

Art as Propaganda: A History on How Ruling Parties Manipulate the Vulnerable

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Abstract

Art has been used as propaganda to manipulate and persuade the public as far back as ruling parties have been recorded. It has been especially highlighted during times of war when governments such as the US, France, and Japan utilized art, knowing that it was an effective way to connect directly with the public's emotions during vulnerable times. This paper will discuss the three primary ways propaganda was used during these times to manipulate the masses. I will discuss 2D art, such as posters and paintings, and how artists use techniques to promote nationalism and degrade their enemies. I will also discuss how the film industries helped produce movies that embody values that governments behold. Lastly, sculptures, such as monuments and statues, were dedicated to each country's prominent leaders to praise their achievements and charisma. I will also show how these arts were not constructed solely for their citizens; they were "advertisements" to present greatness and advancements to other countries.

Introduction

Art has nourished the human mind and has been a sacred place people can rely on for comfort, entertainment, and happiness for as far back as humans have existed. However, because of this, it can be used as a tool of manipulation. During times of war and in countries that still promote communist ideals, art has been used as propaganda to distort minds and perspectives. This paper will examine how countries such as

the US, France, Germany, and Japan utilized various art forms to convey their ideologies. This paper was written to remind us how governments can control the public by controlling the arts and how we must always remember to keep the arts free from these manipulations.

2D Art: Japan

Japanese propaganda is similar to other nations', as it functions to influence public opinion through the dissemination of information. Still, there are distinct factors only found in Japanese propaganda which I will present here. Japanese propaganda during wartime mainly targeted the Western Anglo-Saxons and showed resistance against foreign cultural domination. As shown in figure 1, the Japanese portrayed themselves as superior to the Western countries such as the US and UK by depicting a Japanese soldier walking on top of the Western soldiers' heads, submerging them in the water. In this specific poster, known as the 'plain folks' technique, the artist used everyday citizens and fit them into daily lives.



Another example is a depiction of President Franklin Roosevelt as evil by portraying him in a monstrous form with a bright red background. This propaganda exhibits the nature of Japanese wartime propaganda to target the Western Countries, such as the US. In this poster, the

Japanese used the 'name calling' technique, a skill to link a person or an idea to a negative symbol, and directly depicted Franklin Roosevelt to be associated with negative connotations by distorting his looks and using strong and negative colors such as red, gray, and purple.



Japanese propaganda not only focused on militarist ideas and ideologies but also heavily accented on deep emotional weight and sophisticated artistic mastery. Some of the propagandas functioned as historical records. One of the famous forms of this propaganda is Sensoga (戦争画), which translates as war painting in Japanese. Sensoga was commissioned by the state and featured in exhibitions sponsored by the Japanese state, and yoga (洋画) paintings painted in Western-style oil-on-canvas, were at the core of Japanese Sensoga. However, one question emerges when Sensoga's yoga is examined more closely. Why did the Japanese utilize a Western-style of art when they were passionate about their anti-West campaign? The answer seems to be that since

Western oil painting was known for its depth and realism, Japanese Sensoga artists, who desired to create propaganda that functioned as photography and historical documents, had to use oil paint when creating their art pieces.

Although the Sensoga pieces possess more deep artistic mastery than the previous Japanese propagandas, probing how the Japanese soldiers are placed in a superior position to the Chinese soldiers and portrayal of the Imperial Japanese flag, they all convey the same theme: nationalism. Even though the Sensoga artists thrived in creating elaborate pieces that would function as historical documents, they ultimately made propaganda that contained a multitude of biased nationalist portrayals.

Germany

There is no doubt that German propaganda first comes into mind when people think of propaganda. Adolf Hitler and his followers knew that they would have to gain support from millions of Germans to initiate their plans successfully. The most effective way to shape the minds of millions of Germans was to use propaganda. While Hitler was securing military power, such as equipping new tanks, airplanes, and submarines, Germans were continuously fed numerous propaganda posters, emphasizing their ideology to inflame the political sentiment between the Aryans and the Non-Aryans. One of the reasons that Hitler's propaganda was so successful is that Germany at the time was undefined. Hitler was able to reach the hearts of

the German people by showing them that he knew what it meant to be "pure" German.



