

LITTLE LINKED HEROES: IMAGES OF THE CHILD IN

CULTURAL REVOLUTION LIANHUANHUA

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## Chapter 1: Introduction—Children and Lianhuanhua in the Cultural Revolution

We begin to examine lianhuanhua by looking at one typical story, that of a young boy. Twelve-year-old Xiao Xin is “little Red Guard” with “a round face, bright eyes, and is full of vim and vigor.”<sup>1</sup> He lives in the countryside near the upper reaches of the Tonghe River with his mother and older sister, although the latter is constantly travelling because of her job as a “barefoot doctor,” or a rural doctor trained in basic medical care. Xiao Xin’s father having died, he and his mother are supported by Secretary Li, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) official in charge of the commune. The young hero passionately believes that he can help his community, declaring, “I am a little Red Guard, why cannot I, for the sake of the commune, collaborate and help?”<sup>2</sup> As such, he diligently fulfills his responsibility by collecting medicinal herbs and plants for his production brigade. Secretary Li perceives an innate sense of determination in Xiao Xin and encourages the boy to study to become a barefoot doctor like his sister. Additionally, Xiao Xin already wishes to become a barefoot doctor because of his own family history. Back in the days of the “old society” before the Communist liberation of 1949, Xiao Xin’s ailing grandfather was cheated by a wealthy peasant doctor named Qian Heixin, who collected all of his grandfather’s money without treating his illness. To make matters worse, the dishonest physician continued extorting money from Xiao Xin’s impoverished family after his grandfather passed, until the arrival of the CCP and the founding of the Communist state.

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<sup>1</sup> Cai Jiong 蔡炯 [A], Yu Fangde 余方德 [A] and Lu Ruhao 陆汝浩 [I], *Xiaochijiao yisheng* 小赤脚医生 [Little barefoot doctor] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1977), 21.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 29.

When an injured People's Liberation Army (PLA) captain comes to Xiao Xin's village, the boy nurses "Uncle Zhang" back to health with his knowledge of herbs and acupuncture. However, unknown to Xiao Xin, evil doctor Qian Heixin senses an opportunity to get revenge on the commune by poisoning both the injured PLA soldier and Xiao Xin's family. The doctor sneaks into Xiao Xin's home, puts poisonous herbs into Zhang's medicine, and runs away with "a sinister smile across his gourd-like face."<sup>3</sup> Xiao Xin returns home, and due to his acute knowledge of herbs and medicine, is able to discover the Qian Heixin's wrongdoing before he gives the medicine to the PLA soldier. Moreover, by cleverly following a trail of clues left behind by the wicked doctor, Xiao Xin is able to deduce the identity of the perpetrator and confront him with the help of Secretary Li. Qian is arrested, and the whole village celebrates, remembering "never to forget class struggle."<sup>4</sup>

Published in 1977, the story of *The Little Barefoot Doctor* brings up several questions concerning Cultural Revolution fiction. Why is a young child established as the protagonist and hero of this story? Why, despite his young age, is Xiao Xin depicted as extremely knowledgeable about medicines and complex treatments like acupuncture? Why is his village in an unspecified location? Should *The Little Barefoot Doctor* be considered a children's story because of Xiao Xin's youth, or an adult story because of its mature themes? Why does Xiao Xin have no father? Is this story merely propaganda and serve only to represent the state's agenda, or does it reflect other themes as well?

In order to answer these kinds of questions, this thesis will examine stories similar to *The Little Barefoot Doctor* as told through the medium of *lianhuanhua* (连环画), or

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 32.

“linked serial pictures.” I will look at these comic or picture books to understand visual and written imagery associated with the “child” during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). By scrutinizing lianhuanhua as an artistic and literary medium read by countless people read during this era, I not only wish to emphasize the importance of lianhuanhua as a unique genre in Cultural Revolution studies, but also to stress the importance and significance of the image of the child that was articulated through these comics. As I will argue, both the visual and written discourse of narratives contained within lianhuanhua reveal alternative approaches to examine cultural products and attitudes during the Cultural Revolution, and can help us understand how a surprising diversity of political voices emerged during this period of otherwise strict ideological control.

Traditional narratives of Chinese history in the 1960s and 1970s generally emphasize the unequivocal power of the state in all aspects of people’s lives. While the Cultural Revolution era was definitely one of undeniably strict governmental control, the standard portrayals overlook many limited spaces that were out of the government’s reach and control. While this period is undeniably one where “top-down” interpretations work well given the strength and visibility of CCP control, “bottom-up” analyses of this tumultuous time can reveal room for individual expression and dissent. By looking at Cultural Revolution lianhuanhua, I hope to explore this tension between strict state expectations of lianhuanhua and individual artistic and narrative creativity in their creation. For instance, while the above description of *The Little Barefoot Doctor* appears to be quite overt in its political agenda, other factors in the creation of these pocket-sized comic books that prove they are more than just state propaganda.

This blend of “art and politics” is what makes lianhuanhua a unique source through which to explore beyond the state’s direct control of this period. While it is true that the creation of lianhuanhua was highly regulated by various instruments of the central government, these comics were also created by individual artists and writers who navigated the tumultuous waters of the Cultural Revolution. Restrictions and regulations plagued these creators, but there was still room for them to negotiate their own identities and attitudes from within the confines authoritative CCP structures. After all, art in cartoon form was nothing new by this time, as it had also been employed during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Specifically, “war cartoons” evoked emotional and nationalistic sentiments that utilized art and public opinion to battle the enemy (in this case the Japanese and Chinese collaborators).<sup>5</sup> Artists established patriotic associations and journals, many specifically catering to interior and rural areas, in order to garner support against to Japanese with propagandistic messages; one scholar aptly summarizes this period as being one of “cartoon warfare.”<sup>6</sup> Many artists from this era were also engaged in post-1949 artistic and literary works leading up to the Cultural Revolution, most notably Feng Zikai (1898-1975), whose poignant and simple cartoons evoking the simplicity of Buddhism slowly shifted into more Communist themes such as work and communalism by the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the art and text of lianhuanhua did not simply appear during the Cultural Revolution, but evolved gradually throughout China’s turbulent twentieth century.

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<sup>5</sup> Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 120.

<sup>6</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 94.

<sup>7</sup> Christoph Harbsmeier, *The Cartoonist Feng Zikai: Social Realism with a Buddhist Face* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984), 187.

Lianhuanhua of the Cultural Revolution are a relatively distinct form of art/literature, however, in comparison to earlier war cartoons. This uniqueness stems from the content and narrative methods that derive from the combined effect of both visual and textual imagery. Before going into the specifics of lianhuanhua themselves, their contents—and especially the use of children in these stories—needs to be discussed. This next section will introduce the significance of children in lianhuanhua and why raising children as a subject of inquiry is useful in an analysis of the Cultural Revolution.

### **Art, Literature, and Children**

Lianhuanhua during the Cultural Revolution cover a variety of topics and portray an assortment of protagonists. For example, one comic titled *Contention* features a retired woman revolutionary that upholds ideals of class struggle in a school after liberation. Another titled *An Ordinary Letter* features postmen who seek to reunite the offspring of revolutionary martyrs with each other. If there are a variety of characters and themes within lianhuanhua, why does this thesis focus only on child protagonists? There are several reasons for this line of inquiry. First, throughout a number of cultural genres in the Cultural Revolution, the image of the child is represented ubiquitously in visual and textual discourse. Mao himself made many overtures to children and youth throughout his lifetime, maintaining that “only through the united efforts of our younger generation and all our people, working with their own hands, can China be made strong and prosperous within a period of several decades.”<sup>8</sup> This propensity to elicit the image of children and youth as subjects with which to mobilize for the good of the nation and revolution was one of many places where children were particularly visible. Additionally,

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<sup>8</sup> “Quotations from Mao Tse Tung,” accessed February 25, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch30.htm>.

the image of the child during the Cultural Revolution was visible in daily life in the form of actual children. Because of the Maoist post-liberation baby boom, children existed in great numbers outside the home and as active members of society.<sup>9</sup> Like Xiao Xin above, children participated as “Little Red Guards” or members of the Young Pioneers that mimicked the work and structure of the Communist party. Posters were abundant that featured children doing and learning new things that helped support the CCP and the Chinese nation.

