts, posters, banners, etc. that showed official images of Lenin. As the images of Lenin increased so did those that depicted Stalin at his side, propagating the illusion that they were very close friends and political allies.⁴⁶ In reality Lenin saw faults in Stalin and a few months before his lethal stroke he wrote the following that he was going to read at the Twelfth Congress of the Party advocating for Stalin's removal as General Secretary: "Stalin is too rude, and this fault, fully tolerable in our midst and in the relations among us Communists, becomes intolerable in the office of the General Secretary." But the stroke came before Lenin could utter these words, and for reasons

⁴⁵ Heller, 2008. Page 152.

⁴⁶ Heller, 2008. Page 154.

debated by historians they were never published.⁴⁷ This instance shows that Lenin did not see eye to eye with Stalin, but that is not what the art showed. In the early 20's following Lenin's death manipulated photographs appeared showing Stalin at Lenin's side, one of the famous ones depict them at Gorky Park, historians now agree that that meeting probably never happened and Stalin was montaged into the photograph.

Such techniques helped Stalin take advantage of the factions within the party and take over after Lenin's death, he was also able to get rid of Trotsky, his main opponent. However, the fact that there was another strong candidate for power in the first place needed to be erased from the public's mind. And so Stalin used art to rewrite history in order to show that his ascension to power was the obvious course of events. For this reason the late 20's and early 1930's saw a rise of paintings that depicted these two leaders together. Vepkhvadze's painting, *Stalin meets Lenin*, depicts Stalin and Lenin shaking hands in a central position of the painting at their mythic first meeting at the conference in Finland in the year 1905. Sokolov's painting, *Triumphant Return* [fig. 7], shows Lenin arriving at the station in Petrograd on April 1917 after his years in exile surrounded by a celebratory crowd waving red flags; Stalin is depicted standing right behind him also descending from the train, although in reality he was not present in this event. A painting by Kotov even shows Stalin attentively sitting near Lenin's death bed, as the sick Lenin leans on one arm facing Stalin as if conveying something important to him.

Stalin's strategy was to first promote Lenin as the father of the revolution and great leader of the people by mass producing powerful and positive images of him, and then position himself as the right hand man and close friend of Lenin, and thus the only choice as successor.

⁴⁷ Taylor, Brandon. *Art and Literature Under the Bolsheviks*. Vol. I. Concord, MA: Pluto, 1991. Page 198.

The abundance of Lenin images were soon replaced by Stalin's, although a sculpture or portrait of Lenin is often depicted in the background as a reminder of the connection. Stalin further rewrote history using art, through paintings like *Stalin as an Organizer of the October Revolution* [fig. 8], painted by Karp Trokhimenko during the early years of WWII, at this time when morale was growing weak and people began to question their leader, Stalin commissioned a series of paintings that placed him in the heart of the October Revolution, thus reminding people of his importance, in reality however his role in the revolution was very minimal. A later painting by Boschij titled *Stalin in the Civil War*, once again portrays Stalin in a prominent and active role when historically he was never near the front during this war.

Parallel to this editing of history Stalin also promoted his image as a leader, by depicting himself in a variety of archetypes.⁴⁸ Such as the ideologue, which can be seen in paintings where he is shown presiding over congress, or in a portrait such as the one done in 1942 by Gerasimov. In this painting Stalin sits at a desk, in his hand he holds a book, which can be recognized as *The 1936 Constitution* (Stalin Constitution), the desk also holds newspapers, a notebook and letters. This combination of items shows his connection to current affairs, the people, and most importantly the ideology that he holds in his hands and is contemplating.⁴⁹ He is also shown as a progressive in paintings that depict him in settings such as electrical plants, factories or other public projects. Portraits that show him in uniform, often in profile gazing off into the distance depict him as a military hero; following *his* victory in WWII the highest military rank was created for Stalin, the portrait by Irakly Toidze titled *Generalissimo Stalin* [fig. 9] was done to

⁴⁸ Heller, 2008. Page 158.

⁴⁹ Guldberg, Jorn. "Socialist Realism as Institutional Practice: Observations on the Interpretation of the Works of Art of the Stalin Period." *The Culture of the Stalin Period*. Ed. Hans Gunther. New York: St. Martin's, 1990. 149-77. Page 170-171.

commemorate Stalin's achievements.⁵⁰ And of course in combination with images of Stalin's achievements (or his close relation to the people's achievements) and images that depict his strong tie to the ideology, images of Stalin as a friend of the people were created. These images served as a way to connect Stalin to the people; a painting like the one done by Vasily Svarog titled *Stalin Amidst Children in Gorki Park* is a chief example of this, it shows a smiling Stalin flocked by happy children. This idea is also conveyed in a poster done by Grinets [fig. 10] which depicts Stalin with three children; a young boy he embraces in costume of a pilot who clutches a toy airplane with a red star on its wing, a smiling girl who stands close to his side, and another young boy who plays a violin for the pleasure of all three, the red letters read "Thank you to the Party, and thank you to dear Stalin, for a wonderful and happy childhood." This image shows not only the great life and opportunities that people had thanks to the Party/Stalin but also shows Stalin in the role of a father or maybe uncle: a strong, proud and loving figure that provides for the family. A number of these archetypes come together in a painting titled *Leader, Teacher, Friend* [fig. 11] which was executed by Georgiy Shegal. In it we see Stalin at the 1935 Congress of Collective Farm Shockworkers, he is depicted in the presence of peasants who have surpassed their production quotas, they are rewarded with praise in the press, monetary rewards and a meeting with Stalin; the painting captures this very moment where the cultured peasants talk with Stalin who is imparting his wisdom on them in a grandfatherly fashion.⁵¹ The painting promotes the idea of progress in society, to which Stalin is again closely linked, and it also shows his role as not only a wise leader, but also a friend of the people.

⁵⁰ Heller, 2008. Page 159.

⁵¹ Friedberg, Jane. "The Severe Style: In the Russian Tradition?" *The Museum of Russian Art*. Web. 20 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.tmora.org/educationData/JaneFriedman.html>>.

Mao also created a cult of personality for himself, with parallel ends and means, but the ultimate aesthetic produced in China is of course once again greatly influenced by its tradition and history and is not just a copy of Soviet Art. Unlike Stalin, Mao was an integral part of the revolution; however, he too had rivals. And although he was able to get rid of most of them after his rise to power and promote his image as a revolutionary hero, ultimately by the mid 60's his power within the Communist Party began to wane due to the disastrous result of his Great Leap Forward. The catastrophe this radical attempt to modernize caused, led to political pressure on Mao to resign as head of the state.⁵² Around this time is when Khrushchev was purged from the Soviet Communist Party, a visiting Soviet Minister suggested that if Mao was also removed the relationship between China and Russia can improve, this caused Mao to become even more paranoid, although it is almost certain that no one was scheming to remove him for this reason. This led him to believe that he needed to ensure that the spirit of the revolution does not die.⁵³ Ultimately, the political pressure led Mao to start the Cultural Revolution by mobilizing the students to purge and reform the political party. This way he took care of his rivals, but was not the one directly attacking them.

