



Defeat the Gang of Four, 1976
paint on porcelain

La Trobe University, Geoff Raby Collection of Chinese Art.
Donated by Dr Geoff Raby AO through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019. Photo: Jia De

Yang Huoxing produced *Defeat the Gang of Four* in December 1976, a mere two months after the arrest of four Politburo members – Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Jiang Qing, known collectively as the Gang of Four – and three months after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong. Following Mao's death, the Gang of Four, a political faction that wielded significant power during the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976, were publicly denounced. They were accused of falsifying some of Mao's documents and with planning a coup d'état against the new party leadership. Their downfall was celebrated in the streets of Beijing.

Defeat the Gang of Four narrates the duplicitous and treasonous actions of Jiang Qing, or 'Madame Mao', Mao Zedong's fourth wife. The content is typical of the political cartoons (漫画 *manhua*) caricaturing the Gang of Four that were ubiquitous during the waning years of the Cultural Revolution. Here Jiang is seen falsely 'posing as a labourer for the camera' (假装劳动把像照 *jiashuang laodong ba xiang zhao*), canoodling with Westerners and loafing indolently while dreaming of restoring China's monarchy. In the final panel, the Gang of Four is shown cowed by the people who have risen up to defend the Chinese nation. Depictions of Jiang's lasciviousness, symbolised by cartoons in which she is shown watching imported pornography, echo strategies of public slander levelled against other women in power throughout history, including Marie Antoinette and Catherine the Great, both of whom were depicted as sexually depraved in comparable political cartoons. In Jiang's case, her history as a starlet in Shanghai's film industry of the 1930s generated gossip about her bourgeois, fame-hungry and unstable character.

Highly unusual here, however, is Yang's choice of material. Porcelain does not lend itself to rapid public dissemination, a key function of this kind of political content. There is some indication that versions of this work were produced on paper.* Copying was a common method to expand the circulation of existing cartoons during this period, spreading them through public spaces across the nation (Pozzi 2018).

Genevieve Trail, 2022

Note:

* There is a version of this work in the collection of Stefan R. Landsberger, also produced in December of 1976. The designer is listed as the Sichuan Art Section Mass Art Work Office and the work is on paper.

Reference:

Pozzi, L 2018, 'The Cultural Revolution in images: caricature posters from Guangzhou, 1966–76', *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, no. 27, viewed 9 February 2022, <https://repository.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/en/collection/crposter/1976>.