Second, besides the sheer quantities of visible images of children, children are an understudied group in many historical analyses. Children and their use as symbols have only been touched upon lightly in recent scholarship--when they are discussed, children are considered within the context of the family, and not as individuals. In a short article, Stephanie Donald examines Cultural Revolution posters that feature children. While her analysis is highly nuanced and analyzes how children were used as symbols, her work overlooks alternative representations of children as viewed in *lianhuanhua*. Posters are single framed compositions that provide one visual example in which to interpret the political message. However, *lianhuanhua* contain on average about one hundred images that are connected with text that form a complete narrative. Therefore, by looking at children within *lianhuanhua*, I hope to fill this gap in current scholarship in China. As seen with *The Little Barefoot Doctor*, children in *lianhuanhua* are relatively free of the traditional family structure and often act as independent agents. Xiao Xin has knowledge well beyond his years and is able to discover Qian Heixin’s plot without adult control or supervision.

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<sup>9</sup> Harriet Evans, *The Subject of Gender: Daughters and Mothers in Urban China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 12.

While this thesis is fueled by the dual tendencies of a prevalence of imagery of the child and the dearth of scholarship on this subject during the Cultural Revolution, what exactly does the phrase “image of the child” wish to convey? As *lianhuanhua* are both a textual and a visual source, “image” will refer to both the artistic depiction of the child and written descriptions. I hope to communicate how the gaze of readers interpreted the allegorical symbol of the child and brought this figure into their daily imaginations. This image that readers construct is varied and diverse, and influenced by both individual imaginations and the historical cultural milieu. It is this discursive symbol that I wish to extract from the pages of *lianhuanhua* in order to interpret exactly what the symbol of the child meant to countless Cultural Revolution readers.

With this in mind, the phrase “image of the child” will explore the meanings associated with children and childhood through art and language. Because of the dynamic nature of *lianhuanhua*, the various associations ascribed to the child are especially visible in comparison to other written or artistic genres. It is important to note that the children portrayed do not necessarily represent actual children, because actual children themselves have no part in their artistic and literary creation. Instead, children in art and literature represent “what it is that adults, through literature, demand of the child.”<sup>10</sup> In her influential study of the child in the novel *Peter Pan*, Jacqueline Rose removes the child from children’s fiction, claiming that instead images in literature are “one of the central means through which we regulate our relationship to language and images as such.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, artistic and literary works that contain children are not necessarily about children themselves, but instead make up different beliefs, ideas, and attitudes that adults

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<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 137.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

wish to portray. Just as Rose wants to emphasize that the tale of *Peter Pan* is not necessarily “children’s fiction,” I want to examine lianhuanhua in a similar way: child protagonists in lianhuanhua are not just representations of real children per se, but a complex symbol representing many different aspects and viewpoints. By adopting this perspective, readers can look beyond the explicit state propaganda within lianhuanhua and instead understand what readers took away with them personally from reading these comic books. For instance, readers could place the child in a historical continuum with similar symbols, use the image of the child to explore nostalgically their own childhood, or even utilize it to add to their sense of nationalism towards the Chinese nation.

Since Rose’s study in 1984, scholars have built on her ideas, finding the child in different genres of art and fiction. For example, in his exploration of the child in the creation of eighteenth century national narratives, Ala Alryyes looks at the constructs of both the child and the nation. Metaphorical language that evokes children in the works of Rousseau and others brands the child as a symbolic space for nations and people within such nations to define their identities. He extends his analysis and evaluates the language used concerning children in nationalist institutions that place the child at the center, such as Hitler’s Youth, Stalin’s Pioneers, and the Red Guards.<sup>12</sup> This coupling of child and nation can be seen across the globe, and this “emphasis on children as national raw material” is even evident within Cultural Revolution lianhuanhua.<sup>13</sup> I would argue that the coupling of child and nation is one of the most prevalent associations with the symbol of the child. However, while this thesis will explore children as a national symbol, I want to go beyond this singular way to interpret children in the Cultural Revolution by

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<sup>12</sup> Ala A. Alryyes, *Original Subjects: The Child, the Novel, and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 69.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

examining historical continuums of imagery associated with the child as well as social historical ones.

For example, other works examine how concepts of children are utilized in the cultural realm in many fields such as film, literature, history, psychology, politics, and education.<sup>14</sup> By considering the child in these diverse fields, alternative connections of the child outside the nation and nationalism can be discovered. In the compilation entitled *Children and Culture: Approaches to Childhood*, author Karin Lesnik-Oberstein claims that “the child” is “an identity which is created and constructed differently within various cultures, historical periods, and political ideologies.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, there is no set or standard interpretation of the child, but many, even conflicting understandings. For example, one author examines textual examples of child deaths in fiction show on one level “disguised expressions of adults’ fear of and rage at their replacements” and on another anxiety and fear about their own child’s safety.<sup>16</sup> Thus, children as a symbol can be explored on a variety of levels, whether it is in connection with the nation or an adult’s primal fear of being replaced or losing a child.

Therefore, the appropriation of the child as a symbol is valuable on a variety of levels. However, children and their images are treated in different ways depending on the cultural context from which they emerge. In the next section I want to explore the image over time in the Chinese context, starting as early as the Warring States period and up to

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<sup>14</sup> Karin Lesnik Oberstein, “Childhood and Textuality: Culture, History, Literature,” in *Children in Culture: Approaches to Childhood*, ed. by Karin Lesnik Oberstein (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Kimberley Reynolds and Paul Yates, “Too Soon: Representations of Childhood and Death in Literature for Children,” in *Children in Culture: Approaches to Childhood* ed. By Karin Lesnik Oberstein (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 153.

the present. To understand the image of the child in Cultural Revolution *lianhuanhua*, we need to understand how the child was treated historically over time in China.

### **The Dynamic Image of the Child in a Historical Context**

The image of the child portrayed in China is too diverse to relay in this short section, but it is important to grasp how the image of a child of roughly seven to thirteen years of age was treated over time as a distinctive categorical whole. Of course, this section can only relate mainstream and elite images, and does not accurately examine children in all corners of China, especially ethnic minority children. However, this central discourse of the child is worth mentioning in order to observe the continuity and change of this image over time. Although my treatment is largely chronological, it is important to note that one image of the child did not simply displace another over time. Alternatively, I wish to present these images in order to explain how they build off one another and relate back to the image of the Child during the Cultural Revolution. While using children as a mode of representation is a common literary and artistic trope across cultures, in the context of China there are unique circumstances and historical associations connected with them. By putting these historical images in dialogue with *lianhuanhua* images, I hope to show that the treatment of the image of the child in Cultural Revolution *lianhuanhua* is not simply determined by top-down party leadership, but is part of a long continuum of historical imagery and hence cannot be reduced to its political significance.

In this section, the image of the child is represented in not just one, but a variety of ways, which are also prevalent within the children in *lianhuanhua* comic books. I discuss here roughly seven separate formulations of the child, but it is important to note

that mainstream discourses are not simply limited to what I have written here. In addition to internal formulations of what the child represents to individuals, there are additional meanings attached to children apart from my own account, which traces characteristics also observed in lianhuanhua comic books. From this perspective, we can focus on visions of the image of the child as a precocious prodigy, an educated exemplar, pure and innocent, a moral authority, naughty and impish, and finally, as a nationalistic symbol.

“Childhood” is a peculiar stage of life because it is both transitory and mandatory for everyone.<sup>17</sup> We all have the experience of being a child, which is perhaps why so much meaning is often attached to the concept. But what exactly does a child represent in everyday life? Is it a status one holds within a household? Is it simply a role one plays in a family? Is it a time to be studying and working, or is it a time of play? Of course childhood and children are not limited to real-world concerns, but can take on a variety of metaphysical meanings as well. This topic has been addressed in several works, although there is a need for more research into the figure of the child. I hope to synthesize what has already been written here in order to connect the ideas and grasp a more complete picture of the meanings ascribed to the child in China.

Because of the lack of primary source material on the subject of children, most that has been done on children in China is done with “the image” of the child, not the actual experiences of children. In addition, this evidence is through the eyes of adults, as children rarely produce any viable sources themselves. With this in mind, children and the images surrounding them can be construed as “a construct comprised of adult expectations, hopes, and fears conceding the rising generation as opposed to a social

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<sup>17</sup> Ping-chen Hsuing, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), xiii.

history of the actual treatment of children.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, using adults as a prism in which to view children is standard, and is useful to relate what the image of the child represented over time. Anne Behnke Kinney, who has written much on the topic of children in early China, suggests that the image of the child is more than just about their treatment within the family, but can also be effective to measure features like gender formation attitudes, how a culture perceives both the past and present, and what personified the hegemonic expectations and goals in certain eras of Chinese history.<sup>19</sup> In this way, we can see how the image of the child is an important symbol that needs to be analyzed, especially in the context of the Cultural Revolution, where the image of the child is prevalent.