It is important to note that during the 1950's when the Communist Party was establishing its power over all of China, the party allowed for certain flexibility within the arts, because as it was trying to establish the ideas that were developed in the Lu Xun Academy of Art in Yan'an for all of China to follow, it had to deal with a large diversity of artistic tastes. So parallel to what happened in early stages of the Communist regime in Russia, as the government brought all the cultural systems under its control it needed to allow for certain freedom within the art aesthetic

⁵²Heller, 2008. Page 174.

⁵³ Chiu, Melissa, and Zheng Shengtian. *Art and China's Revolution*. New York: Asia Society, 2008. Page 43.

so as to not ruin the newly established relationship with the artists.⁵⁴ That is why Socialist Realism at this time had strong Chinese characteristics. The Cultural Revolution brought an end to this as all of art was brought under rigid political control, and artists who stepped out of line were swiftly and often brutally punished.

The Cultural Revolution saw a new surge of art promoting Mao. In order to reaffirm his power which he felt was threatened, as Stalin did, Mao relied heavily on art to promote his image to the masses. And like Stalin he chose to rewrite history through images while simultaneously promoting a positive image of himself. Mao's image is believed to be one of the most widely reproduced in the world. His image was hung everywhere, if you didn't display it then you would likely come to regret it. Li Huasheng, an artist of this time recalls that how one displayed the portrait was also very important, one could not hang anything above it, and the frame could not have any dents in it.⁵⁵

Unlike Stalin, Mao had no depictions of him wearing medals or distinctive regalia, and whether he was depicted smiling or stern he came off more as a father figure rather than "an iron-fisted Big Brother."⁵⁶ The Red Guard (what the revolutionary students came to call themselves) wore "Mao Jackets" as a uniform as a way to show their revolutionary spirit. This type of jacket was in fact typical uniform during the time of the Japanese invasion, Mao's choice to wear it almost always served as a reminder of his revolutionary and heroic past. The Little Red Books mentioned earlier were also a must for the Red Guard; they were a collection of quotes by Chairman Mao, which were published in several editions and under various titles, but the content

⁵⁴ Galikowski, Maria. *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*. Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 1998. Page 9.

⁵⁵ Silbergeld, Jerome, and Gong Jisui. *Contradictions: Artistic Life, the Socialist State, and the Chinese Painter Li Huasheng*. Seattle and London: University of Washington, 1993. Page 41.

⁵⁶ Heller, 2008. Page 177.

didn't range much. They were often in red binding and depicted Mao's face. Lin Biao who at the time was a close colleague of Mao's ordered the Red Guard to read it daily.⁵⁷ Li Huansheng, the artists mentioned earlier, recalls an incident when a Red Guard asked him a question relating to this book, if he was unable to answer he would not be allowed to cross the road.⁵⁸ Mao badges and pins were also very popular, ranging in size, material and design; these became a frenzy and over 90% of the Chinese population wore them.⁵⁹ The books and badges were even exported to the Third World to spread Mao's ideas. However, by 1969 production of the badges was restricted, possibly due to need of precious materials for China's industry, but it could have also been due to Mao's growing distrust of Lin Biao, who was responsible for the Mao badge frenzy.⁶⁰ This year also marked the end of the mobilization phase of the Cultural Revolution, which was necessary as the revolutionary frenzy of the Red Guards was getting out of hand.⁶¹ Nonetheless, although the Red Guards attacked political leaders, intellectuals, regular people, and even rival Red Guard factions as being counterrevolutionary, they never turned on their glorious leader who by this time was deified.

While Mao's image was mass produced on posters, badges and books there were also numerous paintings commissioned, in fact at the start of the Cultural Revolution Mao's portrait became virtually the only subject of paintings.⁶² In this manner the craze of the Cultural Revolution that was initiated by Mao, took the cult of the leader further than Stalin. Images of Mao were produced from the start of his rise to power, however during the Cultural Revolution this was taken to an extreme. One of the most famous depictions of Mao was painted by Liu

⁵⁷ Heller, 2008. Page 179.

⁵⁸ Silbergeld, 1993. Page 41.

⁵⁹ Heller, 2008. Page 181.

⁶⁰ Heller, 2008. Page 182

⁶¹ Chiu, 2008. Page 46.

⁶² Chiu, 2008. Page 94.

Chunhua, then a young art student, in 1967 and is titled *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* [fig. 12]. This is an example of similar art we saw in Russia, one that rewrites history. In an interview Liu Chunhua states that everyone knew that Liu Shaoqi led the workers strikes in Anyuan, but that recent research conducted by students and universities discovered that Mao in fact went there seven times and it was then concluded that it was in fact Mao, not Liu Shaoqi, who led the Anyuan workers movement.⁶³ This movement was crucial to the Chinese Revolution and the rise of Communism, and Liu Shaoqi was in fact gotten rid of in 1966 when he was replaced by Lin Biao and placed under house arrest disappearing from political view. Prior to this he was officially named as Mao's successor, but in the end Mao saw a threat in him, and had him removed; this fate will eventually fall on Lin Biao as well. In 1961 there was actually a painting created by Hou Yimin, titled *Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Coal Miners*, during the Cultural Revolution Hou paid dearly for creating this work.⁶⁴ Thus in order to completely remove Liu Shaoqi as a rival during the Cultural Revolution Liu Chunhua was commissioned to create a painting depicting Mao going to Anyuan to start the workers' rebellion; and in this manner Liu Shaoqi was not only pushed out of politics but also history. Posters of this painting soon were given out free with copies of newspapers and ultimately it is estimated that 900 million reproductions of this painting were created, captions under these prints retold the new version of history.⁶⁵ In this manner Mao was able to rewrite history and control reality. This painting became a model painting and was said to be revolutionary down to the way the folds are depicted, every aspect of the painting supported the fact that Mao was the one striding forward bringing winds of change, revolutionary ideas and a bright future to the people.

⁶³ Chiu, 2008. Page 77.

⁶⁴ Silbergeld, 1993. Page 44.

⁶⁵ Chiu, 2008. Page 94-95.

In connection to this idea of Mao bringing brightness and revolutionary enlightenment to the people, the sun became a symbol for him. It often became the background for Mao's image, or in some cases even the presence of a red sun signaled to the people a connection to Mao, he even came to be called the never setting Red Sun. In one poster his portrait is depicted in red as a large smiling face floating above a mass of happy Chinese people with books in their hands or wearing the revolutionary uniform. A painting that is titled *Chairman Mao, the Reddest Red Sun in Our Heart is with Us* [fig. 13] exemplifies this idea both in title and in image; a waving and smiling Mao is surrounded by a mass of people with red bandanas and with Little Red Books in their hands, raised high above their heads. In line with this, a song titled "The East is Red" was broadcasted in the beginning of every newscast and at the commencement of events, those in ear shot would stand at attention and sing along "The East is Red/ The sun is rising/ China has brought forth Mao Zedong/ He brings blessings to the people/ Hurrah, he is the people's great savior." At this point Mao was not only the savior of China but of humankind; it is not hard to draw parallels with the role Jesus plays in Christian religion. This deification is parallel to how in Russia images of Lenin and Stalin replaced religious icons. In this manner Mao and Stalin basically created a secular religion presided by living gods.