According to Kershaw (1992), "the characteristics of visual propaganda were combined with visual arts and politics in Nazi Germany, such as political rallies, posters, and other visual arts." Kershaw later adds that art, in particular, was Hitler's area of interest because, in Hitler's early years, he attempted to earn his living as an artist. As the main characteristic of Nazi propaganda was to target the Jews, posters like the one below used propaganda techniques, such as stereotyping, to inject the negative connotation, like dark colors and evil facial expressions, to represent them. Moreover, the Nazis aimed to show modernity in their arts, so they hired Bauhaus artists like Herbert Bayer, a student of Johannes Itten, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky, to create these posters. Through these Bauhaus-style posters, Nazis wanted to present themselves as a nation "that is modern, that is new and that is different." This "perfect" facade was successful as it was

aesthetically pleasing and "very modern and constructive." The Nazis also targeted the children, whose minds were malleable and easy to inject the Nazi ideologies. Nazi propaganda would emphasize that Hitler was the children's future. Just looking at the artistic style and skills of the posters, it isn't difficult to imagine why they enticed many Germans. Some show great creative talent.

North Korea

North Korea, one of the world's most secretive countries, lives in complete isolation from the rest. North Korea has maintained its isolated state since the Korean peninsula was divided into South and North in 1945. People praise and glorify the leaders of the Kim dynasty, and one of the key contributing factors that allow this to happen is rampant propaganda. Most of the propaganda is produced by the government, the DPRK, and based its ideas on the Juche ideology. "Ju" means man, and "Che" means the body of oneself; the Juche ideology ultimately means that a man is in the center, and in North Korea's case, the man indicates the male leaders from the Kim dynasty. As the Kim dynasty is a crucial part of the North Korean identity, most North Korean propaganda centers on Kim Il Sung, the "Eternal" president. This glorification is shown below, depicting happy citizens embracing Sung. Moreover, North Korean posters serve as the archetype for a cult of personality, a technique when a country produces mass media to generate an idealized

and heroic public image through unquestioning flattery.



Along with the glorification of Kim Il Sung, foreign relations is one of North Korean propaganda's most common themes. Americans are depicted as the main enemy of North Korea and presented as an inherently evil, war-hungry race. Most of the phrases on the posters show Americans as the aggressor in the Korean peninsula, using demoralization, the technique for inciting fighting spirit. Some signs show bold depictions, such as a person ripping the American flag. South Koreans used to be depicted as one of the enemies due to South Korea's alliance with America, but after the summit with both South Korea and the US, North Korea showed a distinctive turn in their message about South Korea. Instead of enemies, North Korea promotes the idea of establishing a united Korea and becoming the world's leading power.

Film: USA

When the US entered World War II, the government immediately established the Office of War Information (OWI) to mass-produce United States propaganda. Among the various branches of OWI, The Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP), the film branch, was the headquarters for creating documentaries and films. Hollywood signed up to contribute to the business of persuading Americans to endorse the war effort. Elmer Davis, the head of OWI, said that entertainment pictures are the best way to inject propaganda ideas into people's heads without letting them know. One of the top priorities of the American film industry during WWII was to glorify the American heroes. To achieve that goal, filmmakers developed styles unique to the Hollywood film industry: authoritative narration, dramatic, and hyperbolic. The relationship and imagery that has been forged during WWII still shape the stories of the US military. Along with glorifying the military, another critical point of American propaganda films was to instill fear and hatred of the Japanese to the public. Frank Capra, one of the most notable directors that produced mass propaganda films, created *Know your enemy: Japan*, focusing on the evil fanaticism of the enemy by representing the enemy's beliefs and goals. Moreover, Capra's films attempt to rouse American wrath against Asian nations. Similar but different techniques were applied in propaganda films during the Vietnam war. While the films produced during WWII were dramatic and hyperbolic, Vietnam-era films are

more sophisticated and subtler. Directors turned to pseudoscientific approaches to persuade their viewers. Also, being more restrained than WWII productions, Vietnam war productions tend to simplify their subjects and exaggerate their claims.

China

Propaganda in China is widely known for its function of promoting the ideologies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). To maintain the authoritarian government and legitimize its power, CCP believes that propaganda has been the most effective device in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Among the various propaganda techniques, CCP utilized the film industry for mass-producing national projects, following Lenin's belief that film was the most revolutionary of all arts. To bolster the popularity of these national film projects, *Dazhong dianying*, the "popular cinema," featured sections called the "Films and Audience," where individuals were encouraged to share their reactions to the films. However, this article's intended function was to indicate how the audiences *should* feel about the cinematic experience.

For the past 60 years, the Chinese government has ordered the film industry to highlight the "soft power," the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion. Soft power increasingly becomes important to China because it creates an amiable international environment, thus mitigating the "China Threat

Theory." Also, soft power helps China to secure its national power and bolster domestic stability. As the Chinese film industry has received prestigious international awards during the past decade, the government targeted the film industry to promote soft power actively. One of the most famous films that embody this idea is "The Battle at Lake Changjin," a film about Chinese soldiers defeating American troops during the 1950s Korean War. Due to the depiction of young soldiers fighting and dying for their cause, the film evokes a sense of patriotism in the Chinese audience, thus exerting soft power. As Dr. Stanley Rosen, a political science professor from the University of Southern California, said, "It's almost a patriotic duty to go see the film."