Some of the first images of the child appear in the form of Chinese myth, or semi-historical legends. These myths, while they had a great deal of meaning for the people at the time they were originally circulated, are relevant at later points in Chinese history as well. In this mythic discourse, the child became a recognized symbol in the form of the “child prodigy.”<sup>20</sup> For example, in a tale about the childhood of Houji (the prince of millet accredited with introducing millet and agriculture to China in the Xia Dynasty), an image of a child that is both precocious and talented takes a central place. Houji, a child who was abandoned and left to die of exposure, developed the knowledge to feed himself through innate understanding of agriculture. Houji was able to grow his own food and survive, and even experimented with different seeds in order to introduce new types of crops to the world.<sup>21</sup> As this legend exists as a corollary to the main myth of Houji as an

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<sup>18</sup> C. John Sommerville, “Forward” in *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Anne Behnke Kinney (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1995), xi.

<sup>19</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney, *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Anne Behnke Kinney (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

adult figure, it can be read that as an extraordinary person, his childhood was also exceptional. This same scenario can be seen in Cultural Revolution *lianhuanhua*, where children, despite their youth, are able to accomplish traditionally adult tasks with little or no assistance.

Kinney labels Houji a “prototype for precocity,” as such that later children in early China were ascribed with having a similar innate knowledge and know-how of the world as children. She cites both Xiang Tuo and Gan Luo as similar mythic children that follow comparable patterns to the Houji story. For example, Xiang Tuo was supposedly a student of Confucius, who at seven years old was able to become the teacher of an adult Confucius. In a late Han Dynasty (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE) stone carving that adorned a funerary monument, Xiang Tuo is shown as a small figure roughly a third of the size of the adult figures around him, looking up at the figure of Confucius and pointing upward, as if instructing him.<sup>22</sup> That such a small child was able to instruct one of the most highly regarded Chinese thinkers shows that there was some importance attached to the figure of the child at this time. The mental precocity of Xiang Tuo illustrates that on some level, the child was seen as charged with intrinsic wisdom and could impart knowledge even to a great thinker like Confucius. This distinction is intriguing because mainstream interpretations of Confucianism relate that to be older is to be wiser. Within the Cultural Revolution context of anti-Confucian campaigns, this view of the sagacious child might be particularly appealing to writers and artists attempting to compose against the Confucian grain.

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<sup>22</sup> "The Boy Prodigy: Xiang Tuo [Stone Carving]," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #190, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/primary-sources/190> (accessed November 21, 2012). Annotated by Anne Kinney.

Similarly the *Zhanguo ce* (The Intrigues of the Warring States) contains a passage that portrays a chancellor of the Qin state who receives unsolicited advice from a young boy, Gan Luo. When the chancellor ignores the young child, Gan Luo rebuffs, “Xiang Tuo was only seven [when] he taught Confucius...and I am already twelve! Please try me, my lord. Surely it isn’t proper to just shout me away.”<sup>23</sup> From these portrayals of precocious children, there is evidence that children were considered as having relatively important standing in the mythic discourse of early China. Yet, the only indicator of these children being children is in their stated ages. They do not represent a typical child who would have toys and frivolity on the mind; they only consider important matters of the state to be paramount. Even their pastimes are not quite those of a child, as Houji’s musings are important tasks like experimentation in agriculture.<sup>24</sup> It seems as if these children exhibit no characteristics commonly associated with children, and that they are exceptional indeed. These little exemplars seem an exception to the norm, stories to inspire children and others to perform at a high level in everyday life.

Beyond the mythic realm of child exemplars, in the Han Dynasty the notion of the child as a prodigy crystalized in in the form of biography. Childhood was a site to expose or foreshadow one’s life achievements and successes. One such record stated: “At the age of twelve I began to study writing, and after three winters I knew enough to handle ordinary texts and records. At fifteen I studied fencing; at sixteen the *Odes* and *Documents*.”<sup>25</sup> Mastery of the classics at an early age was an important hallmark in one’s life, as many claimed similar accomplishments. For example, the famous Han historian

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<sup>23</sup> Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth*, 39.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

Ban Gu was said to have mastered the *Odes* at the early age of eight.<sup>26</sup> This type of record was not only limited to male offspring, as Empress Deng of the later Han Dynasty is portrayed with similar proclivities:

At six years of age the empress was able to read the *Historical Reader*; at twelve she recited the *Book of Poetry* and the *Confucian Analects*. Whenever her elder brothers studied the classics or history, she would interrupt by asking difficult questions. Her interest was in ancient books and records, and she never paid any attention to home duties.<sup>27</sup>

This is a far cry from Confucius's own succinct biography in the *Analects* which stated that:

At fifteen I set my mind upon learning; at thirty I took my place in society; at forty I became free of my doubts; at fifty I understood Heaven's Mandate; at sixty my ear was attuned; and at seventy I could follow my heart's desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety.<sup>28</sup>

From this, we see that there has been a shift in the treatment of childhood; while

Confucius modestly states that he began learning at fifteen, the biographies in the Han Dynasty claim a much earlier age in which they began their studies. From his life story, Confucius places little importance to the child before age fifteen. While his biography can be read as modest in order to relay the long road one must take in order to become a proper scholar, it is clear that he did not consider his childhood years as relevant to his overall intellectual journey. Yet, the later Han biography of Empress Deng and others consider it a time to master crucial cornerstone texts. This precocious child represents hope and aspirations for future generations.

In addition to youthful mastery of children, Han writings show that the figure of the "abandoned child" was also a central literary trope. The ability to endure the hardship

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>27</sup> *Hou Han shu*. 10B [the Biographies of the Empresses]. Translated by Anne Kinney. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965, 418-30. Annotated by Anne Kinney.

<sup>28</sup> "The Analects," in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Phillip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 2001), 5.

of abandonment enhances a child's knack for learning. For example, in the *Hou Hanshu*, a seven year-old orphaned swineherd was portrayed as neglecting his herd in order to listen to a local scholar. When chastised by his employer for his negligence, the scholar takes him in as a student.<sup>29</sup> From this, it is revealed that living a life of hardship enhances one's ability to learn. In opposition to this, spoiled and dependent aristocratic children are portrayed in a negative light.<sup>30</sup> This Horatio Alger-esque promotion of less fortunate children remains key to the understanding the treatment of the child in China. If the child represents a person, one's country, or one's future, it makes sense to see this symbol overcoming the various difficulties in life.

While the children of these early periods are quite serious and lacking in childlike or carefree qualities, the Neo-Confucian school of Wang Yangming (1472–1529) infuses qualities of innocence and natural play into the image of the child. In fact, the purity, innocence, and spontaneity of childhood are essential qualities in the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>31</sup> While previous accounts call for a child to exhibit adult characteristics in order to be considered exceptional, in the Wang Yangming school, the “child's mind with spiritual perfection [was] in some cases regarded... as superior to the adult mind.”<sup>32</sup> As the adult mind became more and more corrupt with learning, Wang Yangming praised childlike behavior as being pure and without restraint. This image of the child as a “blank-slate” that is unrestricted by biased views is different from the “prodigy child” that is featured elsewhere. While the prodigy child is superior because of his/her surprisingly profound knowledge of set texts or skills, the Wang Yangming child has

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<sup>29</sup> Kinney, *Representations of Childhood*, 49.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Pei-yi Wu, “Childhood Remembered: Parents and Children in China 800-1700,” in *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Ann Behnke Kinney (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press: 1995), 146.

<sup>32</sup> Kinney, *Chinese Views of Childhood*, 5.

intellectual superiority because of what he/she does not know. The main point of this Neo-Confucian ideal is that at heart children exhibit a sense of innocence and moral strength that is lost as one grows up.

In addition to stressing the innocence and moral superiority of children, the Wang Yangming school also emphasized the importance of play and childish behavior. This school not only believed that enjoyable aspects of childhood benefit and nurture the innate goodness and innocence of children, but that it also aided them in learning.<sup>33</sup> Wang specifically advocated the use of play and music to cultivate the minds of children, as it would allow them to develop naturally and harness the useful innate knowledge that they all possess. This use of natural play differs from earlier conceptions within Neo-Confucianism, where the child was expected to behave like a small adult and discouraged from juvenile activities.

While in some circumstances the freedom and innocence of the child is praised, Ping-chen Hsiung's seminal work *A Tender Voyage* examines childhood in Ming/Qing China and recognizes a tension in images of children between those who were exceptional and studious and those who were wily and playful. For example, in some Qing Dynasty images, groups of children are depicted as wildly engaged in various activities like mock sword fighting, banging on gongs, and chasing each other while angry tutors observe with no power to stop them. Some depictions even show sleeping tutors lounging unaware while children engage in various activities. Conversely, other images show "model boys" who in unsupervised settings sit quietly and diligently while

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<sup>33</sup> Limin Bai, *Shaping the Ideal Child: Children and their Primers in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005), 119.

studying educational texts.<sup>34</sup> Expressed within these two conflicting images is the desire for one's child to learn and become successful in his future life as an adult, while the other presents children as whimsical, impulsive, and creative, as an age in which to celebrate and embrace being young. From this, the site of the child is negotiated between two conflicting expectations for children: one where greatness and success in the future is praised and the other where a child's natural joy and uncorrupted nature in the present is preferred.