But in order to not remove himself too far from the people paintings such as *Forging Ahead in Wind and Waves* were created. Here Mao is promoting a friendly image, a man of the people. The scene depicts Mao in a bathrobe surrounded by youth after his swim across the Yangtze River, this event actually did happen, however he swam surrounded by bodyguards, not smiling children. A painting done by Shi Lu in 1959, titled *Fighting in Northern Shaanxi*, done in a more traditional aesthetic this picture depicts Mao standing on a mountain top looking contemplative as other people finish ascending. It was later heavily critiqued as

counterrevolutionary for depicting Mao too removed from the people. *The Spirit of Yan'an Shines Forever* [fig. 14] is another painting that depicts Mao surrounded by smiling people, this time he is working with them, his stature is increased to show his importance, but he is among the people and knows how to do good labor just like them. The reference to Yan'an also connects this painting to the times of war when the Communists were based in this city, thus this painting remind people that those revolutionary are not over, and the revolutionary character needs to be carried on forever. This painting also shows how Russian Socialist Realism aesthetic in China sometimes was integrated with influence of traditional Chinese art; in this case the style shows influence of woodcuts, this blend is the reason why the outline of the figures is more solid. This painting also exemplifies the three characterizes Jiang Qing, Mao's last wife who had a very large impact on the arts of China, said that every good painting should have: red, smooth, glowing. These three characteristics were to convey the proper mood and revolutionary message to the masses. These types of paintings gave the people the illusion that Mao is not only the leader (or savior of humanity), but also their friend, and in fact a lot like them.

Like Stalin, Mao also had images of him at places of progressive projects, such as the one titled *Shining Path Glittering Future* in which a smiling Mao is once again surrounded by happy people, but this time in a large, clean and modern looking factory with more saluting workers in the background. Images of him giving guidance to revolutionaries or preaching ideology to the masses were also prominent. And in this manner Mao, just like Stalin, was able to rally the people behind him. The difference as already mentioned is mostly in the aesthetic and medium differences, not in the ultimate purpose the art served. Also, Mao chose a more friendly and fatherly image, whereas Stalin who also used this archetype promoted himself equally as a more

stoic and serious figure. And as already mentioned the cult of Mao almost got out of hand, and for this reason his deification was pushed farther than Stalin's in Russia.

It is also important to note that in both countries the image of the leader was very important and for that reason every depiction was always scrutinized. If the artist did something that the Party was not pleased with the image would not be allowed and the artist could be subject to punishment and public denouncement. In fact in China only people deemed revolutionary enough could depict Mao, and at the time of the Cultural Revolution it was the young generation of the Red Guards who were in charge, many of the older masters were often barred from depicting Mao.⁶⁶ Liu Chunhua, the artist mentioned earlier who painted on the topic of Mao's trip to Anyuan, mentions in his interview that he was always taught by teachers and elders that painting a picture of Mao was not to be taken lightly, he recalls how as a child he depicted Mao twice, and both times he was severely scolded by his mother.⁶⁷ Throughout the regimes of both Mao and Stalin the fact never changed that their image could only be depicted in the correct fashion, the problem was that the guidelines were often changed. The revered images of these two leaders were very important to their desire to remain in control, and for that reason what the artists depicted was closely monitored, lest an artist produce a work that makes a negative contribution to the leader's reputation.

Socialist "Reality" and Role Models for the Masses

In addition to serving as a means of controlling history and the public image of the leader, art also sent a message to the people by depicting role models for the masses, as well as the socialist "reality" of the present or the not so distant "future." Andrei Zhdanov, the secretary

⁶⁶ Chiu, 2008. Page 10-11.

⁶⁷ Chiu, 2008. Page 122.

of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, who had a large impact on cultural policy, at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow in 1934 said that, “Soviet literature must be able to show our heroes, must be able to catch a glimpse of tomorrow.”⁶⁸ And in China Mao himself emphasized the need to reform art so that it is art for the people and by the people, and shows things that are important to them. What is important to the people is however obviously dictated by the Communist Party. As already mentioned neither the Soviet nor the Chinese Communist Party tolerated negative depictions of life on their soil. Propaganda art showed how things were bad in America or elsewhere, but in China and Russia there were only smiling red faces and bright, hardworking people.

One subject of this art was the collectivization of farm or other industries. It depicted the Communist idea that all means of production are shared by the people, and so these paintings showed how this new approach to ownership was a positive change for the people, and for all of Motherland since progress of one group of peasants and workers is the progress of the whole nation. Tung Cheng Yi’s *Commune Fish Pong* [fig. 15] and Zakhar Pichurgin’s *The Collective Farm at Work* [fig. 16] both exemplify the benefit of working together and working hard. In the Russian work by Pichurgin we see a large field being harvested by a group of people; children, men and women are all depicted performing various tasks, getting the job done. The Chinese painting is actually from the Peasant’s Art Movement, when the government encouraged all people, especially peasants to partake in making wholesome Communist art. This style, basically invented by the Communists, once again mixes Socialist Realism ideas with elements of aesthetics that have a long history. The large stretched net is filling with an abundance of fish, and the viewer can see the strain it takes for all the people to keep hold of it. What this collective

⁶⁸ Bowlit, 2002. Page 40.

activity shows is that when working together, one can achieve greater feats, for one or two people would be unable to make a catch that large.

In combination with this other images such as *We Will Rebuild Everything* [fig. 17] by Fedor Antonov and *I am Seagull* [fig. 18] by Pan Jianjun show that great feats can also be achieved by people who possess heroic qualities. These two images depict women high on telephone poles fixing or installing something; and in this manner thanks to their knowledge, capabilities and hardworking nature a service is done for all people. The one by Pan Jianjun also adds an element of danger and urgency as a rain storm rages in the background. Antonov's poster focuses more on the idea of progress and new construction, as is echoed by the scene in the background which shows outlines of new modern constructions. These posters also show that there was propaganda art directed at females, encouraging them to take an active part in society, for in both Russia and China they were able to get an education and were encouraged to be as much of a contributor to society as their male counterparts, although of course in practice equality wasn't complete.

Posters and art depicted a range of role models to account for all the professions the Party was trying to encourage, especially if there was a specific need to be fulfilled. A Russian poster done in 1943, during a time of war, reads "Forward for the Sake of Motherland!" [fig. 19] in the foreground there is a soldier in uniform looking back and holding a gun high as if he is signaling to others not in the picture frame. A number of guns with bayonets frame the lower corners of the poster to show that he is not alone. Behind the soldier stands a Bogatir, or traditional Russian warrior, mirroring the uplifted and dynamic pose. Here the hero is a soldier, defending the motherland in a time of war. The presence of the Bogatir in the background is one

of the interesting developments in Communist art. In theory Communism rejects ideas of the feudal or bourgeois past, and the Communist Parties both in Russia and China often attacked things of old tradition. Jiang Qing, who implemented Mao's ideas and ran the arts, in an address to artistic workers in 1966 stated, "We should not lavish praise on foreign bourgeois art and feudal art...the kind of art we need is art that serves socialism as well as workers peasants, and soldiers. It is necessary to create art that encourages the people to advance."⁶⁹ The irony though is sometimes they had to make use of old ideas in order to encourage the people. Because ultimately, both countries could not escape their cultural ties, and what's more important is that it was beneficial for the Communists to sometimes embrace certain traditional ideas or symbols. In the case of this poster the presence of the Bogatir is something all Russians would recognize as they are prominent heroes of history and folk tales. A painting done by Viktor Vasnetsov in 1898, titled *Three Warriors (Three Bogatirs)* [fig. 20] depicts three impressive male figures sitting astride powerful horses keeping a look out for invaders, the three figures are Alesha Popovich, Dobrynia Nikitich, and Ilya Muromets, heroes of old Rus and folk tales. This painting was very familiar to the Russian public and many people had reproductions of it in their home. In this manner the poster is creating the idea that if one becomes a soldier then they can be like these great heroes and defend their country from invaders. Thus the Communist Party is using a traditional idea to appeal to the people, and to encourage them. As already mentioned Socialist Realism won in Russia in large part because it visually appealed to the masses. In China the return of traditional aesthetics and imagery happened for the same reason. As long as it wasn't contradictory to the Communist Party, then those traditional aesthetics and symbols can be used to better communicate with the masses.

