Capa de *Lian Huan Hua Bao* número 2, de 1975.

Lianhuanhua

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Lianhuanhua (illustrated story books) were probably the closest Chinese equivalent to comic books until contemporary times. They have been compared to the Big Little books (Inge 2004) and *Classics Illustrated* comics popular in the United States in mid-twentieth century. Yet, though there are similarities, they are different from these and other western- and Japanese-style comic books.

First of all, lianhuanhua (also known as *xiaorenshu*, or little man's books) are only palm size (five inches long, three and a half inches wide, and one-fourth inch thick). They are formatted differently, containing one illustration per page that carries a paragraph description usually at the bottom; seldom do they use balloons. For much of their long history, lianhuanhua had purposes and messages that deviated from those of western comics; they were used to support social and political movements and to educate and mobilize readers. And, as such, they were under stricter control than western comics.

The justifications for including lianhuanhua with comic books might be that they combine the verbal and visual to tell stories, an often-given criterion for comics, and they resemble other pre-twentieth century drawings labeled comics, e.g. those of Töpffer.

Lianhuanhua have a long history, appearing under various names by region: *tuhua shu* (picture book) or *xiao shu* (little book) in Shanghai, *yayashu* (children's book) in Wuhan, and *gongzaishu* (kids' book) in Guangdong (Zhong 2004: 107). Their origin is hard to pinpoint, some researchers dating their precursors to Han Dynasty stone carvings and murals. (see Jie, 2004; Jiang 2000; Chen 1996; Huang 1981) More likely, they came out of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kuiyi Shen (1997: 3) attributed the introduction of lithography to China as the stimulus for development of an embryonic form of lianhuanhua, claiming an illustrated narrative about the Korean rebellion in a 1884 *Dianshizai Pictorial* may have been the first. However, this story was not published as a separate "book"; the first example of that format appeared in 1916, when the newspaper *Caobao* bound its single-page pictorial into

an album. (Huang and Wang 1993: 17-18) Because of the popularity of these news and current events albums, Shanghai publishers competed to find painters to draw them. Content changed when, in 1918, a few small publishers hired painters to draw illustrated story books of a famous Peking opera then playing in Shanghai.

Other opera-based story books followed, usually drawn coarsely, as Shen (2001: 101) explained:

> The backgrounds in the paintings were simply copied from the stage sets, and images of the figures were also exact copies of the opera, keeping all the traditional symbolism of the objects, gestures, and make-up. The reason for this might be because a major concern of these small publishers was time. They tried to keep the publications following the schedules of the performances, so the cartoonists they commissioned were asked to draw at least ten pieces every day.

By the 1920s, novels and current social events became regular themes, probably the first such title being *Xue Rengui zhengdong* (Xue Rengui Going on an Eastern Expedition), drawn by Liu Boliang, whose style became the standard. The term *lianhuanhua tuhua* was first used in 1925, to describe a World Book Company publication. (A Ying 1957: 21). Later, the "tu" was dropped.

Andrews (1997: 18) made connections between the spread of lianhuanhua in the 1920s and the ready availability of western publications in Chinese cities, claiming the "appearance of lianhuanhua was part of the Chinese response to and adoption of new forms of publishing from the West." Hwang (1978: 53) said many foreign comics [strips] were translated into Chinese at the time, and that, "Before long, original Chinese comics [lianhuanhua] modeled after the foreign ones were rolling off the press of specialized publishing houses." (see also, Nebiolo 1973)

During China's Republican period (1911-49), stories came from popular drama, traditional fiction, and movies; those based on current running dramas or films were often drawn and printed the night of the opening performance and made available the next morning. Artists were self-taught or started out as apprentices to masters who took full credit. (Andrews 1997: 18-19)

An elaborate distribution system spurred readership of lianhuanhua in the 1920s and 1930s. Because the small books were considered vulgar by intellectuals,[1] most book stores did not stock them. Instead, publishers sold lianhuanhua to street booth vendors (usually on Beigongyili Street in Shanghai), who, in turn, rented them to low-income readers. Nightly, the vendors went to the small publishers to buy the two new volumes of each comic serial issued every day in two thousand copies press runs. Once twenty-four volumes of a serial appeared, publishers bound them

1 But, early on, *lianhuanhua* had its defenders. In about 1932, leading literary figure Lu Xun (Zhou Shuren) wrote an article, "'Lianhuantuhua' bianhu" (In Defense of "Comic Strips"), followed quickly by "Lianhuantuhua xiaoshuo" (Comic Strip Novels) by major novelist, critic, and editor Mao Dun (Shen Yanbing). Both articles published in *Wenxue yuebao* saw merits in lianhuanhua and visual culture generally. (see, Macdonald 2011)

and put them in a box to be sold as old-style books. (Shen 1997: 5; Huang and Wang 1993: 18-9) In 1935, the publishers and street book stalls formed a comic book exchange in the Taoyuanli district of Shanghai, where new lianhuanhua were brought by publishers at two o'clock in the afternoon daily, from whence they would appear in street book booths by six o'clock. (Huang and Wang 1993: 115-9)

Production in the 1920s and 1930s was handled by a few large and about twenty small publishers, all dependent upon a master-apprentice workforce. Because speed was essential, the commissioned masters were expected to finish works daily. In an assembly-line type of operation, the master composed and drew the main images, after which the apprentices completed the details, each person in charge of a specific aspect—clothes patterns, flora, fauna, architecture, etc. (Shen 1997: 5)

Quite famous among the masters were Zhu Runzhai, Zhou Yunfang, Shen Manyun, and Zhao Hongben, called the "four famous female roles" (*Sida mingdan*) of lianhuanhua, a reference to Peking opera. (Shen 2001: 105) Zhu, in a brief career, completed more than thirty serials, mostly adopted from novels and historical romances. Zhou, using western art styles and modern themes, had many young followers as well; one of his major contributions was adapting Ye Qianyu's famous newspaper comic serial, *Wang xiansheng*, into a lianhuanhua. Shen was known for drawing opera and legendary stories, while Zhao brought progressive works to lianhuanhua.