In the twentieth century, the child's image became more nationalistic and politically charged. One good example of this is in the Boxer Uprising (1898-1901) which appropriated the image of the child as one of a moral authority that was both able to recognize the negative effects of Christianity and foreign incursion and more effectively receive the spiritual advantages of the boxer spirits.<sup>35</sup> The uncorrupt nature of (male) youth allowed them to be more susceptible to the boxer spirits than adult men.<sup>36</sup> Frequent imagery of children mastering mythical tasks and spiritual techniques was common in descriptions of this time. One chronicler of the event in 1900 observed that "they had no proper teachers, but their boxing techniques and swordsmanship were as if the result of long training."<sup>37</sup> Another more skeptical observer claimed that "they teach their tactics first to young boys, and these boys take the lead in every desperate deed, and elder people stand in awe of them and believe that they have supernatural powers."<sup>38</sup> Comparisons with children during the Cultural Revolution are commonly made with

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<sup>34</sup> Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage*, 121-123.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Cohen, *History in Three Keys: Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 115.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

Boxer children, as they were both engaged in a “reversal of status” that allowed them to break out from traditional roles.<sup>39</sup>

The May Fourth Movement (1915-1921) likewise put children at the center of discussion for purposes of nationalistic discussion, making them a symbol of hope for the future.<sup>40</sup> While the May Fourth/New Culture Movement sought to reinvent China on the national stage by doing away with certain aspects of tradition, some focused on children as instruments in which to enact this change. There were a variety of ways of presenting the child at this time. For example, one essay written under the pseudonym “Han Yi” (meaning a member of the Han Race) suggested rather radical images of children and the family. Although originally published in 1908, this work resonated within the New Culture movement. “Han Yi” claimed that children “belong to the world as a whole,” and should thus be raised publically and not be the responsibility of a single family.<sup>41</sup> By elevating the child as an entity that is universally belonging to everyone, we can see that the image of the child was being used and reconceptualized at this time.

The most famous May Fourth intellectual who focused on children was Lu Xun (1881-1936). He fashioned the image of the child into a symbol of China’s future.<sup>42</sup> Lu Xun was generally concerned that the future of China depended on children, relating the famous last line from his work *A Madman’s Diary* which stated “save the children.”<sup>43</sup> He saw children as a way to enhance China’s future place in the world, and orientated a lot of his lifeworks toward the intellectual and moral enhancement of children. Lu Xun

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Ann Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Han Yi, ‘Destroying the Family’ in *Sources of Chinese Tradition* ed. Wm. Theodore De Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 395.

<sup>42</sup> Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 41.

imagined children as the vanguard of for China's future and saw them as impressionable and malleable examples in which to promote change in China.<sup>44</sup>

Other May Fourth era thinkers and artists also presented a variable image of the child. For example, the cartoonist Feng Zikai, who was most active in the 1920s and 1930s, was known for his rather whimsical but sincere portrayals of children in his work. In much a similar way to the Wang Yangming school of Neo-Confucianism, Feng Zikai children were portrayed as free to be themselves, playing with innocent curiosity or naughtily getting into forbidden places.<sup>45</sup> For example, in his cartoon entitled "One Can Look Down into the Swallows Nest," two children look down out of their window, pointing at a swallow's nest that has been built just under it.<sup>46</sup> The two children are innocently observing the life of the two birds inside the nest in harmony. This represents innocence and genuine nature. Indeed, Feng often depicted children in realistic and mundane settings, engaged in activities one would expect of any child.

Through this quick examination of the child in the historical context, I hope to convey that children were portrayed in not just one, but many ways. From the child prodigy to the pure innocent, the child has transformed in many ways to suit the needs of different people at different times. Lianhuanhua children likewise exhibit similar tendencies that these historical examples portray. In lianhuanhua we see precocious prodigies who understand theories of communism and revolution, even more than some adults. We also see pure and uncompromised children who are naturally aware of Maoist ideas and maxims. In the next section, I hope to provide a complete image of the child in lianhuanhua so that he/she may be considered in this continuum of imagery.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 84-85.

<sup>45</sup> Harbsmeier, *The Cartoonist Feng Zikai*, 63.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 105.

### **Methods**

This thesis will be broken down into three chapters. The second chapter, entitled “Lianhuanhua of the Cultural Revolution” will look at the genre of lianhuanhua as they existed during the Cultural Revolution. In addition to the examination of art during the Cultural Revolution in a more general sense, this chapter will show the processes involved in the production of lianhuanhua as well as the types of writers and artists that produced them. By covering the historical development of lianhuanhua and how they were appropriated for propaganda use by the state, I hope to highlight how this type of art/literature was an essential component to everyday life during the Cultural Revolution. Conversely, this chapter will examine the constraints of the state on the production of lianhuanhua and locate limited spaces of individuality on part of both writers and artists. The final part of the chapter will evaluate how the unique method of reading and consuming lianhuanhua render it a distinct cultural form during this period.

Chapter Three, “Little Heroes: Images of Children in Cultural Revolution Lianhuanhua,” will look specifically at images of children produced within lianhuanhua. By looking at common conventions across a number of lianhuanhua with child protagonists, I will identify the different sets of meanings and interpretations attached to children. Besides nationalistic connotations with the image of the child, children during the Cultural Revolution encompassed meanings such as (but not limited to) innocence, strength, nostalgia, lost childhoods, and precocity. The chapter will conclude by dictating the distinctiveness of lianhuanhua in comparison to other similar Cultural Revolution didactic constructs such as models figures, posters, and children’s picture books.

Chapter Four, “The ‘Other’ Child: Minority Children in Lianhuanhua” will shift gears and look at minority children protagonists in lianhuanhua. From this, I want to

challenge common assumptions of state-produced minority imagery as feminine and weak by using examples of strong, heroic minority children in lianhuanhua. Lianhuanhua offer a distinct space for minorities to portray a more formidable image, although this strength is produced in the confines of state artistic conventions. In addition to minority children, I will also examine portrayal of children of different nations, such as Korea and Vietnam. By investigating the ethnic/national “other” in the figure of the child in lianhuanhua, I hope to not only complicate the image of the child during the Cultural Revolution, but also reveal different ways in which the average person approached minorities in China.

The final chapter will look at the thesis as a whole and suggest larger research implications and perspectives concerning the image of the child and Cultural Revolution lianhuanhua. Additionally, this chapter will explore future implications of this study.

## **Chapter 2: Lianhuanhua of the Cultural Revolution**

In China and elsewhere, art has been used for reasons outside the realm of aesthetic pleasure. A Northern Song Dynasty painting purportedly by the Song Emperor Huizong (r. 1100-1125) himself, entitled “Cranes over Kaifeng,” relates the auspicious imagery of cranes as symbols of longevity in order to communicate the prominence of his reign.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Qing Dynasty painter Zhu Da (also known as Bada Shanren, 1626-1705) used his brush to portray dystopian natural scenes that relayed his dissidence toward to the new Qing Dynasty. Seemingly little has changed in the realm of art up to the Cultural Revolution, where art was largely created to serve the political purposes of the state.

Lianhuanhua are no different than these well-known pieces, and the art and text that make up the narratives of these comic books on one level can be read simply as propaganda that is similar to all of the other government sponsored works in this era. Yet lianhuanhua are a distinct art form that in many ways represents a different avenue in which to view Cultural Revolution art and literature. By combining image and narrative text into one artistic medium, one can construct new conjectures regarding Cultural Revolution propaganda. Instead of viewing only Cultural Revolution posters or novels, art and literature are combined to deliver propagandized messages. Specifically, the use of the image of the child in Cultural Revolution lianhuanhua reveals new insights into how people perceive certain symbols in their everyday life.

Before delving into the specifics concerning children in lianhuanhua, it is necessary to examine the cultural context of lianhuanhua production and art in general.

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<sup>47</sup> Peter C. Sturman, “Cranes above Kaifeng: The Auspicious Image at the Court of Huizong,” *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990): 33.

The Cultural Revolution was a time when people at all levels of society paid particular attention to artistic and visual forms. Not only did such images surround people in everyday life in the form of posters and cartoons, but such art was also carefully regulated by both official governmental sources and everyday people. With this in mind, are lianhuanhua of the Cultural Revolution simply the manifestations of strict top down Communist ideals? Or is there more to the process that can lend credit to the individual artist or writer of lianhuanhua?