⁶⁹ Chiu, 2008. Page 221

Images of young pioneers and revolutionaries were also prominent in both countries. These were a way to target the masses from an early age, and as exemplified by the Cultural Revolution, the youth are the ones that were easiest to influence due to the fact that they grew up surrounded by propaganda, and didn't have to adjust to it as the older generation did. A Russian example of this is a poster titled *Long Live Young Pioneers* [fig. 21], it depicts three youths in military costume walking forward, smiling and saluting while carrying a big red flag with the images of Stalin and Lenin, each is also wearing the signature red scarf to signify their connection to the Party. This image encourages the youth to study and embrace the Communist ideas of the leaders as well as start thinking early about what role they can fulfill once they come of age. The Chinese poster targeting youths [fig. 22] depicts a young girl, also with a red scarf holding an open book looking off into the distance with a serious look on her face, the background behind her depicts figures in heroic and active stances, beneath this all red characters say: "Read revolutionary books, learn from Revolutionaries and become an heir of the Revolution." This poster encourages the same type of activity: the study of the ideology which leads to an active and positive role in society. It is important to note that all the posters discussed so far in this part of the paper depict willing and active people that choose to serve their country and are doing a good job of it, and whether with stern or joyous expressions all these figures have a purpose and a role to play. They are not idle, they seem knowledgeable in what they are doing (thanks to the education provided by the generous Communist Party) and they are not lacking necessities such as food, water or shelter; overall they are model citizens in a society that is progressing and not lacking.

This sense of stability while the country is in progress is a contradiction to the reality, in which case both Stalin's and Mao's Five Year Plans caused famines and hardship, because in

reality the countries could not keep up with their plans. This illusion is further propagated by images such as the painting by Aleksandr Laktionov titled *New Apartment* [fig. 23] and the Chinese poster that reads “Happy Life Given to us by Chairman Mao” [fig. 24]. The Chinese poster shows a happy family of five having a nice dinner in their nicely furnished apartment; the picture of Mao hangs on the wall, this shows both the family’s respect, and as the poster says gratitude; but also includes Mao in the family scene. The painting by Laktionov shows a part of the apartment as a family moves into their new place with all of their belongings. The way the artist cropped the painting brings the focus on the family, but also suggests a very nice and spacious new place to live in. Among their possessions are articles such as books, an instrument and a globe showing that the family is educated; the presence of a partially unrolled poster and the image of Stalin also show that this family is a devoted Communist family. The young boy carefully holds up the painting of Stalin, as if asking his mother where to put this treasured artifact. Here once again the family is shown in a setting that demonstrates that they are not wanting, and the presence of an image of Stalin is similar to the presence of a portrait of Mao in the poster; in both cases it shows the viewer that this family got there by following their leaders, and everything they have is thanks to what those leaders do for the country. However, as history shows the conditions for most people during those times did not match these images, especially in times of hardship and turmoil, both of which were present in real life, although not acknowledged in the arts.

The only images that were allowed to have anything negative were those that depicted the enemy; and even then images usually hinted to the threat of the enemy, or called for mobilization against one, but did not depict them or their way of life. A painting done by Shen Jiawei, titled *Standing Guard for our Great Motherland* [fig. 25] depicts three soldiers at a watch tower

keeping an eye on the Soviet border, this was done at a time when Chinese and Soviet relations weren't smooth. Here the enemy is not depicted, but the atmosphere and the watchful faces of the soldiers warn the viewer of the possibility of danger. A painting such as this calls to attention the need for the people to stay united and do their part so as to not succumb to the enemy. In Russia posters, such as the one that reads "Be on guard, these days the walls have ears, it starts with gossip and chatter and ends with TREASON...don't blabber!" [fig. 26] convey a similar message. The only thing it depicts is a woman with a finger to her lips shushing the viewer, however, it reminds the viewer that there is an enemy, and the enemy may be nearby. In this manner these posters reminded the viewer of the presence and threat of the enemy, who is the antithesis of all that Communism stands for, the hated and feared "other." Through this technique the Communist society was emphasized as the perfect, natural and correct way of being, but there was also a reminder that all that the people hold dear could be destroyed by the enemy, which seeks to ruin great Communism. This constant reminded of the "other" also allowed the Party to target its enemies within, claiming people to be an enemy of the state or a traitor. And this wasn't just reserved for political rivals that needed to be removed; any person could have been labeled thusly and in fact many were; as punishment they were imprisoned, sent to labor camps, denounced or executed for their treason. This technique also reflects the fact that the Communist Party tolerated no criticism or challenge of its power.

In both China and Russia art became a means to "shape" reality and control the masses. Although what the art depicted did not change reality, these images in combination with controlled education gave Mao and Stalin the ability to create new "truths" and have power over the masses. The images could reach a large number of people, and with the new added bonus of mass reproduction, Stalin and Mao were able to further increase their reach of influence. It is

important to remember that the artwork did not exist in a vacuum and other factors contributed to the control of the people, such as education, but without art the other factors would have been lacking in their ability to affect people on such a grand scale.

The image Mao and Stalin created of society and themselves remained intact until after their death. In the case of Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, didn't wait long after his death to start dismantling Stalin's cult of personality.⁷⁰ Lenin's reputation as the father of Communist ideology in Russia remained intact, as a justification for Communism's right to continue to maintain power. But all of Stalin's atrocities were brought to light as a way to blame him for all things that have gone wrong, and all the violence and suffering that the Russian people lived through under the Communist regime, in this manner the new leadership hoped to gain the trust of the people. This period brought on the destruction of many of the monuments and artifacts that bore Stalin's image, and his body was removed from its place next to Lenin.⁷¹ Calculating the number of victims during Stalin's regimes has proven difficult, the first problem is what figures to include; should the deaths caused by the famine that was caused by Stalin's policies be included, or should they be rejected on the basis that the famine was a latent effect of Stalin's plan, and how does one calculate an accurate number of deaths due to the labor camps and prisons, as well as executions. The task is problematic due to lack of accurate or trustable sources. However, despite the disagreement among scholars on an exact figure most of the estimates go into the millions. So how is it possible that a man responsible for so many deaths and hardships was so revered by the people? Vagif Samadoghlu, the son of a famous Azerbaijani poet, who was 14 at the time of Stalin's death recounts that day and the funeral that followed. People were in shock and disbelief, his father even yelled at him "Shut up. That's impossible" when he brought him the

⁷⁰ Heller, 2008. Page 158-160.