As movies became popular in the late 1920s and early 1930s, they, along with theatre, became the major sources for hurriedly-produced lianhuanhua that appeased both movie patrons and those who could not afford to attend. Alongside the commercial lianhuanhua prominent in the 1930s were avant-garde lianhuanhua woodcuts, printed by leftists in relatively small editions with not much exposure. (Andrews 1997: 22)

During the Japanese war (1937-45), both the Guomintang (Nationalists) and Communists used serial pictures to instill patriotism and to resist the invaders. Hwang (1978: 53) said the Communists used lianhuanhua for education and indoctrination; the Guomintang, for "didactic and patriotic purposes." Among comics in Guomintang areas were translated foreign (especially American) versions, according to Hwang.

Lianhuanhua remained an important entertainment and educational vehicle throughout the 1940s; as the decade closed, in Shanghai alone, more than 100 publishers and more than 2,000 street stalls catered to lianhuanhua. By that time, the distribution network had expanded to Hong Kong, Singapore, and Indonesia. (Shen 2001: 108) Yet, the heyday of lianhuanhua was yet to be.

That was to come after Liberation in 1949, when lianhuanhua were made to fit Mao Zedong's prescription for art that he delineated at the "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" in 1942: artistic qualities are always secondary to political uses,

and art should be simple, readable, and up-beat to appeal to illiterate masses. In 1950, Mao told then vice minister of publicity, Zhou Yang, that because lianhuanhua had such broad appeal, a state publishing house to issue new books should be set up. Accordingly, the Popular Pictures Press (Dazhong Tuhua Chubanshe) was established; in 1951, it merged with People's Art Press (Renmin Meishu Chubanshe) and began publishing *Lianhuanhua Bao* (Lianhuanhua Pictorial) the same year. (Jie 2001: 25; Pan 2008: 702-3)

To prop up the lianhuanhua industry, in 1950, New Fourth Army cadres were sent to work as supervisors at Shanghai lianhuanhua publishing houses. Radical changes were made concerning artists and writers, who underwent "thought reform and ideological indoctrination," were retrained in special art classes in 1951-2, and/or were recruited from art schools. Artists were also relieved of the responsibility of writing texts, a result of which, was that

> the artist was simply presented with a set of captions for which pictures were to be supplied. This was an attempt to professionalize both writing and drawing, potentially raising the qualitative level of each. At the same time, it may have made state control of the textual content more efficient. (Andrews 1997: 23)

The reorganization of lianhuanhua found favor among junior artists/writers who must have felt exploited working in the old workshops and private publishing outfits.

By the mid-1950s, the re-training had paid off as drawings were more refined and more Chinese. Andrews (1997: 26) wrote of this transformation; "The artists effectively limit any use of shading or chiaroscuro, thus creating a more Chinese flavor as well as a very clean image. Furthermore, they adopt conventions of traditional illustration, but combine them remarkably effectively with realistic drawing."

Significant revisions concerning content occurred; themes concerning gods, ghosts, kings, ministers, scholars, and beauties gave way to "praising the party, Chairman Mao, socialism, heroes of the new era, workers, peasants, and soldiers." (Ma Ke 1963) Old themes were considered "superstitious and feudalistic, unsuitable for the education of the masses." (Hwang 1978: 53) Post-1949 lianhuanhua fell into categories of those molding "the heroic image of the proletariat"; "dealing with Chinese Communist revolutionary history and contemporary reconstruction campaigns"; recounting traditional folklore, and recording the history of international Communist movements. (Hwang 1978: 57, 59)

Lianhuanhua became a major propaganda arm of the party and state in the 1950s and were to be "strengthened in order to occupy the consciousness of the youth." (Jiang 2005: 33) That this happened is visible in the growth

in numbers of titles and total circulations: 670 titles and 21 million copies in 1952, to 2,300 titles and more than 100 million copies in 1957. (Chiang 1959) Between 1949 and 1963, 12,700 different titles with a combined circulation of 560 million appeared.

The situation drastically changed at the onset of the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-76), when the lianhuanhua of the seventeen-year period after Liberation were criticized as being feudalist, capitalist, and revisionist, and many were burned as "poisoned weeds," their artists and editors criticized, censored, and sent to the countryside to be reformed. An article in *Shanghai Art World Criticized Material Collection No. 9* during the "Cultural Revolution" promoted lianhuanhua as important propaganda agents for Maoist thought, but lamented that for seventeen years, their artists neglected the class struggle, spread "poisoned" ideas, and pushed for the revival of capitalism in China. The article reported that in 1962, Minister of Culture Zhou Yang gave the Shanghai Peoples Art Press paper to print more than 27 million copies of the lianhuanhua, *Sanguo Yanyi* (Three Kingdoms Stories), blamed for spreading feudalism in China, as well as in Hong Kong, India, Macao, and elsewhere through exportation. (Jie 2004: 37)

For five years (1966-70), seldom were lianhuanhua published, but then, on September 11, 1971, Chou Enlai called publishing leaders together and told them to revive lianhuanhua as soon as possible to solve the next generation's lack of spiritual nutrition. Because art and literature policy was controlled by the "Gang of Four," lianhuanhua contents were what they ordered—sample operas (eight operas ordered by Mao's wife Jiang Qing), heroes' stories, criticisms of Lin Biao and Confucius, the two class/two roads struggle, Red Little Guards and Red Guards, intellectual youth going to the countryside, industrial learning from the Daqing oil wells, and farming learning from Dazhai (village) revolutionary struggle stories. (Jie 2004: 43) If a study situation was depicted, many of Mao's books would be on bookshelves and all those pictured in the lianhuanhua would be holding Mao's books. If a farm harvest was shown, many bags and piles of grains and fertilizers were visible, as were farming machines, all neatly lined up.

"Cultural Revolution" lianhuanhua both criticized party and state enemies and praised heroes of the Revolution to the extreme. Exemplifying their emphasis on messages of loyalty, humble self-sacrifice, and attendance to duty, Moritz (1973: 9) cited *Twenty-Four Tales of Filial Piety*, a picture story book about a young boy who lowers his body onto the ice to melt a hole in order that his starving father can fish.