This chapter will reflect on this question by looking at lianhuanhua as a component of popular culture and government propaganda in Cultural Revolution society. The first section will examine questions of agency surrounding the production of lianhuanhua art. Studies on specific lianhuanhua have found that there is more to certain lianhuanhua narratives than the CCP's imagination. Conversely, this section will also examine the strict regulations on artistic style, narrative content, and publication of art during this period. Section Two will look specifically at the development of lianhuanhua during the Cultural Revolution and examine questions concerning lianhuanhua authorship. The final section will look at the narrative techniques of both image and text to emphasize the uniqueness of lianhuanhua reading practices. By examining a single example of lianhuanhua entitled *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*, I hope to elucidate why lianhuanhua are such an optimal but understudied source of propaganda during the Cultural Revolution. Overall, this section will highlight both the significance of the lianhuanhua genre in within the context of Cultural Revolution art and literature by examining it as a limited space of artistic expressions not seen in other works of this period.

### **Lianhuanhua: Behind the Narrative**

Upon first glance, artistic and literary forms within the Cultural Revolution appear strikingly similar in aesthetic style. The homogeneity of image and text can be regarded as the product of strict political and ideological control on art, inherited from Mao's Yan'an talks in 1942. At this event, Mao declared that art for art's sake was not acceptable, and art required political criteria that had the ability to extend across all levels of society. Yet art during the Cultural Revolution was the upshot of many diverse processes, both from strict governmental regulations and individual artistic aesthetics.<sup>48</sup> This tension between individual agency of the artist and strict governmental control is not often discussed in Cultural Revolution scholarly works, as agency of any kind is difficult to locate in this chaotic era. Case studies of individual works have been the most successful in this regard, as tracing the origins of singular works can reveal more complex processes than previously imagined in what seems a rather "black and white" period in Chinese history.

A good example of this can be observed in Uradyn E. Bulag's research into the origins of the parable of the *Heroic Sisters of the Grassland*, which shows that a propagandized narrative, rather than embodying a simple machination of the ruling Communist regime, can actually be read as a strategy of resistance by Mongolian leadership.<sup>49</sup> The story depicts two young Mongolian girls who are dedicated to herding their sheep, but tragically lose their way in a snow storm. As they evade a Mongolian class enemy's attempt to steal their sheep, they are ultimately saved by a young PLA

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<sup>48</sup> Julia F. Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution" in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-1976*, ed. Richard King (Vancouver: UBC Press 2010), 31.

<sup>49</sup> Uradyn E. Bulag, "Models and Moralities: The Parable of the Two 'Heroic Sisters of the Grassland,'" *The China Journal* 42 (1999), 24.

soldier. Bulag's analysis follows the rapid appropriation of this story first by the Mongol leadership and then by the central Communist government itself. With this method, Bulag shows how the promulgation of this story was not simply a political tactic on the part of the CCP, but in fact demonstrates a Mongol political maneuver aimed at showing devotion to the Communist cause and the peaceful friendship between the Mongol and Han peoples. This story situates Mongols and Han on the same side of Mao's class struggle, and constructs a shared conception of the dangerous "other": class enemies. Bulag's investigation into the processes of the creation of this story goes against a simple "top-down" reading of art and literature during the Cultural Revolution.

However, works that made it to print during this time were published as a result of much oversight by various committees and officials. Mao contended that artists were the "cogs and screws" in the revolutionary machine, and art was to be produced by "cultural workers" under the direct oversight of the Communist Party.<sup>50</sup> For example, in order for an artist to submit his/her work of art to an art exhibition, he/she needed approval from a variety of disparate individuals. For one such exhibition, after passing local checks, an artist required the approval of "the head of the People's Academy of Fine Art, the head of the College of Arts and Crafts in Beijing, the fine art editor of the *People's Daily*, the head of the People's Fine Art Publishing House, and a number of well-established artists."<sup>51</sup> Acceptance into an exhibition was one of the only avenues to become a successful artist during the Cultural Revolution, and if one's art was not up to the standards of a variety of artistic authorities trained to accept certain Communist aesthetics and messages, one would have trouble showing art at any career-establishing level.

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<sup>50</sup> Richard King, *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>51</sup> Maria Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China 1949-1984* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998), 17.

In addition to this oversight, there were strict guidelines established by party leadership that put many limits on artists. By the 1970s, individuals like Mao's wife Jiang Qing (1914-1991) and her state-controlled culture group personally laid down specific standards for art, literature, and theatre; not only must all art depict worker/peasant/soldier themes, but all works were required to emphasize positive figures that were both heroic and central to the composition.<sup>52</sup> If works did not adhere to these criteria, one had the unfortunate possibility of being dubbed "rightist," "black," or "counter-revolutionary" and face imprisonment or worse. As mentioned earlier, cartoonist Feng Zikai was defined by his peers as a "reactionary academic authority" during the Cultural Revolution. In 1969 he was taken forcefully from his home and sent to the countryside to harvest cotton.<sup>53</sup> While Feng was well-loved in previous eras for his simple and morally constructive art, Cultural Revolution authorities considered his work "bourgeois" and not appropriate for the masses. In fact, during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, few artists were able to avoid imprisonment, public humiliation, or ostracization.<sup>54</sup>

Jiang Qing's concept of the "three prominences" also played a major role in the creation of art and literature in this period. Although originally applied to model operas, the concept spread to other art forms during this period. The three prominences stated that all narratives should give prominence to positive characters; positive characters should give prominence to heroes and heroines; and all heroes and heroines should give

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<sup>52</sup> Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 366-367.

<sup>53</sup> Christoph Harbsmeier, *The Cartoonist Feng Zikai: Social Realism with a Buddhist Face* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984), 41.

<sup>54</sup> King, *Art in Turmoil*, 3-4.

prominence to the principle hero.<sup>55</sup> This elevation of the heroic figure had precedence in earlier Chinese literature, but Jiang Qing's edicts ultimately generated little wiggle room for artists in terms of theme and artistic style.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, lianhuanhua of this period feature exclusively heroic protagonists, and as we will examine, stories from earlier periods that did not fit Jiang Qing's pattern were manipulated so that they could be included into the Cultural Revolution literary and art cannon.

While these stylistic impasses may have denied artists some creativity, it did not ultimately stall the production of art in general. In addition to the quantity of artistic works produced in this period, the number of copies and editions of each work was quite large, especially in comparison to earlier periods. One scholar speculates that 172,077 copies of a single poster were not uncommon during this time.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, an article in the *People's Daily* surmised that "according to incomplete statistics, in 1972 Beijing alone published more than 21 million copies" of lianhuanhua, eagerly read by workers, peasants, soldiers, and young people.<sup>58</sup>

By the early 1970s, as Red Guard movements wended down, artists gained freedoms denied to them earlier in the Cultural Revolution. Some imprisoned artists were released from prison and sent back to work.<sup>59</sup> Some in this period even boldly called for the elevation of artistic standards of lianhuanhua and other forms of art. One article in the *People's Daily* suggested that:

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<sup>55</sup> Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China*, 165.

<sup>56</sup> Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1990), 102.

<sup>57</sup> Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 1.

<sup>58</sup> Liu Dengcheng 刘登程, "Qing shaonian xuyao geng duo geng hao de Lianhuanhua 青少年需要更多更好的连环画" [Young people need more and better comics], *People's Daily*, June 13, 1973, 3.

<sup>59</sup> King, *Art in Turmoil*, 9.

Readers are also concerned with the quality of lianhuanhua. In addition to improving the ideological content, they should also be required to improve the painting (including cover design,) printing, and binding quality. Currently some lianhuanhua's art is monotonous and rough. The cover designs are generalizations and the images and colors are not distinctive.<sup>60</sup>

Although the *People's Daily* is a government sponsored and official newspaper, this call to reshape the appearance of lianhuanhua shows the desire to improve the standards of previous artistic production. Earlier artistic and literary flaws were often blamed on favorite Cultural Revolution scapegoat Liu Shaoqi. As a *People's Daily* piece argued, "before the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the traitor Liu Shaoqi and his agents of literary and art circles...concocted a lot of 'poisonous weed' works."<sup>61</sup> From this, it is evident that art and literature in the Cultural Revolution was under constant negotiation.

My analysis suggests that there were many factors contributing to the production of art and literature during the period of the Cultural Revolution. While official decrees are the most straightforward method to identify and understand Cultural Revolution art, there were additional avenues in the creation of arts in this period, especially by the 1970s. From Bulag's discussion, we see that *Heroic Sisters of the Grassland* is a good example of art serving purposes other than furthering state policies. In addition, the public discussions over artistic standards of lianhuanhua in newspapers allow us to avoid a simple "top-down" reading of all art and literature during the Cultural Revolution. With this in mind, the next section will look more specifically at lianhuanhua and how examining this art form reveals different perspectives from which to view Cultural Revolution art and literature.