⁷¹ Golomstock, 1990. Page 110. Heller, 2008. Page 160.

news. School was closed that day and a few days to follow, everyone was crying, and teachers said that US might bomb their country now that Stalin was dead. The whole country was like a child that lost its parents, feeling helpless and vulnerable. The funeral brought 4 million people to Red Square, too much for even such an open space, hundreds were crushed to death. He recalls that immediately after Stalin's death when Khrushchev started to denounce Stalin, he was so outraged that he wanted Khrushchev dead.⁷² As Stalin was denounced it seemed like reality was falling apart, some people ultimately came to terms with the truth, but others refused to give up the glorious image of Stalin.

In 2008 a competition titled "Name of Russia" took place on the state channel on television, it is believed that one in three Russians voted, which adds up to over 50 million, though telephone, texting and internet. Stalin came in as Russia's third greatest man in history. He led the competition from the start and only in the final round did the two Russian heroes, Alexander Nesky and Pyotr Stolypin jump into first and second place from their original places at 9th and 29th respectively. It is suspected that the votes were altered in order to avoid embarrassment for the organizers, in the end Stalin lost only by 5000 votes.⁷³

In the case of Mao, his successor also attacked Mao's reputation, but because China did not have a Lenin to fall back on, Deng Xiaoping had to be careful to present Mao as a great leader, just one that made some grievous mistakes. To this day some people still call him the never setting Red Sun. Liu Chunhua the artist that was eager to paint Mao, recalls that after Mao's crimes have been revealed he spoke to a man whose home was ransacked numerous times

⁷² Samadoghlu, Vagif. "Stalin's Personality Cult: Three Times I Changed My Mind." *Azerbaijan International* 7.3 (1999). *The Azeri Language and Literature*. Web.

<http://azeri.org/Azeri/az_latn/latin_articles/latin_text/latin_73/eng_73/73_stalin_cult.html>.

⁷³ Carbonnel, Alissa De. "Stalin Remains Unsinkable in Popularity Contest." *Top News*. 30 Dec. 2008. Web. 20 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.topnews.in/stalin-remains-unsinkable-popularity-contest-2102133>>.

during the Cultural Revolution, and whose family must have suffered greatly, spontaneously he expressed regret that Mao Zedong allowed for these crimes to be committed, in response the man replies “It wasn’t Mao Zedong who made us suffer, it was the people whom Mao Zedong was against who made us suffer.” To him this answer goes to show how complicated the Cultural Revolution was.⁷⁴ The response of the man, as well as the artists own hesitancy in discussing this topic shows that this phenomenon is indeed complicated. As is the case with Stalin, contemporary attitudes towards Mao are not all negative. This can be seen in the fact that when celebrating the 60th anniversary of the People’s Republic, there was a surge in Mao’s popularity, as he was celebrated as a caring father of the nation in a movie commemorating this event.⁷⁵

The resistance of so many people to give up the at least a somewhat positive perspective on Mao or Stalin shows to what extent Mao and Stalin were successful in controlling their public. Not only did they shape reality according to their will during their lifetime, the legacy they left behind to this day eclipses their true deeds. The art that was produced for this purpose worked, and worked well, shrouding the eyes of the masses, allowing Stalin and Mao to implement the policies they desired.

System of Rewards and Punishment and Mentality of the Masses

The impact and purpose of this art we have addressed, but it is also important to explore the reasons why and how the policies that governed the arts could be implemented so that people followed them. In combination with establishing government systems and organizations that are in charge of monitoring and educating people on the proper things to depict in art, both Russia

⁷⁴ Chiu, 2008. Page 129.

⁷⁵ Lewis, Dana. "60 Years After Revolution, Mao's Popularity Surges in China." *Fox News*. 08 Oct. 2009. Web. 20 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2009/10/08/years-revolution-maos-popularity-surges-china/>>.

and China had a system of rewards and punishments. And the government organizations weren't the only ones keeping check; many people themselves actively supported this system. In both countries it got to the point that many people were scared to step in the wrong direction for fear that someone will see it and report them. This was at its extreme in China during the Cultural Revolution and in Russia during the Great Purge, also known as the Great Terror. Both cases were times when Mao and Stalin felt their power was threatened and they targeted their opponents via the masses. The system that existed however worked throughout their regimes, it was the details that changed, sometimes the rules were harsher and sometimes they were more flexible, and more than once the rules, or those that implement them were changed.

First let's address the system of rewards and the positive aspects that encouraged the willing participation of the people. The willingness of many stems from the fact that they had an internal desire to better their society and be a part of the greater good. Communism as an idea appealed to many of the people because their countries have historically been imperial and not always just to their people. The mood of the revolution was alive when the Communists took over and people were eager for a change for the better. The paper previously discussed the fact that in the beginning both regimes were more lenient with art policies as they implemented the changes, this caused a large number of artists to join because they believed they can make an impact, by the time the policies became constricting, the people were already indoctrinated and many continued participating in the making of propaganda art. So in a way the artists' opinion that they were doing something positive and that they are part of something good and grand, was a reward in and of itself, and the propaganda art they were creating helped continue this illusion. I want to make a disclaimer here to say that obviously not all things they propagated were false, some were just exaggerated but had a truth to them, and great progress did occur both in China

and Russia at certain times, it just came at a great expense. The point I am making is that even during bad times the illusion carried on. In fact in the times of turmoil in the 1930's in Russia as things got worse "the fine and applied arts became more florid, pictorial subjects more abundant, and construction projects more grandiose."⁷⁶

To continue with that thought, one positive thing that the Communist party provided was education and work for all. And although the education was administered by the government and so in many cases it was biased, the people were very happy to have this opportunity that was not available to all before. Liu Chunhua in his interview also mentioned that one of the reasons he had such great love for Mao was because he and all four of his siblings were able to get an education, despite the fact that their family was quite poor. His father even often told him, "If there were no Communist Party, and if there were no Chairman Mao, then there would be no you."⁷⁷ For this reason he was eager to paint Mao from an early age and was thrilled when he got the opportunity to do so. The free education system in Russia called out similar enthusiasm. Knowledge is always empowering, and thus by administering free education for all, the communist parties in Russia and in China were able to encourage willing participation in their citizens. But of course control over the education system ensured that the people learned what the government wanted them to know.

In relation to this the communist parties also provided jobs for all their citizens. Being a positive and active part of society was required by the government, and every person was given a job they can do. The need for propaganda meant that artists were always needed. Both countries also created administrative jobs for artists in addition to supplying them with the opportunity to

⁷⁶ Bowlit, 2002. Page 37.

