

China in Transition. 1985/2007
George Legrady, August 14, 2007

Billboard Descriptions

"China In Transition" consists of 12 sets of 2x2 clustered images (polyptychs) of photographs I made in China in the summer of 1985 that document handpainted billboards randomly found by wandering in the cities of Guangzhou, Xian, Beijing, and Shanghai. I was interested in the cultural narratives of the painted images in relation to their stylistic realization, production methods, potential audiences, and communication goals. Even though the images were produced under significantly different specific cultural conditions than my own, I have been able as an outsider to understand to some degree what the billboards communicated. Nonetheless in the process of verifying their meaning, I have also been fortunate in receiving comments from Dr. Stone Huang, a Beijing information designer, whose father, Longcheng Huang was an active billboard painter in the 1980's and could therefore share his personal experiences as a producer of the billboards. The images can be found at:
<http://www.mat.ucsb.edu/~g.legrady/rsc/China1985/index.html>


The billboards fall into 3 main categories: Rules of conduct & propaganda, product & industrial advertising, cinema and entertainment. The most culturally significant may be the propaganda pictures. Stone describes the situation:

“China opened its doors to the outside world after the “Gang of Four” were beaten down. They were responsible for the 1966-1976 ten-years dark period of the “Culture Revolution”. In the 1980s, leaders of China believed the “Culture Revolution” disordered China to such a degree that the people’s ethical standards needed rebuilding and social order needed reform. Every form of media was used to ideologically re-educate China so newspapers, TV, broadcast and billboard were tools of propaganda and control. In those years, “Reform and opening up” became a loud slogan to encourage and lead people. As I remembered, most Chinese were somewhat uninformed and so sciences and ethics were the main contents of the billboards. At the same time, seeds of free business began to take place. Commercial advertising became a new power to reform China’s visual culture.”

The sequence of descriptions are as follows:

1	2
3	4

Bikes.jpg



1. *“Guangzhou Electric Iron, A good helper to beautify your life”* Advert of electric iron by Guangzhou factory of electric heaters

2. *“To comply with traffic regulations is a virtue that every citizen should have”* Public conduct billboard

3. *“Your blood saves others’ lives”* Public conduct billboard

4. *“Happy family makes for a prosperous country”* Family planning public conduct billboard

Business.jpg



1. "International Economy Cooperation Company" international trade company Hua **
2. Shandong bulldozer factory
3. "Zhong Yi company of Guangdong province" Ad for an electronic equipment company
4. "Jiangsu Yangzhou air condition and purification equipment factory" Ad of an air condition factory

Décor.jpg



1. "Boys and girls in good age (July 8)" Color film of Xiaoxiang film studio

"Bloody black valley" (July 1-4)

"Guide Dog Hasid" (Japanese film, July 5-6)

"Tan Ci Tong" (Da Shichang, leading role, July 8)

Note: the poster uses some non-standard Chinese characters which were only used in 1970s to early 1980s.

2. Lingnan Art Press
Guangdong Art Publishing House

3. "China seasoning, Long history of Culture Innovation up-to-date, Spice the world" Made by China monosodium glutamate technical company

4. "Shandong flavor, Various hot dishes, Cold dishes, cigarette and alcohol, Roast duck, Private room inside, Whole table order, Thoughtful service, Welcome"

Restaurant Address: 293#, west Damechang, Qianmen street Tel: 75-3998 75-1586

Hands.jpg



1. "A bottle of blood can save a life" Public conduct billboard
2. "To beautify Guangzhou, to promote activity of "three guarantee" and qualification" Note: "three guarantee" is a policy of guarantee and return in China.
3. "To procreate less and educate better, to train elite for "four modernizations" Family Planning conduct billboard
4. Ad for Meiduo radio cassette recorder

Industry.jpg



1. Shenzhen modern science and education equipment sales center
2. Ming Auto mechanics factory.
3. Management Department of Shanghai Equipment & Meter Industrial Corporation
4. Guangzhou Huanan cable plant

Gaze.jpg



1. "Arrest command on hand" Film poster
2. "Cheer, female soldiers" Film poster
3. "Misshapen moon" Film poster
4. "Broad Sword Wang Wu" Film poster

Show.jpg



1. *"Chen Geng's crucifixion"* Film poster
2. *"Code '213'"* Film poster
3. *"Broad Sword Wang Wu"* & *"Strange Case of Mei Mountain"* Film posters
- "Please go to South underground tunnel" traffic information
4. *"To develop computer technologies, To promote "four modernizations"* Science propaganda poster

Products.jpg



1. *"Local and Guest clients, welcome to purchase our products by visiting, phone or mail"* Auto gasket, Soft wood powder Industrial Materials
2. *"Color floppy disk, intimate partner of computer support rewritable more than 100,000,000 times"*
3. *"Daermei shampoo"* & *"White cat detergent"*
4. *"The best...hardwares,capacitor, transmission, transformer.... sold to all over the country"* Commercial ad.

Triad.jpg



1. *"Keep up vigorously working on family planning"* Family Planning propaganda
2. *"Procreate Less and Rejuvenate Better the Chinese Nation"* Family Planning propaganda
3. *"To rejuvenate the nation, need population control"* Family Planning propaganda
4. *"Everybody participate in eradicating mosquitoes, flies and rats. Prevent the spread of disease"* Disease Prevention propaganda ad

Facing.jpg



1. "*Cherish Youth, Encourage late marriage*" Family Planning propaganda
2. Left "*Chen Geng's crucifixion*", Right side "*The Melody Of My Hometown*" Uighur film shot in Xinjiang region of China, 1984 Poster has production credit list
3. "*Er Mei flying thief*" Movie poster
4. "*Keep up the vigorous work of family planning*" Family Planning propaganda

Potential.jpg



1. "Comply with traffic regulations, Obey police command" Public conduct billboard
2. "*Cross only at the striped crossing*" Public conduct billboard
3. "Beautify Guanzhou, Everybody abide by the 'Six don'ts and six does'" Public conduct billboard
4. "*Follow the socialist path and uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, leadership by the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought*" The famous "Four cardinal principles" of China

Traffic.jpg



1. "*Look Left, then Right when crossing the road*" Public conduct traffic billboard
2. "*Drive carefully, Ensure safety*" Public conduct traffic billboard
3. "*Bikes are not permitted to carry people*" Public conduct traffic billboard
4. "*Be observant when crossing traffic*" Public conduct traffic billboard