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<sup>60</sup> Liu, "Young People Need Better Comics," 3

<sup>61</sup> Chuan Hongnong, 川红农, "Laogu de zhanling lianhuanhua zhendi 牢固地占领连环画阵地" [The strong position of lianhuanhua comic books,] *People's Daily*, August 5, 1970, 4.

### The Origins of Cultural Revolution Lianhuanhua

Lianhuanhua published during the Cultural Revolution represent a culmination of a previous comic book tradition first developed in 1920s Shanghai treaty port culture.<sup>62</sup> But what exactly are Lianhuanhua and how did they develop from their origins and within the context of the Cultural Revolution? Before describing specific examples of children portrayed in lianhuanhua, the significance of this art form needs to be touched upon. How can a simple comic book help to decipher state images of children?

Lianhuanhua or “linked picture stories” were originally developed in the early twentieth century. They are pocket-sized books (roughly 3-5 inches) that were printed cheaply in small printing studios in urban areas.<sup>63</sup> These books contain roughly one black and white line art graphic per page with a short 3-4 sentence caption underneath. Before 1949, topics varied and included everything from ghost stories and historical romances to pornography and popular operas. This type of commercial art was largely enjoyed by middle and lower class people, who rented these small books at newsstands.<sup>64</sup> Illustrated Chinese fiction was nothing new, as people in the past enjoyed combinations of poetry and illustrations<sup>65</sup> as well as illustrated versions of famous stories like *Journey to the West*.

After 1949 and the creation of the People’s Republic of China, lianhuanhua production was coopted by party cadres. By 1950, the CCP had full authority to approve the contents of all lianhuanhua publications. The state then used these books as an additional form of propaganda aimed specifically at soldiers, housewives, children, and

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<sup>62</sup> Kuiyi Shen, “Lianhuanhua and Manhua: Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai” in *Illustrating Asia*, ed. John A. Lent (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 101.

<sup>63</sup> Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 67.

<sup>64</sup> Shen, “Lianhuanhua and Manhua,” 101.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 192.

workers.<sup>66</sup> The new lianhuanhua were didactic tools to teach readers about the revolution and the various roles everyone in society was required to assume. One contemporary proclaimed that “Although lianhuanhua are small, the impact can be large, as it holds an important position in the competition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.”<sup>67</sup> Cadres took responsibility to retrain Lianhuanhua artists and authors to illustrate and write in certain styles and produce images from text prepared by special committees. In 1953 the Beijing People’s Art Press established lianhuanhua research groups that allowed only approved literature, cinema, and political messages to make it into published books.<sup>68</sup> By the Cultural Revolution, this type of propaganda was not simply a tool for the uneducated masses, but an exalted form of literary art that contained both high artistic quality and elevated ethical messages. Large conventions and conferences were even held to select some lianhuanhua for national awards beginning as early as 1959 and 1963.<sup>69</sup>

Often, the writer and the illustrator of lianhuanhua were two different people or groups of people. Usually the credit for the production of certain lianhuanhua went to a corporate author such as “Shanghai People’s Publishing Company” and not an individual author. This is because often a team of two or more writers would construct the narrative of the story, not a single author. This is also the same for the artists involved in the creation of lianhuanhua, who would illustrate certain parts story and pass it on to another artist. Often, artists would work from set prototypes in the depiction of characters and backgrounds, leaving little room for individual artistic expression. This collaborative

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<sup>66</sup> Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 70.

<sup>67</sup> Chuan, “The Strong Position of Lianhuanhua Comic Books,” 4.

<sup>68</sup> Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 129.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 246.

style was common for novels during the Cultural Revolution as well, but even more common with lianhuanhua.<sup>70</sup>

Authors and artists of lianhuanhua comics were not only professionals, but amateurs as well. At the 1973 "National Lianhuanhua and Chinese Painting Exhibition," at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing, over 97 sets of lianhuanhua comic books were put on display.<sup>71</sup> A reporter covering the event commented that

In this exhibition, people are particularly excited that the team engaged in lianhuanhua production has expanded to include not only professional artists, but also workers, peasants, PLA soldiers, teachers, poets and writers. A wealth of practical experience of the three great revolutionary movements of workers, peasants, and soldiers is put into lianhuanhua production, which has brought new vitality to the lianhuanhua field.<sup>72</sup>

While this may be read as an attempt to promote lianhuanhua as a true mass cultural form, it accurately reflects that fact that authorship of lianhuanhua was complex and often represented the efforts of many contributors.

Lianhuanhua that were not the result of multi-person think tanks were often adapted from approved opera or film scripts. For example, one of the most famous lianhuanhua that features a protagonist child, *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*, first appeared in film form in 1963 and was adapted into a lianhuanhua in 1972. Some lianhuanhua even captured direct screen shots from a film, and condensed captions were provided to recount the film in comic book form. This style stems from lianhuanhua's roots as a medium through which to supplement popular films and operas that some people may not have been able to access in their everyday lives. As film from the mid-1960s became a

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<sup>70</sup> Lang Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), 9-10.

<sup>71</sup> "Meishu yuandi qixiang xin: 'Quanguo lianhuanhua, zhongguohua zhanlan' he 'Hu Xian nongmin hua zhan' xunli 美术园地气象新《全国连环画、中国画展览》和《户县农民画展》巡礼" [Fine arts corner meteorological news: "National Cartoon and Chinese Painting Exhibition" and "Hu County Peasant Painting Exhibition" festivals], *People's Daily*, October 15, 1973: 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

central part of Chinese cultural life,<sup>73</sup> lianhuanhua likewise acted as a corollary to this cinema upswing. Lianhuanhua assisted audiences in learning the language and styles of film, as film conventions were relatively new to many in this period.<sup>74</sup>

With the start of the Cultural Revolution, lianhuanhua production ceased as many artists were jailed and the government apparatus in charge of regulating them was abolished in 1966.<sup>75</sup> However, by 1972, as the chaotic period of the Red Guards died down and some order was established, many imprisoned artists were released and sent back to work in the creation of lianhuanhua. As a result, many artists strictly adhered to the creation of government-approved stories that contained the didactic messages accepted by the top party leadership. Therefore, much of the work in lianhuanhua comics is state-sanctioned artistically and content-wise in this period, roughly from 1972-1976. To some extent they can be read as constructions of the state more than creative output of individual artists; however, with the above example of Bulag's analysis of the *Heroic Sisters of the Grasslands*, artistic and narrative agency was a definite possibility. This is observed in some artists' aesthetic choices for their characters that reveal artistic roots not specifically located in the Cultural Revolution.

For example, this phenomenon can be seen in the lianhuanhua comic entitled *A Case of Mauser Pistols*. In this lianhuanhua, the author depicts the main hero Tuan Tuan riding on top of an ox (fig. 2.1). While this at first appears quite conventional (the ox in the story is used as a literary device to provide an example of a commodity belonging to the entire agricultural collective), its artistic choice is actually quite nuanced. Symbolic

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<sup>73</sup> Paul Clark, "Triumph of Cinema: Chinese Film Culture from the 1960s to the 1980s" in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, ed. Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 87.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

<sup>75</sup> Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 349.

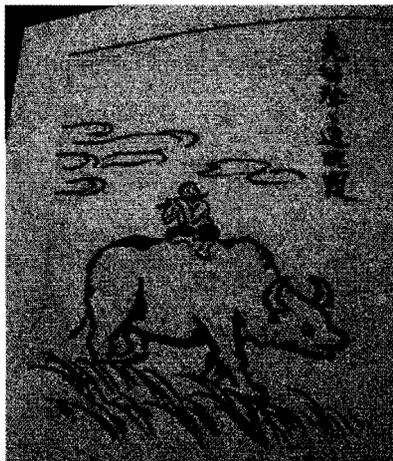
associations of a boy riding an ox are portrayed in folk art of the parable of the *Cowherd and the Weaving Maid* (Niu lang zhi nu).<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, when comparing this image to Feng Zikai's 1965 cartoon entitled "Music from the Flute Sends Home the Evening Clouds" (fig. 2.2), the images are nearly identical. These similarities are interesting because as mentioned above, Feng Zikai's art was condemned as reactionary.<sup>77</sup> Thus, even though the government and other art authorities carefully regulated the art and story of *lianhuanhua*, artistic expression was still an option in small cases like the above example illustrates.