⁷⁷ Chiu, 2008. Page 123.

do their trade. In China favored artists got jobs in the new cultural bureaucracies that were often accompanied by things such as housing, cars or opportunity to travel.⁷⁸ In Russia this was also the case, as already mentioned the many new academies and cultural organizations that were opened, created many new job openings and were often run by the artists. The creative workers went from not being able to make a living from their talent to a guarantee that they will have a job, as long as they support the party of course. This is quite a change from 1946, when in the turmoil that preceded the Communist regime in China only five writers were able to support themselves by their writing!⁷⁹ Under the control of the Communist however there was something to do for everybody, so people were kept busy since both Mao and Stalin were trying to push their countries forward and to modernize them. The fast pace of modernization did lead to some crises in both countries, but those were the times when propaganda art was in the highest demand in order to continue the illusion that everything is fine.

The cult of the leader and other propaganda was effective as already established and for that reason; for many artists, especially those who grew up during this period, making art for their country was an honor, especially if they had the privilege of depicting their leader. Shen Jiawei, the artist who painted *Standing Guard for our Great Motherland*, states that being a part of the generation “raised under the red flag” he passionately believed in communism.⁸⁰ The artist talks about all the work and preparation that he put into making this painting so that it would meet all the standards. He was rewarded by his painting being hung in a prominent place in an exhibition and approved by Jinag Qing, who during Mao’s reign was the one who chose what art

⁷⁸ Kraus, Richard Curt. "The Waning Authority of the Chinese State as Patron of th Arts." *The Party and the Arty in China The New Politics of Culture (State and Society in East Asia)*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield,, 2004. 37-72. Page 40.

⁷⁹ Kraus, 2004. Page 39.

⁸⁰ Chiu, 2008. Page 133.

is to be considered as the model. Following this it was mass produced as posters and eventually acquired by the museum; it was even printed large scale on a tower facing the Russian border. The artist was obviously excited, however in his case the excitement was dampened because his painting was corrected before it was hung (someone repainted the faces) and he only got recognition from his unit, however at that time everyone believed that all work was revolutionary and accepted that individual recognition or compensation is not guaranteed.⁸¹ Artists lived for the possibility that their work might be chosen as an example and they might be awarded with praise, and most were pleased even by the fact that they were contributing to the society. The artists knew that others have been chose as official artists, or their paintings were considered model paintings, and thus the idea that anyone, no matter where they come from, can create art that is praised by the whole country motivated many artist to depict the ideas the Communist Party wanted them to depict, in the best way they can. In the Soviet Union, awards such as “People’s Artists,” “Honored Art Worker,” and “Hero of Socialist Work” as well as numerous Stalin Prizes were awarded to artists, thus officially recognizing the ideological or aesthetic quality of their work. There were also a multitude of publication praising model works and thousands of art works were exhibited.⁸² The combinations of all of these factors motivated many to willingly create propaganda, and do it by the standards the political party set. It is also important to remind here that propaganda was viewed as a positive means to mobilized people, not as a tool for trickery or evil manipulation.

However, obviously not all artists bought into this, some from the start who did not like that their creative individuality was taken away from them, others became disillusioned with the government when they saw things going wrong. But the Party both in Russia and in China would

⁸¹ Chiu, 2008. Page 144-145.

⁸² Guldberg, 1990. Page 149-150.

not allow artists to create work that criticized them and threatened to shatter their power, nor would they leave artists alone and allow them to create art for art's sake. Such art was too dangerous to be allowed because Mao and Stalin were both very aware the power that art has, and they needed it on a very short leash, doing only what they wanted it to do. That is why any deviants were punished. In both China and Russia someone who has transgressed against the state could face imprisonment, work camps, public denouncement or even execution. The punishment depended on what the crime was, but also often on the mood the country and the punishing officials were in. For example, during the violent and turbulent times of the Cultural Revolution and the Great Terror people died for making the mistake of actively or accidentally stepping out of line.

First off, just as an artist can be publically awarded and praised, the opposite can also happen. In China there were in fact Black Exhibitions (and idea they got from Hitler Germany) where artworks that were considered counter revolutionary would be displayed with black thread X's through them. These were also accompanied with other public denouncements and punishments.⁸³ During the Cultural Revolution the Red Guards often organized public denouncement events where people would gather and a few choice deviants would be verbally and sometimes physically abused. Zhao Yannian, a woodcut artist, recalls the time in early 1967 when he and two other artists Pan Tianshou and Wang Dewei, were taken from their homes by young revolutionaries. When they were taken they were not told where they were going, but on their journey that took days, they were treated with disrespect and neglect. At this time Pan Tianshou was an elderly gentleman but all three were not provided with food or warmth. Finally they got to their destination and were led into a room full of people. It turned out that they were

⁸³ Silbergeld, 2004. Page 41.

chosen for the criticism session by Rebel Factions from their academy, they were to be publically criticized as part of a graduating ceremony of a portrait painting class. After they were verbally criticized, during the duration of which they were made to kneel, they were “thrown to the ground and tread upon” and their “bones ground and ashes scattered” meaning there was also a physical abuse component. Following this they were paraded through the town and finally led to a place with no beds or blankets and left to sleep. The only positive part of the story is that luckily one young man risked his neck to feed them and provide them with blankets. The morning after they were forced to paint large versions of their “black paintings” that would be displayed in the Great Criticism columns, they were then told to go home, and had to figure out how to do so themselves. All three were also forbidden to paint from the start of the Cultural Revolution.⁸⁴ This horrific tale makes it easy to understand why many of those who weren’t enthused to paint for the Communist Party out of their own free will were too scared to go against them and paint something that might lead to this. Li Huasheng also experienced public denouncement for his art, but was only labeled “contradiction among the people” and thus his punishment was unpaid hard labor for a few months during which other workers treated him as a political outcast: he was to work in silence and be last in line for things such as food. This was said to be a way of reeducating him.⁸⁵ After this incident he produced propaganda works by day, trying his best not to displease anybody, and did traditional Chinese paintings, which he was passionate about, by night. And of course if those were ever discovered he would have been in grave danger. But mostly he just tried to stay out of the way and was fearful of commissions because what pleases one faction, can get you killed by another.⁸⁶ Shen Jiawei recalls that when he was painting the painting of the watchful soldier in the tower there were such requirements as

⁸⁴ Chiu, 2008. Page 85-89.

⁸⁵ Silbergeld, 2004. Page 39.

⁸⁶ Silbergeld, 2004. Page 42-43.

the Soviet side of the sky had to have dark clouds and had to be on the right side, not following these guidelines would mean you were committing a “grave error of political incorrectness.”⁸⁷ Thus when painting artists has to be careful to include all the proper details so as to avoid being considered counterrevolutionary, and being innovative was a danger because the unknown element to that increased the chances that somebody would consider it to be a negative depiction. In addition to the specific guidelines on how to paint and what to paint, artists who have “black elements” in their past had to be especially careful. If an artist’s family member was ever labeled an enemy or of bourgeois connection then the artist was likely to be accused of following in their footsteps if anything was depicted incorrectly.⁸⁸

Creative workers of Russia faced similar dangers. In a way the artists were forced into a cultural exile. Ivan P. Bahriany, was a Ukrainian writer whose experiences with the Communist Party required him to escape his native country in order to survive. In an interview conducted by the Committee of Un-American Activities in the United States he recalls his experiences. He and his ideas were publicly denounced as “hostile to the proletariat” in an official Soviet magazine. The article labeled him as a “kurhul” or rich farmer, because his grandfather was a rich man, although Bahriany himself was of proletarian origin. It also said that his work has negative views towards “Soviet reality, the proletariat and towards the process of reconstruction.” Overall he was labeled by the government as a bourgeois nationalist and a sellout to capitalism.⁸⁹ For his deviancy he was put into solitary confinement for 11 months in 1932 and then again imprisoned for 2 years and 7 months in 1938. During the second imprisonment he was physically tortured and interrogated as well as malnourished. He eventually spent 83 days in a death cell with 13

⁸⁷ Chiu, 2008. Page 145.