Lianhuanhua came in two versions—one illustrative and "cartoonized," used to criticize their subjects; the other photographic, meant to espouse the achievements of heroes. (Jie 2004: 42) All lianhuanhua started with a page of Mao's words; though not a rule, it became a custom or widely-used practice. Additionally,

some others published the words of Marx, Lenin, Engels, or Stalin; the content determined who was to be quoted. When, in October 1972, the Shanghai Peoples Press published a film version lianhuanhua, *A Fu*, based on the Vietnamese movie of the same title, Ho Chi Minh's sayings appeared on the first page. (Jie 2004: 42)

Hwang (1978: 66-7) said the artists worked under strict guidelines that stipulated the use of caption, not balloons (because captions allow for more narrative information, while balloons are less aesthetic), the emphasis on many close-ups of heroes/ heroines, and the centering of the main character in the pictures. Jie (2004: 44), describing the "three outstanding" principles of lianhuanhua, said: all positive characters must look outstanding; among positive characters, heroes must look outstanding; among heroes, the major hero must look outstanding. Other rules required portraying enemies of the masses with sinister looks, drawing scenes and minor characters to serve the main proletarian hero/heroine, and employing graphic devices of contrast to reflect the relationship between the hero/heroine and the enemy. Colors were effectively used: enemy and ugly characters were drawn in cold greys; heroes were given bright colors. (Jie 2004: 45)

One genre called "criticize movement lianhuanhua," reflected the status of a place or company's movement. These books used very serious words, mixing satire of contemporary situations with ancient stories. Their language consisted of slogans used as criticism; their images drawn in an orderly fashion and appearing as quickly-drawn cartoons. (Moritz 1973: 9)

Though rare in the first half of the "Cultural Revolution," lianhuanhua regained favor once the "Gang of Four" had complete control over them. Altogether, 1,500 lianhuanhua titles with more than 700 million copies were printed during that decade; more than a third of the titles came from Heilongjiang province and Shanghai.

After Mao's death in 1976, lianhuanhua publishing was reorganized once again. Exiled older artists returned to the studios, joined by young draftsmen; room was made for freelance artists' works; strident propaganda was replaced by very subtle messages; styles of art became more diverse, and with Deng Xiaoping's rule after 1979, rigid controls were abandoned. (Andrews 1997: 31) The popularity of the miniature books resulted in huge profits for publishing houses between 1978 and 1984; in 1983 alone, 2,100 titles appeared, surmounting 630 million copies, or about one-fourth of China's total book production that year. (Jie 2004: 33, quoted in Pan 2008: 706) The number rose to 800 million the following year.

Prominent painter Wang Wei said it was an honor to draw lianhuanhua in the early 1980s, and it was profitable. He said for his work with a drama troupe at the time, he was paid 39-41 yuan monthly, but he received 120 yuan to draw one lianhuanhua. Discussing his lianhuanhua

experiences, Wang Wei (interview, 2012) recalled:

> I used different styles (brush, pen, etching, etc.), depending on the content. If I drew ancient stories, I used brush and long lines. For war stories, I used pen. Stories were given to us by the publishers. I did much research on the subjects, people's dress, customs, etc. I'd design everything—conceptualize, sketch, and ink the story. A draft then would be drawn for the editor's approval. He corrected the work, we would discuss it, and I would do a new version. The whole process was taken very seriously. All lianhuanhua artists were very serious; there were different values then. Every detail and style was carefully done; versions were drawn over and over.

Wang Wei (interview, 2012) showed how his lianhuanhua (and the industry generally) dwindled in circulation by the mid-1980s; in 1980, his first title, *36 Strategies*, sold 1.8 million copies; a second, *Xue Zhan Shahe*, in 1984, 850,000 copies, and a third in 1985, 340,000 copies. He blamed the entry of Japanese manga into China in 1984 as the main reason for the lessened interest in lianhuanhua.

But, others blamed the 1986-7 crash of the lianhuanhua market on the widespread availability of television sets and video-cassette players; the diminished quality of the books as publishers and artists quickened their production pace to meet reader demands (Cao 2002; Yu 2000; Lin 1997; Hong 1995), and the replacement of the government-secured distribution system with one for which publishing houses were responsible. The market reforms also affected bookstores which would not buy unprofitable or marginal profit books without government subsidy. (Xu 1999: 53, quoted in Pan 2008: 706-7)

State publication bureaus attempted to save the industry by regulating publishing houses and the books' quality, but to little avail. In 1987, total sales of lianhuanhua amounted to less than 80 million copies. (Jiang 1989: 8) Sales dropped considerably more in the 1990s, and lianhuanhua began to be collectables, rather than rich reading material. Collecting lianhuanhua for profit escalated, encouraging some renowned presses to republish old versions.

In recent times, the line between lianhuanhua and comics blurred, leading to the coinage of the term "cartoon- lianhuanhua." Pan (2008: 713) explained:

> Several implications underlie the mixture of usage. First, it shows the compromise of traditional lianhuanhua with overseas comic art. Since the tastes of Chinese children and youth have been shaped largely by imported cartoons or comic books lately, the publishers tried to win back readers by catering to their preferences. Second, it signals the innovations within the lianhuanhua, which aims at competing with the imported cartoons or comic books by learning from their

artistic style and marketing strategy. Lastly, the term "cartoon- lianhuanhua" disclosed the direction that the pictorial book industry works toward in boosting the domestic market, i.e., while learning from oversea counterparts, certain elements of the traditional lianhuanhua would be maintained.

Manga and *Xinmanhua*

The popularity of Japanese manga beginning in the 1980s has had much to do with how artists, audiences, and the authorities have perceived comics. Older cartoonists, most of whom drew humor or political/social commentary cartoons for decades, labeled manga style as "ugly" (Liao, interview, 2002; Chen Huiling, interview, 2009), damaging, and non-relevant, having a pernicious effect upon the Chinese style. (He Wei, interview, 2001; Zheng Xinyao, interview, 2001) Younger artists, who grew up reading pirated manga, favored this drawing style because it appeared to be modern, was more action oriented, captured the changing culture trends in China, and sometimes provided opportunities for international recognition through manga competitions.