2. 1 Tuan Tuan on top of an ox. *Yi zhi bo ke qiang* 一支驳壳枪 [A case of Mauser pistols] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1972), 14.

<sup>76</sup> Patricia Bjaaland Welch, *Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery*, (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2008), 153.

<sup>77</sup> Harbsmeier, *Feng Zikai*, 116.

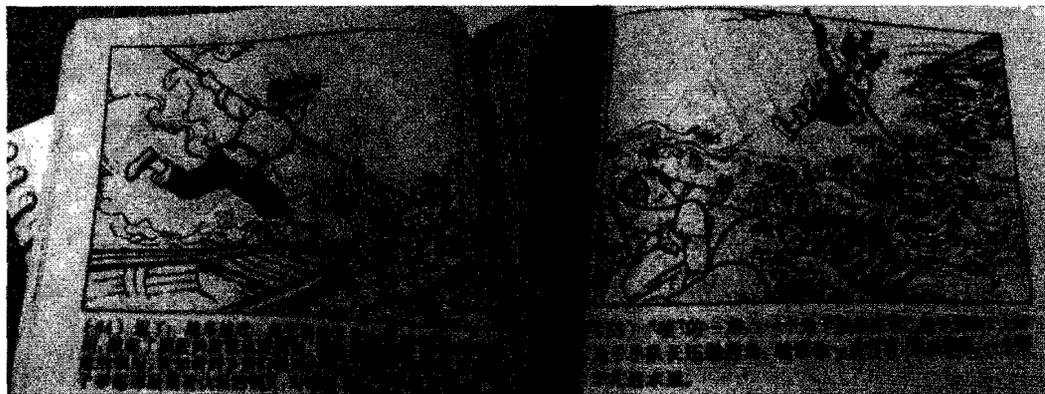


2. 2 “Music from the Flute Sends Home the Evening Clouds,” in *The Cartoonist Feng Zikai: Social Realism with a Buddhist Face*, ed. Christoph Harbsmeier, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984), 116.

Other artistic deviations from the norm include subtler references. For instance, in *Little Eighth Route Army*, the artists and authors portray the young protagonist Huzi wielding a spear in battle with Japanese soldiers (he is initially considered too young to carry a handgun). In figure 2.3, Huzi is about to violently stab an enemy soldier with his weapon. Notice the spear’s length, perhaps a little longer than Huzi himself. In the next frame as shown in figure 2.4, Huzi has stabbed his foe, using the Japanese soldier’s submerged body to launch onto an enemy life raft in order to continue defeating his enemies. Notice that in this frame Huzi’s spear has lengthened to a considerably longer size as he acrobatically flies through the air to the enemy boat. While this could be simply artistic license within the context of a chaotic battle scene, the image is reminiscent of Sun Wukong, also known as the Monkey King, a character from the epic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. One of the chief characteristics of the Monkey King was his weapon: a “magical steel” or staff that could change length and size at will in battle.<sup>78</sup> While this reference to the monkey king is subtle, Mao Zedong purportedly

<sup>78</sup> Thomas L. Cocksey, *Masterpieces of Non-Western World Literature*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 123.

identified and praised the character of the Monkey King, making this reference perhaps as a nod to Mao himself.<sup>79</sup>



2. 3 and 2. 4. Huzi in a battle with the Japanese. Shanghai shi mu'ou jutuan 上海市木偶剧团 [Shanghai puppet troupe], *Xiao balu* 小八路 [Little Eighth Route Army] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1971), 64-65.

Finally, in addition to subtle references outside the Communist cannon, artists of *lianhuanhua* frequently used painting techniques from earlier periods in order to “evoke visual links” with traditional Chinese painting (*guohua*.)<sup>80</sup> Part of this tendency is due to the inherited tradition of *lianhuanhua* as a type of woodcut print. Furthermore, copy books and models of correct ways to portray certain items and figures in *lianhuanhua* were standard for many artists, and deviation from these standards was not often accepted. Some of the artistic styles seen in *lianhuanhua* are directly related to earlier art from as early as the Ming Dynasty. For example, technical primers for painters of this era are strikingly similar to certain aspects of art in *lianhuanhua*. A Ming dynasty text instructing readers how to draw the trees of Song Dynasty painter Fan Kuan (990-1020) directly correspond to *lianhuanhua* depictions of similar trees.<sup>81</sup> Thus, while Cultural Revolution

<sup>79</sup> Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 20.

<sup>80</sup> Donald, *Picturing Power*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 231-232.

maxims supported eschewing traditional Chinese styles, artists still relied on this older tradition in the depiction of lianhuanhua.

As my discussion of the development of lianhuanhua as Cultural Revolution art and propaganda has shown, lianhuanhua are unique in their form and style and suggest new ways to examine propaganda and art in this period. While like other forms of art in this period lianhuanhua production was marked by strict governmental oversight, past tropes and motifs were employed in the creation of some lianhuanhua. While these minor instances do not reveal much in terms of an artist or author's individual agency, it shows that lianhuanhua production had space for the insertion of images not specific to the Cultural Revolution cannon. The next section will continue this line of argument and look at narrative forms deployed by lianhuanhua more specifically in order to relate how this form of propaganda was manipulated for public consumption.

### **Lianhuanhua as a Cultural Mechanism**

Why were lianhuanhua coopted by CCP authorities for propaganda, especially during the Cultural Revolution? There are several answers to this question. The first is that popular culture and other artistic forms have the ability to reach the masses on a large scale. They have a direct appeal to Communist authorities for the purpose of disseminating information and garnering support because they can be and viewed not just within the public sphere, but within the private one as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, utilizing art on a mass scale was employed in earlier instances, such as the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), in order to sway public opinion against the Japanese. While art was in use for political purposes before this time, art as a vehicle to disseminate subjective information was common in this period of war. Political cartoons

and posters gained a lot of popularity in this period as artists from the cities travelled to rural areas to spread their ideas.<sup>82</sup> Besides the fact that this urban form spread to the country in the period of war with the Japanese, lianhuanhua were still a widely-read form of urban popular culture, having strong levels of readership from at least the 1920s in Shanghai. This high level of mass readership was ideal for Communist propagandists in search of a way to disseminate political messages to the masses.

Besides their mass readership, the format of lianhuanhua represented what many in China considered a native form of popular art. Some contend that lianhuanhua came from purely indigenous roots from late 19<sup>th</sup> century lithographic printing that contained text and picture within a single composition, much like contemporary lianhuanhua.<sup>83</sup> However, others believed that lianhuanhua represented a “Sinicized” version of cartoon illustrative forms in the West and Japan.<sup>84</sup> Either way, the Communist leadership saw lianhuanhua as a local and widely-read form in which to circulate Communist values and political messages. One reporter from the *People's Daily* insisted that “we are confident that under the guidance of Chairman Mao’s revolutionary literate and art route, for the workers, peasants, and soldiers, the lianhuanhua workers of the revolution will certainly advance.”<sup>85</sup> Therefore, by incorporating lianhuanhua into the CCP’s propaganda, they assigned a new communist connotation with this form of popular culture.

Lianhuanhua were an attractive site for communist values in more mundane respects as well. As a relatively inexpensive form of entertainment (the list price for *Little*

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<sup>82</sup> Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 94.

<sup>83</sup> Shen, “Lianhuanhua and Manhwa,” 100.

<sup>84</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 120.

<sup>85</sup> Wei Pu 蔚普, “Wei gongnong bing he qingshaonian chuanguo geng duo lianhuanhua, 为工农兵和青少年创作更多连环画” [Create more lianhuanhua for the workers, peasants, soldiers, and young people], *People's Daily*, April 10, 1972: 4.

*Soldier Zhang Ga* was 0.10 yuan), lianhuanhua could be read by virtually all classes of people. If one could not afford this price, they could easily rent them for less or borrow them. Many schools and businesses kept libraries of these comics for employees and students to check out.<sup>86</sup> They also offered an alternative form of entertainment to both film and stage productions of stories on similar topics. As discussed above, some early post-liberation lianhuanhua were cribs to help audiences unfamiliar with the conventions and language of film culture.<sup>87</sup> By the time of the Cultural Revolution, many films were converted into lianhuanhua comic books, allowing people to bring their favorite films into the comfort of their own homes.<sup>88</sup> Other lianhuanhua were based on popular “real-life” events (*Heroic Sisters of the Grassland*), or popular communist figures (Lei Feng), or stories that touch on Communist themes (landlord/peasant relations.) Thus, the variety of subjects of lianhuanhua appealed to many readers, allowing this to be an ideal form to promote communist ideals.