⁸⁸ Chiu, 2008. Page 107.

⁸⁹ Bahriany, Ivan P. "Control of the Arts in the Communist Empire." Interview by Richard Arens. 03 June 1959: 8-24. Page 3-8.

other men condemned to death. However, he was lucky that at this time Stalin relaxed control a little in order to increase his popularity and Bahriany was pardoned from execution and returned to an ordinary cell where he spent 6 more months, however this time without torture. Eventually due to a lack of proof he was released but kept under close surveillance.⁹⁰ He eventually escaped abroad where he was actively participating with the Ukrainian National Rada which is the coalition of Ukrainian democratic parties in exile. Another weapon they used against him is his own son who he has not seen from an early age, although there is no way telling if it actually is his son, he believes it is. Over public Soviet controlled radio his son first asked him to return home, and when he did not turn up in the Soviet Union his son publically denounced him as a “traitor.”⁹¹ This account once again attests to what sort of system of punishment existed in order to keep creative workers from stepping out of line. This was a means of discouragement to active rebellion but also kept creative workers on their toes, so that they were more attentive to what message their art sends.

This combination of rewards and punishments kept most artists in check, and those that stepped out of line paid dearly for it. And so to stay safe artists either eagerly chased the carrot on the stick, or lived and created with their heads down and mouths shut for fear of being reprimanded. In his novel called *The Captive Mind* Czeslaw Milosz, a Polish poet who also experienced the Soviet Regime, wrote about “the vulnerability of the twentieth-century mind to seduction by sociopolitical doctrines and its readiness to accept totalitarian terror for the sake of a hypothetical future.”⁹² He speaks of a longing for harmony and happiness that

⁹⁰ Bahriany, 1959. Page 6-9.

⁹¹ Bahriany, 1959. Page 20.

⁹² Miłosz, Czesław. *Captive Mind*. New York: Vintage, 1981. Foreword.

surpasses ordinary fear or desire to escape physical suffering or destruction.⁹³ This quality in many human beings is what will keep them believing in an ideal like a utopia that Communist ideology promises while the reality may be starvation another forms of suffering. He also addresses the fact that this period was one during which religion was collapsing and was being replaced by other ideas.⁹⁴ The philosophical ideas that replaced religion prior to the rise of Communism were not as accessible to every man, and in combination with this neither was the abstract art that was discussed earlier. This made the philosopher or artist feel disconnected from the people, and people felt disconnected from the arts or intellectuals. Even the purpose of existence itself came into question. In addition war brought devastation that left people confused, and questioning what is “natural,” the existence before or the existence now.⁹⁵ All of this combined led to people, especially artists and other intellectuals, feeling removed from others and as all the questions remained unanswered, life itself seemed to not have much meaning. Then Communism steps in, it offers the people a secular religion and gives artists the chance to create socially useful pictures rather than wallow in existential thoughts, and in this manner life begins to have a purpose again, one's actions relate to all people, and there is hope for a bright future. In fact the Communist Parties practically guaranteed that future and worked hard to sustain that illusion. The problem as Milosz points out is that by swallowing this new “reality” things still don't match up, and as he puts it some people become schizophrenics.⁹⁶ This is parallel to what has been discussed in this paper; the “socialist reality” the art depicted created an illusion many people believed and clung to because of a hope for that bright future, and that is why the Communists were able to maintain control over the people and the art; the people

⁹³ Milosz, 1981. Page 6.

⁹⁴ Milosz, 1981. Page 7.

⁹⁵ Milosz, 1981. Page 28-29.

⁹⁶ Milosz, 1981. Page 5.

themselves created it, and many then believed it. Ultimately, the problem was that the original stability that Communism promised was undermined by the power struggles and Mao's and Stalin's idiosyncratic personalities. Power struggles within the party trickled down to the people, and when there was any hint that people were becoming disillusioned the Party tightened its hold on power, doing anything necessary to keep it. This resulted in uncertainty because somebody who was an ally one day could be an enemy the next, and this caused the people mesmerized by the hope for a utopia to start to look around and question things. However, since this was something the Communist Party could not allow, propaganda art was mobilized to greater heights in order to perpetuate that illusion.

CONCLUSION

In the end, the purpose that art served was to reaffirm the power of the Communist Party as well as to indoctrinate people and keep them believing an illusion. The reality of Socialist Realism was heavily glorified and selective; it perpetuated the idea that life under Communism is always great and the country is making great progress forward; it could never contain even a hint of trouble, because under Communism there are no problems only revolutionary atmosphere and happy people. The attitudes both Mao and Stalin had in their control of the arts and the people is parallel to the attitude Stalin had in relation to Biology and Psychology. Under his reign the accepted theory in Biology was called Michurinism and it is based on the ideas of the "unity of the organism with the environment." Meaning that an organism cannot transform from within, for it holds no separate existence from its environment, thus the "forces for change reside exclusively with the environment."⁹⁷ Within this frame work the law of evolution is "change or

⁹⁷ Tucker, Robert C. "Stalin and the Uses of Psychology." *World Politics* 8.4 (1956): 455-83. JSTOR. Web. 11 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/189274>>. Page 457.

die.”⁹⁸ Eventually, Psychology developed similar framework, except now these ideas didn’t just apply to microscopic organisms, but human beings. Thus by manipulating the environment, one could transform the people of the Soviet Union into a new species of “Soviet man.”⁹⁹ So it was believed that “people growing up in the Soviet social order and subject to the formative influences which the state could bring to bear upon them through the family, the school, the press, and all the other channels of control would, in the vast majority of instances, develop true “Soviet selves.”¹⁰⁰ And man can be “controlled at every step of the conditioning process” thus everything about him is a reflex to the environmental changes, not a personal choice.¹⁰¹ This attitude is reflected perfectly in Stalin and Mao policies. Their tight control on society as a means to channel it in the direction they want was based on the idea that if they control the context then they can control and shape every individual within. This is the reason why art was so important to them, because it was a very effective tool to shape the context the people lived in. Through art they could control the context (reality) and thus they believed they could ultimately completely indoctrinate every single human being and transform the populace into a race that was the embodiment of their ideology. This means that there is no room for art without a purpose, and all art needs to serve their purpose. Thus Communist art came to embody propagandistic nature. This is true for both China and the Soviet Union, the differences in the aesthetic and the fluctuation in policies are due to three reasons: the idiosyncratic personalities of the leaders, the historical and cultural ties of these nations, and interaction with some outside influences. Although ultimately the art served the same purpose for these leaders, but the fact that they operated in different contexts results in the discrepancies between the arts that developed in

⁹⁸ Tucker, 1956. Page 458.