Youth comics audiences also developed new tastes in the 1990s, looking to the West and Japan for lifestyle, fashion, and entertainment models, as they sought to develop their own identities in an open market economy and as the first generation of the one-child policy. Manga and anime loomed large in their search, noticeable in the immense popularity that manga/anime-based cosplay attained throughout the country.

Chew and Chen (2010: 173) believed that the pirated publication of more than six million copies of *Saint Seiya* in 1990-1, set off the manga and anime boom in China, mainly because it appealed to young adults, as well as children. Development of a huge and fast-growing manga piracy industry at that time resulted, according to these authors,

> Because copyrighted original manga publications were costly, inaccessible, and written in the Japanese language, they could not possibly satisfy the growing demand of Chinese audiences. At the same time, Japanese publishers did not have incentives to expand operations, distribute products, and glocalize contents for any anime and manga markets outside Japan. Moreover, the Chinese state was still unaware of the potential social impact of anime and manga and hence did not try to regulate their circulation in China. (Chew and Chen 2010: 173)

Pirated publishers, the most successful of which was Sichuan Xiwang Shudian (Sichuan Hope Book Store), employed various strategies to keep manga prices low for young readers with little disposable income—dividing books into less costly volumes and building a network of specialized pirated manga book stores and make-shift stalls across the country. Sichuan Xiwang Shudian

also published the comics magazine *Huashu Dawang* (Comic King), initially, consisting of the latest pirated manga series, but soon after, including lianhuanhua and locally-drawn manga-style comics (xinmanhua). The popularity of the latter led to imitators, and the birth of the xinmanhua genre, described by Chew and Chen (2010: 174-5) as a contrast to lianhuanhua because xinmanhua were drawn in the early period by,

> Mainly manga fans, white-collar workers, and students without any education in the fine arts of professional training in the comic arts. These young artists took comic drawing as a part-time hobby; they were not organized into work units or professional workshops.... Because most of the xinmanhua artists took popular manga as their models, they tended to produce fictional stories, love fantasies, and fairy tale-like contents; their drawing style tended to be less realistic and more embellished than that of lianhuanhua. The images of characters in xinmanhua were as exaggerated as those of manga.... Xinmanhua's use of camera style motion and filmic perspectives also distinguishes it from the static lianhuanhua perspective.

Some artists, such as Jiang Ling and Yao Feila, who developed their own localized manga styles, started out imitating manga to the smallest detail; a few others even copied pictures from original manga and incorporated them almost un-modified in their own works.

In 1993-4, Japanese manga publishers filed complaints with the Chinese government relative to the piracy, results of which were the forceful closure of Sichuan Xiwang Shudian, the banning of *Huashu Dawang*, the subduing of piracy for a while, and the implementation of the 5155 Project in 1995. Under the auspices of the General Administration of Press and Publication, 5155 "constructed five major comics publishers within three years to publish fifteen series of comic books and establish five comics magazines." (Chew and Chen 2010: 176-7) The most influential and longest-surviving of the new comics magazines were *Shaonian Manhua* (Youth Comics) and *Beijing Katong* (Beijing Cartoon).[2] All five magazines benefited greatly from the already-established markets and talent pools inherited from the pirates and their government affiliation and funding, which allowed them to legally obtain copyrighted manga. Though, in their initial stage, the 5155 comics filled pages with much manga content, they also encouraged non-Japanese manga styles and content made up of something other than "dull historical stories of thousands of years ago." ("China Challenges…" 1996: 4)

For example, *Beijing Katong* featured stories such as "Chinese Ghost Woman," "Handsome Boy," who "cheats in the singing competition, but still gets the girl," and "Nie Shuer," about a teenage, "accident-prone martial-arts ingénue." ("China

2 Two others were *Katong Wang* (King of Cartoon) and *King of Popular Science Comics*.

Challenges…" 1996: 4) A favorite 1996 comic book was *Soccer Boy*, a sixty-part saga about a boy who makes the national team under the authoritarian guidance of a coach determined to "overcome the laziness and lack of discipline that plagues the spoiled kids… growing up in the era of China's one-child policy." (Mufson 1996: A31) *Soccer Boy*, the product of the government-favored Sichuan Children's Publication Press, was a reaction to government and public outcries about the cultural "malnutrition" resulting from Chinese children's digestion of foreign comics. (Mufson 1996: A32)

The 5155 Project allowed the authorities to exercise more control over content considered harmful to Chinese morals and social norms. The prevalence of teenage love affairs and depictions of sex in manga were especially controversial and were often the subjects of media attention. Though anti-pornography laws carried severe penalties, from fines and imprisonment to the death penalty, the "distasteful" manga, through underground and Internet channels, continued to thrive well into the first decade of the twenty-first century. Particularly of concern were boys' love (*danmei*, or male-male relationships) manga. (Liu 2009)

Xinmanhua in the late 1990s tried to distance themselves further from manga, replacing sex and violence with educational values, resetting love stories in ancient, rather than contemporary, China, and encouraging non-Japanese styles. Some xinmanhua artists turned to Taiwanese and Hong Kong popular culture or other areas such as fashion illustration for styles and content. In some rare instances, artists such as Zhao Jia, Weng Ziyang, and Quan Yingsheng incorporated traditional Chinese painting into their comics. All seemed to be going well: popular xinmanhua series in the five official magazines were being re-published as single comic books; some artists, such as Jiang Ling, Xiao Yanfei, Hu Rong, and Yao Feila, were winning awards in China and abroad, and xinmanhua styles were being made "more technically mature, localized, and diversified." (Chew and Chen 2010: 180)