UK

Germans were pouring out propaganda in various forms during the first and second world wars. Seeing the public persuaded by the German propaganda, the British government felt the importance of creating a national organization to inform and influence public opinion abroad and undermine Germany's false information. In response, Wellington House was established to promote the ideas of allied powers. The organization did not immediately initiate its film productions. This was because cinema was still regarded as vulgar and without any serious importance, and to make war productions, the filmmakers had to obtain cooperation from the Admiralty and the War

Office. They were highly reluctant to agree to such collaboration.

Finally, in 1915, the Wellington House obtained cooperation and started propaganda production in the film industry. Straying away from the atrocious film propagandas, which was immensely devoted to creating fictional films that overly promoted propaganda ideas, British propaganda films concentrated on real cinema during the first world war. During the second world war, the Wellington House became the Ministry of Information (MOI). With the lead of Kenneth Clark, the head of MOI, the British government targeted the public to be convinced of the German brutality. *Went the Day Well?* by Alberto Cavalcanti is one of the films that embody such ideas of German brutality and fear of invasion. As cinema-going became the main leisure activity for people of the advanced societies that fought in the war, the role of propaganda films increased in significance. With television not yet progressed and embraced by the public, films' importance grew even more. Film peaked during the second world war as the technique switched from black and white to color, wider screen formats, and the adoption of a more durable film base.

Sculpture: France

Mass scale propaganda that we know of today began during the French Revolution. In the 18th century, many organizations bombarded the public with manipulated information. Most of the monuments had the function of appraising military victories, national heroes,

and patriotic virtues. Edme Bouchardon and Jean-Baptiste Pigalle were active sculptors that created propagandist statues such as the Equestrian Statue of Louis XV for the Place de la Concorde. Bouchardon created this statue to commemorate the War of Austrian Succession, finished by Pigalle. Such statues functioned to bolster the people's morale and secure the king's support by displaying an imposing figure of the king's victory. As 18th-century statues in France exhibited characteristics of Neoclassicism, Bouchardon's statue also followed the strong horizontal and vertical components of Neoclassicism. This style effectively showed the victorious king because the simple and formidable lines of the sculpture allowed the viewers to focus solely on the king and his accomplishment. However, as the French Revolution greatly influenced French society, it directed people to apply new meanings to sculptural propaganda. Instead of maintaining the statues that represented the accomplishment and glory of the king, people promoted values like democracy, liberty, and equality to the newly established statues. For example, the public eventually took down the equestrian monument of Henry IV during the revolution and replaced it with a colossal statue symbolizing the French people.

Soviet Union

With the lead of Vladimir Lenin, the Soviet Union employed various monumental propaganda to promote its communist ideas of the Soviet Union. Lenin and his socialist

followers believed that sculptures, especially monuments, had the advantage of being socially accessible to the public and effectively conveying communist power and collective identity. As Lenin's monumental propaganda showed a favorable response and was perceived as a medium that successfully solidified USSR's communism, the propaganda plan became the basis of the history of Russian sculpture. Also, Lenin's monumental propaganda became the origin of the Soviet school of Sculpture. One of the famous sculptors who embodied Lenin's plan was Nikolay Andreyev. Andreyev showed his socialist realism style, highly influenced by communist propaganda, through his project, Leniniana. Leniniana was a project that constituted 100 sculptures and 200 graphic works of Lenin. The sculptor could access Lenin's office and observe him, recording the most precise details of Lenin. In Andreyev's sculptures, Lenin mostly looks up in the sky, showing the strong leadership of the citizens of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and these monumental propagandas are undergoing significant changes as society rapidly changes. Countries that gained independence, like Ukraine and Poland, are dismantling communist symbols, particularly statues of Lenin, actively showing that they do not embody any socialist values. In modern-day Russia, the idea of "post totalitarian" art is emerging. People neither worship nor destroy the monuments but turn them into essential fragments of history that future generations can reflect upon.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown how art can manipulate; government officials and the art industry have avidly worked together to generate work to influence the public mindset. Looking back at the history of propaganda, the intentions are obvious, and we can see that blatant propaganda is effective. Propaganda paintings, films, and public installations successfully influenced entire countries. Governments were deliberately structuring the ideology of their propaganda by paying close attention to details such as the colors and images chosen for 2D work, selecting a film director that embodies their propaganda values, and what figure they selected as their monuments. The powerful influence of art recorded in world history allows us to ponder the various roles art occupies in human history. Art can be exponentially influential. It can bring cities alive and restore hope in people's lives. However, it has the momentum to do great harm if harnessed and controlled by the wrong hands. We must learn from our past and not ignore our mistakes.

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