⁹⁹ Tucker, 1956. Page 464.

¹⁰⁰ Tucker, 1956. Page 471.

¹⁰¹ Tucker, 1956. Page 472.

China vs. arts that developed in Russia. The unifying factor of course is the fact that people of both nations embraced Communist ideas.

It is curious to note however that this type of attitude towards art is not unique to Communist regimes. In fact historically many leaders who wanted to maintain their monopoly on power employed art for the purpose of control, however not all took it to the same level as Mao or Stalin. Hitler and Germany under his rule is an example of a different authoritarian state that took control of the arts to a similar level. In the American magazine *The Nation* Hitler is quoted to have said “Art must not only be good but it must be popularly grounded. Only that art which draws its inspiration from the body of people can be good art in the last analysis and means something to the people for whom it has been created.” This quote directly reflects ideas that Stalin and Mao preached, and the art that Germany produced also was shaped for the purpose of controlling the masses. So it is important to keep in mind that Communism wasn’t the only authoritarian government to have such attitude towards art. And as already mentioned other institutions have made use of art as a means of propagating an idea as well as a way to influencing the way people act or think. Christianity has used images in churches for centuries to convey to the people the ideas of their religion. And monarchs as well as rulers such as Napoleon have used art to convey a glorious image of themselves and their deeds, in order to affirm their power. In fact, even a democratic nation like the USA makes use of propaganda art, as is evident by posters created as a means of mobilizing people for wars, or images that were created as a way of promoting the idea of the American Way of life.

Keeping this in mind, why it is important to look at art that was produced under Mao’s and Stalin’s regimes is because it helps us understand the power of art and its potential. These periods in history left people who lived under them in a state of confusion after their leaders who

they followed blindly passed away. A painting titled *Why?* [fig. 27] by Gao Xiaohua in 1978 shortly following the death of Mao and the Cultural Revolution, shows the state of devastation and confusion that followed, when people couldn't understand what happened and how it was possible. The violence and suffering that took place under these regimes has been glossed over by the powerful illusion that Mao and Stalin created through art, but it is important to understand what happened during these periods, and what role art played in that. Art is something that greatly affects people, something that a ruling power is well aware of. Thus by studying how art has been used and the affect that had, one can better understand what happened during that time period, and the unfathomable begins to make some sense.

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Fig. 2 El Lissitzky, cover of Industriia Sotsializma (The Industry of Socialism) 1935.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Heller, 2008. Page 135.

¹⁰³ Bowlt, 2002. Page 41.



Fig. 3 Xu Beihong. *Slave and Lion*. 1924.



Fig. 4 Guan Zilan. *Portrait of Miss L.* 1929.



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¹⁰⁴ Heller, 2008. Page 156.

¹⁰⁵ Heller, 2008. Page 159.



Fig. 10 Grinets. "Thank you to the Party, and thank you to dear Stalin, for a wonderful and happy childhood." 1937.



Fig. 11 Georgii Shegal. *Leader, Teacher, Friend*. 1937.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Friedberg. The Museum of Russian Art.

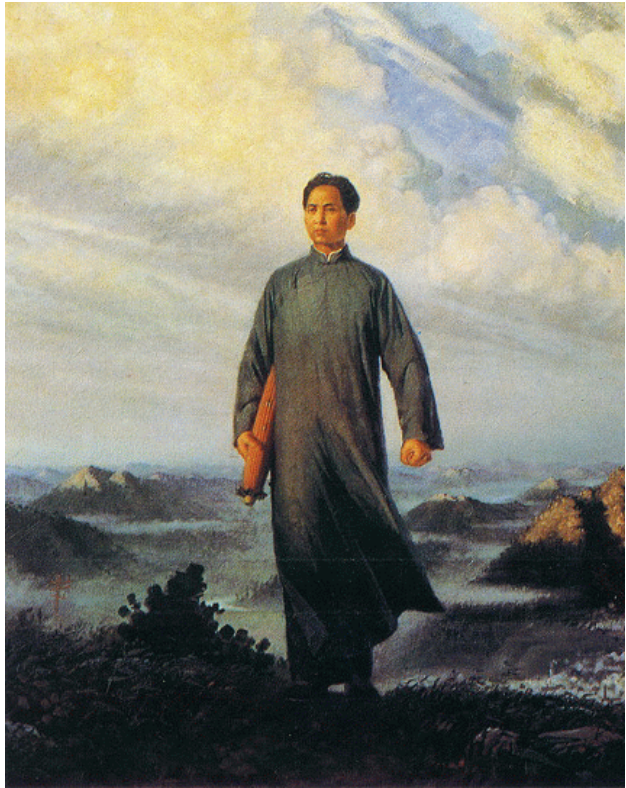


Fig. 12 Liu Chunhua. *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*. 1969.



Fig. 13 Anon. *Chairman Mao-the Reddest Red Sun in Our Heart Is with Us*. 1967



Fig. 14 Lin Yong. *The Spirit of Yan'an Shines Forever*. 1971.



Fig. 15 Tung Cheng Yi. *Commune Fish Pond*. 1974.



Fig. 16 Zakhar Pichurgin. *The Collective Farm at Work*. 1930.



Fig. 17 Fedor Antonov. *We Will Rebuild Everything*. 1949.



Fig. 18 Pan Jiajun. *I am "Seagull"*. 1972.



Fig. 19 Forward for the Sake of the Motherland! 1943.



Fig. 20 Viktor Vasnetsov. Tree Warriors. 1898.



Fig. 21 Long Live Young Pioneers! 1939.

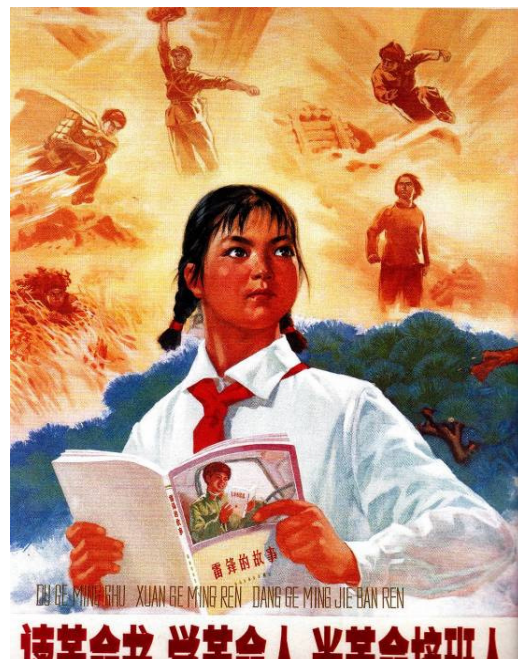


Fig. 22 “Read Revolutionary Books, Learn from Revolutionaries and become an heir of the revolution.” 1974.



Fig. 23 Aleksandr Laktionov. *New Apartment*. 1952.



Fig. 24 "Happy life given to us by Chairman Mao." 1952.



Fig. 25 Shen Jiawei. *Standing Guard for Our Great Motherland*. 1974.



Fig. 26 "Be on guard, these days the walls have ears, it starts with gossip and chatter and ends with TREASON...don't blabber!"



Fig. 27 Gao Xiaohua. *Why?* 1978.

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