And then, just as quickly as the 5155 Project had altered Chinese comics generally for the better, a series of circumstances in 2000-1 steered them to other less than ideal directions. Among these changes were the declining interest in printed comics, the drying up of the 5155 official magazines, the revival of pirated manga, and the ushering in of new comics media, such as info-magazines and the Internet. By 2000, the official magazines struggled financially, as much of their revenue was siphoned off to the sponsoring officials, leaving little for the artists, who drifted off to other employment. With dwindling staffs and the inability to meet payrolls, the official magazines were all gone by 2005. The revival of new strands of pirated manga was also blamed for the demise of the official magazines. In the early 2000s, unauthorized copies of copyrighted Chinese translations of manga from Taiwan and Hong Kong found their way to the mainland. These comics, though

half the size of standard comics published in China, were sometimes five times the price because of their higher quality. In 2002, a new version of pirated comics appeared, described by Chew and Chen (2010: 181) as,

> This version minimized the original pages and then printed four pages on a 32-fold page. These so-called *si-pin-yi* (four pages in one page) pirated books were of low quality, because the pictures were greatly minimized and the words were barely readable. The reading system was problematic because on each page, the lines read right to left, but the four pages read left to right. It was so confusing that the pirate publishers had to mark the correct reading order on each page of all manga.

Despite their poor quality, the prices of the pirated manga skyrocketed. At the same time, with more readers moving to the digital arena, pirated anime prices fell sharply and replaced pirated manga. As the bottom fell out of the pirated manga market, the whole printed comics industry plummeted in China.

While all of this was happening, new platforms for xinmanhua were ushered in, such as info-magazines. Begun in 1998, the semi-legal info-magazines collected materials on manga and anime from Japanese print magazines and the Internet and translated the information into Chinese. Chew and Chen (2010: 183) reported that between 1998 and 2006, info-magazines were the major location for xinmanhua content, though in limited amounts. *Manyou* (Comic Fans), which devoted more of its space to xinmanhwa than did other info-magazines such as *Dongman Shidai* (Animation and Comic Times) and *Xinganxian* (Comics and Ani's Reports), attracted many of the artists who previously published in the official magazines. Because of its concentration on xinmanhua, *Manyou* gained state financial support in 2008 and was the lone survival of the first group of info-magazines. Chew and Chen (2010: 184-5) wrote,

> The commercialized nature of *Comic Fans* has influenced the direction of xinmanhua development. The magazine targeted female teenagers and published comic styles and contents that catered to this particular market. As a result, a large portion of the xinmanhua works carried in the magazine either resembled Japanese shôjo manga or followed the most recent fad in the Japanese manga scene.

In addition to info-magazines, the Internet was the other new vehicle for comics dissemination in the 2000s. No doubt, the Internet played a major role in the decreased sales of printed comics in China, but it also helped xinmanhua to survive, through *oekaki* bulletin board systems that allow budding cartoonists to create, using computer graphics, and then post their works; online forums that accommodate comics and animation fans, and sites that provide space for alternative comics.

Both online and in printed xinmanhua, a common theme of young cartoonists is the upheaval of Chinese society caused by so-called "modernization." One such popular online work in the late 2000s was Liu Gang's "Suicide Rabbit," that portrayed with "gentle humor the million little abuses suffered by Chinese people as their society endures a bumpy transformation." (Cody 2007) Another strip by Luo Yonghao, published online and in a literary magazine, followed a fly character trapped in a glass bottle trying to escape, an allusion to the dilemma of Chinese people trying to follow their heart, truth, and honesty, instead of the increasingly materialistic Chinese society. As another example, Benjamin Le Soir's comic books (*One*, *Orange*, *Remember*, *Savior*, etc.), published in Chinese and French, dealt with suicide, mental disturbance, madness, and the belief that materialism and money are not the best paths to happiness.

Some of this type of fare comes out of self-publishing collectives producing underground comics (e.g. Cult Youth or Special Comics). Coco Wang, a Chinese cartoonist living in England,[3] described these collectives as consisting of artists who make a modest living working in the game/animation industry and spending most of their free time simply drawing comics and having fun exchanging and criticizing one another's works. Coco (quoted in Gravett 2008) said these young people stay in their rooms for long periods doing comics because they have "computers, DVDs, online games, internet, take-away menus (of many restaurants), phone numbers of convenience stores," some of which deliver. Some of them print their work in book form, but, because most of what they do is considered unsuitable by the state and not commercial enough for investors, it goes largely unnoticed.

However, there have been commercial successes among recent Chinese comic books, such as Zheng Jun's two volume graphic novel *Tibetan Rock Dog* (2009) and the comics of Quan Yingsheng. A rock star himself, Zheng Jun fashioned a story about a dog that grew up in a Buddhist temple in Tibet and the hardships he faced pursuing his dream of being a rock star in Beijing. The book sold more than 100,000 copies and was spun off into a movie, dolls, and other merchandise. ("Tibetan Rock Dog Rocks on" 2009)

Quan Yingsheng, founder and head of Beijing Heavycomics Culture & Media Co. Ltd. (founded 1999), has succeeded with a diverse mix of comics. One of the two largest of several hundred comics companies in China (the other being Shenjie Comics in Tianjin), Beijing Heavycomics bring out manga, xinmanhua, and manhua, the latter distinctly Chinese in story and aesthetic qualities. Perhaps most unique of the young artist's endeavors is the application of traditional water and ink painting to comic books such as *Cheng ji si han* (Genghis Khan), *Chan lai chan qu* (Buddhahood Twines), *Qi gain an zai* (Beggar Boy), and *Geshaer Wang* (King of Gesar). Quan (interview, 2011) said he intertwines comics and traditional painting to disprove people's perception that "if you

3 Coco Wang draws memoir/diary-type comics (*tu wen*), popular among Chinese cartoonists in recent years. Two other Chinese cartoonists working out of England whose works are published in China are Yishan Li, author of about a half dozen comic books, and Rain (Ru An), known for *Ethereal Wings*, *Midnight Ink*, and *Silent Rainbow*.

draw comics, you cannot draw as an artist." Working on the principle of "reducing the manga and switching attention to the Chinese style," Quan (interview, 2011) has published a long line of comic books based on themes of Chinese adventure, history, love, sports, detective, etc. Many are multi-volume collections. Quan's water and ink comics fare better financially than those he does in manga style. Because there are many small publishers printing manga-style books in China and the international manga market is already glutted, Beijing Heavycomics has little room for expansion in this field. On the other hand, the company's water and ink comic books, because of their uniqueness and the small pool of highly-skilled artists who can draw them, have become popular in China and anticipate increased international sales. (see Lent and Xu 2012)

Overall, Chinese comic books needed a boost when the government got heavily involved again in the mid-2000s, partly as a reaction against the prevalence of foreign works and as a potentially important investment. Economists and national leaders, perhaps following the South Korea example a decade earlier, propped up comics and animation as the third pillar of the economy. During the 11th Five-Year Projection for Social and Economic Development (2006-10), the comics and animation sector was listed as a key cultural industry to be developed at the national level. The development had already begun by 2006, when more than twenty provinces made comics and animation a new industry, nine cities had established their own production bases with preferential policies, and many animation/comics extravaganzas, such as festivals, competitions, and conferences, had taken place. By 2012, at least one hundred annual festivals existed, along with museums, centers, theme parks, thousands of studios, and hundreds of educational and training programs. Most of the emphasis of these state-backed projects was placed on animation. Though the quantity of the comics and animation was more than sufficient, the quality of work often suffered because of rushed jobs, over-emphasis on software, and lack of good storytelling techniques.

Despite this preferential treatment, China's comic book industry still lags behind some of its Asian neighbors; it has been described by cartoonist Ru An as "a teenager; it's young, but pretending to be old. But it must [mature] quickly and catch up to the others [Japan and South Korea]." (quoted in Cha 2007)

Humor/Cartoon Magazines and Comic Strips

Pictorial newspapers and magazines dating from the late nineteenth century played vital roles in the creation of a comics tradition in China. The first pictorial magazine was *Ying Huan Pictorial* (1877-80), edited by a Britisher; it was followed by about a dozen others during the latter years of the Qing Dynasty. The pictorials, as well as most of the seventy newspapers and magazines that appeared in China between 1875 and 1911, often carried "funnies,"

"burlesques," "current pictures," and "emblems," all forms of comic art.

Standing out among the cartoonists of the 1911 revolution period was Qian Binghe, who worked for the daily *Minquan huabao* (Civil Rights Pictorial), but also contributed cartoons to other periodicals. He was particularly noted for a comic strip published in *Minquan huabao* and *Minguo xinwen* (Republic News) for the year 1913. Entitled "A Hundred Appearances of the Old Gibbon," the strip poked fun at President and would-be emperor Yuan Shikai, using the rebus of gibbon (*yuan* in Chinese) to do so. (Shen 2001: 109)

Two claims have been made for the first humor or cartoon magazine in China, both named *Puck*. Writing in 1877, Parton reported on an English-language humor monthly, *Puck*, published in Shanghai in the 1870s. For the most part, the British ridiculed themselves in *Puck*, although occasionally, they had a chuckle about Chinese ceremonies. (Parton 1877: 196) Likely more deserving to be called the first was *Shanghai Puck* (also *Bochen huaji huabao*, or Bochen's Comic Pictorial), because it was published by a Chinese cartoonist and carried the word "comic" in its title. The bilingual (Chinese and English) monthly was started in 1918 by Shen Bochen and issued more than 10,000 copies of each of its only four numbers. Shen (1918: 2, quoted in Shen 2001: 109) gave his magazine's responsibilities as:

> first, to give advice and warning to both governments of the south and the north, and spur them to work in concerted efforts to create a unified government; second, to let westerners understand Chinese culture and customs, and thus, raise the positions of China in the world; and third, to promote the new morality and practices and discard the old.

A prolific cartoonist who created more than 1,000 cartoons for various periodicals in the 1910s, Shen also did most of the cartoons in *Shanghai Puck*.

A second cartoon/comics magazine came out of the Shanghai Manhuahui (Shanghai Comic and Cartoon Society), started in 1927. The following year, this group of young cartoonists brought out *Shanghai Manhua* (Shanghai Sketch), which also published paintings, photographs, and essays. The editors stated in the inaugural issue, that "we don't want to be a guard-dog of the old morality in order to curse evil, and don't have interest in praising vanity fair either… Our effort is to express our feelings about the great and colorful life in Shanghai." Less political, *Shanghai Manhua* concentrated on comic strips, the most famous being "Wang xiansheng" (Mr. Wang), drawn by Ye Qianyu (Ye Lunqi).

"Wang xiansheng" was a four- to eight-panel strip built around a "triangular-headed, middle-class philistine, proud possessor of all the typical Chinese vices." (Chen 1938: 312) Dealing with the sensations of modern urban life (luxury, gluttony, deceit, pleasure seeking) coupled with accompanying social problems (conformism, gambling,

hunger for social success, and lack of education and culture), the strip was the first to feature a "true comic strip hero" in China. (Shen 2001: 113) Ye had a keen sense of characterization, which he mentioned when later remembering the launch of his career: "Although I was motivated more by need than artistic fulfillment, I learned how to pick out that tell-tale trait that gives life to a character and—how to make my audience laugh or cry over it." ("55 Years…" 1982: 26)

When *Shanghai Manhua* ceased publishing in 1930, "Wang xiansheng" moved to *Shidai huabao* (Modern Miscellany), which Ye edited. Ye spread the strip around after 1932. For *Tuhua chenbao* (Picture Morning News), he did the series "Wang xiansheng biezhuan" (Another Story of Mr. Wang) and later drew "Story of Mr. Wang in the South" for Guangzhou and "Story of Mr. Wang in the North" for Tientsin. *Tuhua chenbao* kept the series alive for 182 issues. (Xie 1991: 88)

Cartoon magazines thrived in the mid-1930s; about twenty published in Shanghai alone. Besides those already mentioned, they included *Modern Sketch*, *Manhua shenghuo* (Comics and Life), *Duli manhua* (Oriental Puck), *Manhuajie* (Comic Circle), *Independent Cartoons*, *Zhongguo Manhua* (China Cartoon) and *Time Cartoon*, the latter published as a reaction to Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, which it described as a "tragic farce." (quoted in Chen 1938: 308) Some magazines were reincarnations of titles forced to close for various reasons. For example, *Manhuajie* started up as the successor to *Time Cartoon* when the latter was suspended in 1936 because of its political stance, and *Manhua shenghuo* was the new version of the monthly *Cartoon Life*, closed by the government in 1935 because of its leftist viewpoints. (Lent 1994: 285) *Manhua shenghuo* also closed after three months because of government charges that it advocated class struggle, opposed the government, and promoted the Bolshevik Revolution.

Considered the cartoon magazine of highest quality was *Modern Sketch*, edited by Lu Shaofei, which was noted for its use of several color pages and for publishing the cartoons of more than one hundred Chinese cartoonists. (see, Wang 1935: 3) A major cartoonist at the time, Jack Chen, gave the circulation of some cartoon magazines as high as 40,000. He said they were meant primarily for men, because they indulged in some "Elizabethan coarseness," explaining, "There is necessarily a certain amount of eroticism, influenced to a great extent by such journals as the American *Esquire*, but with an element of quite Chinese abandon." (Chen 1938: 311)

Most of the second generation master cartoonists (those born in the 1910s and early 1920s) started their careers on these humor magazines while they were still teenagers or college students. (Huang, interview, 2001) Among them were Chen Huiling, Ding Cong, Mai Fei, Te Wei, and Liao Bingxiong. Describing cartooning for those magazines and dailies in the 1930s and 1940s as "a hungry situation," Liao Bingxiong (interview, 2002) said:

> I found this Shanghai cartoon magazine (*Time Cartoon*) in a bookstore and starting sending cartoons to it. I became a Shanghai cartoonist after that. They and other periodicals could not pay. I was very poor, could not afford to take the bus. I walked to the newspaper to hand in my works, and I seldom got payment. What payments there were, were very small. My hope was to get some money so I kept sending cartoons.

Mai Fei (interview, 2006), whose first cartoon appeared in *Zhongguo Manhua* in 1935, said he was a second year art student at the time and became "famous" among fellow students because he was published.

Other outlets for cartoonists were provided by major journals such as *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany), *Lun yu* (Analects), and *Yuzhou feng* (Cosmos Wind), magazines which increased their solicitation of cartoons, and newspapers which added special cartoon/comics sections. (Hung 1990: 42) The supplements that appeared in Chinese dailies by the 1930s occasionally included a children's page. These were particularly common in North China, starting with Tientsin's *Social Welfare* in 1929. All such supplements included cartoons and strips. (Cheng 1931: 103-4)

Among trend-setting artists whose comic strips and cartoons appeared in these publications of the 1920s and 1930s, Feng Zikai and Zhang Leping must be singled out. Feng Zikai contributed much theory and technique to the new field through scores of books and countless drawings. In fact, the term manhua (a direct translation of the Japanese manga) was first applied to his work by Zheng Zhenduo, when his "Zikai manhua" appeared in the impressive literary journal, *Wenxuezhoubao* (Literary Review) in 1925. Feng is credited with giving cartoons much needed respect, because he contributed regularly to prestigious literary journals and influential dailies of the 1920s. His "Zikai manhua" was extremely popular because of its portrayal of "lovable, mischievous children" in an original style that combined the traditional Chinese brush technique with contemporary social settings, humor, and religious messages. (Hung 1990: 46-7) He also introduced an important new genre into modern Chinese image literature with his literary comic strips based on the best modern Chinese literature. In the 1930s, he moved from idyllic children's cartoons to social cartoons, although his works were not "ephemerally political" like those of his contemporaries.

Zhang Leping is credited with creating China's most important and longest lasting comic strip, "Sanmao" (Three Hairs), started in 1935 in the daily *Xiaochenbao* (Small Morning Paper) in Shanghai. In its pre-World War II version, "Sanmao" was strictly for humor and entertainment. (Bi and Huang 1983: 258) Social inequities started to appear when the strip was revived in 1945 after an eight-year lapse. Published in Shanghai's *Shenbao* (Shen Newspaper), this version satirizes

greed among high officials, while showing Sanmao as a brave-beyond-belief soldier (in one instance, single-handedly defeating an entire platoon), who often was the butt of elder soldiers' anger—a kid at the bottom of the pecking order. Called *Sanmao Congjunji* (Sanmao Joins the Army), these strips were brutally graphic at times, showing bayoneted victims, a severed hand, a splotch of blood were once stood a fellow soldier, etc. As Zhang (1983) himself acknowledged, Sanmao' ingenuous soldiering was often absurd. In one strip, Sanmao manages to lift his heavy gun and kill four enemy soldiers with one bullet.

Sanmao Congjunji was a bridge from the "for fun" strips of the 1930s and more serious and socially penetrating ones beginning in 1947. Farquhar (1995: 151) said several traits common to the later series *Sanmao Liulangji* (The Wanderings of Sanmao), beginning in the newspaper *Dagongbao* (Dagong Newspaper) in 1947, were evident in the post-World War II strips, such as their contemporary, controversial, and educational nature and their sympathetic concern for the masses. She said a fourth characteristic added to *The Wanderings of Sanmao* was a "clear differentiation of class" (152), where Sanmao is representative of the oppressed. Zhang Leping discussed the motivation of the strip starting in 1947, writing,

> [In 1948 and 1949], you could see homeless children in every street and alley you walked along in old Shanghai, then ruled by the reactionary nationalist government. Some were so exploited by landlords and capitalists that they had no clothes and food and died of illness and starvation. Others became cannon fodder, forced into the army by the reactionary Nationalist clique. Still others were killed indiscriminately by reactionary American devils.... Every family has countless such tragedies to tell! (1913, quoted in Farquhar 1995: 149)

Throughout these pre-Liberation strips, Sanmao was screamed at, kicked, scolded, slapped, and imprisoned, and though he was compassionate and well meaning, he always seemed to do the wrong thing and he never fit in. He is seen sleeping on the street blanketed by newspapers and dreaming of being part of a family with food, a bed, and a loving mother; shivering from cold as he watches a wealthy woman and her dog, both in fur coats, pass by, or thinking up survival schemes. In one episode, he hangs a sign around his neck advertising that he was for sale for 10,000 yuan. Meanwhile, in a shop nearby, a child's doll was advertised as costing 100,000 yuan.

Most "Sanmao" strips were reprinted many times as collections, particularly *The Wanderings of Sanmao*, which, after 1949, were used to contrast the wretchedness of pre-Liberation with the uplifted living conditions under Mao. The post-liberation "Sanmao" series lost their spark,

serving as educational and rhetorical tools "to draw a symbolic line for children between old and new China." (Farquhar 1995: 154) Sanmao now was shown as a bright, studious boy and as a teacher, imploring friends not to smoke, be selfish, or show off. (see, Peng 1980:2)

"Sanmao" remains China's most popular comic strip after more than 77 years, still featured in films, stage shows, and new book compilations in China and abroad (some pirated versions). Merchandise carries Sanmao's name and image, including toys, clothing, shoes, and souvenirs. Though there are occasional comic strips in some newspapers and magazines today, none comes anywhere near to "Sanmao" in social impact and entertainment value.

Cartoon and humor magazines and the strips they contained continued to be a vital part of China's publishing would until the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the initial stage of the war with Japan, cartoon magazines were used for propaganda and resistance purposes, the chief of them being *Kangzhan Manhua* (Anti-War Cartoon). It and *Xingqi Manhua* (Weekly Cartoon) were brought out under trying circumstances by a cartoon propaganda brigade that roamed parts of China warning about the Japanese invaders and building morale among the Chinese. *Kangzhan Manhua* was termed the "national authorized cartoon journal at the time" by brigade deputy leader Mai Fei (interview, 2006). Mai Fei was also in charge of the other brigade periodical, *Xingqi Manhua*, a one-page, weekly section of *Qianxian Ribao* (Front Daily); the cartoon supplement published fifty-two times.

Describing the conditions under which *Xingqi Manhua* existed, Mai Fei (interview, 2006) said:

> When we did *Xingqi Manhua*, there was no electricity some days, so we could not use the printing machine. We took photographs and when there were rainy days, we could not photograph either. So, we sometimes had to cut woodcuts. I know how to do them. Our writer Ye Gong wrote articles to fill empty spaces around woodcut cartoons. We printed in daytime and were never delayed; we worked day and night.

Between 1946 and 1949, a number of influential cartoonists who had fled China during the war returned and started new magazines to offset the Guomintang Party's restrictions on already existing newspapers. These magazines became the outlets for cartoonists to ridicule the civil war between the Guomintang and Communist parties, dictatorship, persecutions by the Guomintang, inflation, and national traitors.

After 1949, cartoons and cartoon magazines were not as plentiful as previously; some of the problems cartoonists lampooned had been obliterated by the Communists. One cartoon magazine wrote, "The crazy dictator [Chiang Kai-shek] and his shameless greedy running dogs have offered us innumerous subjects for cartoon drawing," but

they were no longer around. (Shi 1989: 14) Under Mao Zedong, cartoons and cartoon magazines were tasked with invoking hatred for enemies of the state, refraining from ridiculing life in the new China, and singing the praise of the correct line.

From 1949 through the Cultural Revolution (1976), cartoon and humor magazines had an "unfortunate history," according to Xu Pengfei (interview, 2001), former editor of *Satire and Humor*. Only one cartoon magazine, *Manhua*, published in Shanghai by the China Artists Association and edited by Mi Gu, lasted as long as ten years, closing in 1959, because of "so many political movements, the bad economic situation, low quality work, and poor paper." (Jiang, interview, 2002)

The longest-running cartoon magazine in Chinese history is *Satire and Humor*, founded in 1979, by Hua Junwu, Jiang Fan, Ying Tao, Miao Di, and Jiang Yousheng as a supplement of the national newspaper, *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily). Jiang Yousheng (interview, 2002) said *Satire and Humor* was established because, "During the Cultural Revolution, no one could draw satire. After that, there were many cartoons on the 'Gang of Four' but no place to publish them." At its beginning, *Satire and Humor* had a circulation of 1.3 million. Xu (interview, 2001) said that in the early years, people queued to make sure they received a copy. In 2001, the sixteen-page *Satire and Humor* printed 300,000 copies every two weeks. (Xu, interview, 2001) By 2005, it was made into a weekly with a circulation of 110,000. Xu (interview, 2005) said the magazine was more market oriented, selling mainly at newsstands, less artistically motivated, and more concentrated on news and politics than other cartoon magazines that emphasize "humor and funny things."

Whereas other newspapers and magazines pay cartoonists according to their rank in the profession, *Satire and Humor* compensates them by the quality of their work, thus, amateur cartoonists have been known to receive page one space. Xu (interview, 2001) said cartoonists are asked to draw on specific topics—timely themes, government policy, and, especially the common people's concerns. Every issue includes a page of comic strips, very popular with readers. Though an appendage of the government newspaper, *Satire and Humor* has "no limitations, as we can control everything ourselves," Xu (interview, 2001) said.

Another important cartoon magazine published in Shanghai in the 1990s was *World of Cartoon*, a sixteen-page periodical started in 1985 by animator Ah Da. It died in 1999. Originally, *World of Cartoon* was meant for cartoonists and cartoon lovers, but when it was revived as a page in *Xinmin Evening News* in 2000, the appeal was to all types of readers, according to its editor, Zheng Xinyao. (interview, 2001)

In recent years, other cartoon magazines have appeared, mainly as commercial ventures. (Wang Fuyang, interview, 2001) Some, such as *Zhongguo Manhua* and *Cartoon Monthly*, replaced front cover

cartoons with photographs of entertainment personalities and local cartoons with manga.

The comics, whether in book, strip, or cartoon magazine format, have been following the path of so many aspects of Chinese culture—the old is rapidly giving way to the new, with not enough deliberation on preserving what is distinctly Chinese. With huge government interest in and support of comics and animation for the past few years, quantity has replaced quality and commercialization has ruled over artistic considerations in many instances.

Detective Di Renji, de Quan Yingsheng