Looking at a single example of lianhuanhua, *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*, we can understand how narrative modes and artistic devices allowed lianhuanhua to be an ideal source of propaganda for the CCP. As mentioned above, the 1972 lianhuanhua was based on the 1963 popular film. Besides this story representing one of the more popular lianhuanhua that has remained well-liked even to this day (an animated version was released in 2005), it contains a lot of tropes and themes that appear in other lianhuanhua as well. In addition, because this story has been released in multiple media throughout the

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<sup>86</sup> Susan Glosser, trans., *Li Fengjin: How the New Marriage Law Helped Chinese Women Stand Up* (Portland: Opus Mogus Books, 2005), vii.

<sup>87</sup> Paul Clark, “Triumph of Cinema: Chinese Film Culture From the 1960s-1980s,” in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, edited by Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press: 2010), 88.

<sup>88</sup> Clark, “Triumph of Cinema,” 93.

Communist period, we can view changes in the story that reveal the nature of propaganda and art in the Cultural Revolution in comparison with other periods.

The distinctive format of lianhuanhua epitomize what exactly made this genre of art/literature both a great propaganda tool for the CCP and an attractive form of recreation for a variety of readers. Much work has been done on deciphering comics as a narrative mode, but the unique layout of lianhuanhua offers different ways to view this art form. The combination and separation of image and text on a single page allow readers to interface with more than one narrative mode in order to understand the comic's message. This arrangement is considered a form of what one author calls "verbal conduction," meaning that the reader is required to shift their attention from text to image, allowing for more "forceful political communication."<sup>89</sup> In other words, the reader both absorbs the language of lianhuanhua as well as the visuals evoked by such language. In *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*, in one page of the comic the reader can observe the daunting visual representation of Japanese armies raiding a Chinese village ruthlessly. At the same time, the text articulates messages to both confirm what is occurring in the image and to relay what might not be obvious from the illustration, as the Japanese soldiers are described in the acts of "murder, committing arson, and plundering grain."<sup>90</sup> (fig. 2.5) In this way, the reader is doubly aware of the atrocities conducted by the Japanese.

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<sup>89</sup> Gino Nebiolo, introduction to *The People's Comic Book: Red Women's Detachment, Hot on the Trail, and other Chinese Comics*, trans. Endymion Wilkinson (New York: Anchor Press, 1973), xiv.

<sup>90</sup> *Xiaobing Zhang Ga* 小兵張嘎 [Little soldier Zhang Ga] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1972), 133.



2. 5. Japanese soldiers looting a Chinese village. *Xiaobing Zhang Ga* 小兵張嘎 [Little soldier Zhang Ga] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1972), 133.

In some cases, perhaps to spare the innocent eyes of younger readers, the most violent details are contained in the text while omitted from the image. This can be observed in *The Old Locust Tree Secret*, where the hero Erniu is recounting the death of his father at the hands of the Japanese. The image shows Erniu in a determined posture with strong contempt across his face, appearing to be having an internal rant about his current circumstances as an orphan boy under Japanese occupation. However, within the text he is recalling how his heroic father was captured by the Japanese while saving the masses, and then subsequently “the devils (Japanese soldiers) hung him from the locust tree, set him afire while he was still alive, and burned him to death.”<sup>91</sup> In this case the text serves to add deeper meaning, details, and context to the image.

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<sup>91</sup> Xu Bin 徐斌 [A], Chen Guangyi 陈光镒 [I], Sheng Liangxian 盛亮贤 [I], and Wang Yiqiu 王亦秋 [I], *Laohuaishe de mimi* 老槐树的秘密 [The old locust tree's secret] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 1976), 9.

Comics of any kind are usually first comprehended visually, as in general readers prefer the less complex nature of an image over text.<sup>92</sup> In addition, if a reader has difficulty interpreting the text, they can reference the picture to help them to understand the contents of the story. Because the narratives for *lianhuanhua* can often be quite complex and nuanced, images can be particularly busy and can be interpreted from multiple perspectives. Figure 2.6 represents a highly detailed scene in *Little Soldier Zhang Ga* that has multiple areas of interest for the reader. Central to the composition is Gazi, the hero of the story. As he flees from merciless Japanese soldiers who intend to do him harm, he runs into a courtyard and bars the gate. To the left of the panel are the three Japanese soldiers, trying to break into the courtyard to capture Gazi. Finally, on the far right inside the house adjacent to the courtyard is an unidentified hunched figure holding a walking stick, peering out at Gazi. Amidst the action of this sequence of three separate scenes, throughout the background there are small environmental details littering the picture, including a pumpkin grove, a large tree, and piles of firewood. Because nearly everything in the image is painted with the same thickness of line, it is difficult to focus on any one area within the image. Thus, without reading the text, only careful observation would reveal the narrative actions of the scene. However, as the hunched figure overlooking Gazi on the right is not mentioned in the text beneath the image, close observers of the image are rewarded with some foreshadowing insight: is this mysterious figure an enemy of Gazi, or will he soon be saved from the ruthless soldiers? As the reader can only observe two images at any one time with the open book, one has to turn

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<sup>92</sup> Mila Bongco, *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 2000), 46.

to the next page to find out the conclusion of this dire situation. Thus, the chaotic nature of the scene is paralleled by both the art and text of the image.



2. 6. Gazi on the run from Japanese soldiers. *Xiaobing Zhang Ga* 小兵張嘎 [Little soldier Zhang Ga] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chu banshe, 1972), 115.

Besides such detailed scenes that contain multiple sources of action, others employ a great deal of negative space to emphasize more dramatic moments. Figure 2.7 of *Little Soldier Zhang Ga* depicts Gazi and his recently murdered grandmother to the right of the scene. As if to mimic the shock felt by Gazi at the sudden passing of his grandmother, the right of the composition is relatively blank with the exception of a broken dish and some disheveled clothes. Where scenes in *lianhuanhua* often depict numerous small items and clutter (as is seen in an earlier panel of Gazi in his house talking with his grandmother), this one contains relatively few details. This use of negative space slows the pace of the narrative and places the reader in the direct moment. Whereas figure 2.6 depicted multiple focal points and movement, this scene is still and serves to pull the reader into Gazi's state of mind, which is scared and hopeless. While

within the action scene it is acceptable to miss the some of the details within the art (like the hunched man on the right), in this scene it is impossible not to read the tragedy and heartbreak of the image.



2. 7. Gazi and his murdered grandmother. *Xiaobing Zhang Ga* 小兵張嘎 [Little soldier Zhang Ga] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1972), 36.

These examples show that each page essentially freezes a larger moment within the *lianhuanhua*'s narrative. Unlike Western comics that employ multiple panels to set the tempo and speed of the comic (with action oftentimes spilling into several panels), *lianhuanhua* need to convey much more within a single frame so that the narrative is understood by readers. However, to truly interpret the narrative of the *lianhuanhua*, one has to understand the interaction of both image and text and how they are manipulated together to understand the message each story is attempting to convey.<sup>93</sup> The text, while viewed secondary to the image by the reader, contains important elements to understand the story in its entirety. Arguably, the text of the *lianhuanhua* contains a more nuanced message than that of the image.

<sup>93</sup> Bongco, *Reading Comics*, 46.

As described above, lianhuanhua have multiple sources of readership that represent a variety of age ranges. Many times there is no distinction between books for the young and books for adults.<sup>94</sup> Often, if the book is intended for a younger audience, the book will contain pinyin Romanization so more difficult characters can be identified.<sup>95</sup> While the language used in lianhuanhua is not too complicated for most readers, it is clear that children might have a more difficult time reading some of the text without assistance. In addition, slang is often used within the text, including derogative terms for Japanese soldiers, traitors, and class enemies.

The text of lianhuanhua is often quite detailed, much like some of the images described above. Such detail perhaps relates the level of sophistication of some of these narratives, taking away some of the low-brow nature of the comic and making it into a more advanced literary form. For example, in *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*, the narrative uses a total of five pages to describe Gazi's journey into the Eighth Route Army's secret headquarters, which is located behind a tea shop, over a wall, within several inner courtyards, and into a secret room. While this lianhuanhua was adapted from a film, the author could be attempting to encapsulate the atmosphere of the film into the pages of the lianhuanhua. However, it is more likely that the author is using descriptive elements in order to emphasize the importance of the scene. *Little Soldier Zhang Ga* is one of the longer lianhuanhua and running around 200 pages; and even several scenes from the film are omitted.

This textual neglect of certain scenes is perhaps the result of editing the longer film into the pages of the comic book. However, as the writer of the lianhuanhua

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<sup>94</sup> Nebiolo, *The People's Comic Book*, xi.

<sup>95</sup> None of the lianhuanhua examined in this paper contain pinyin.

continues to develop the importance of minor scenes like the discovery of the Eighth Route Army hideout, this is unlikely. Instead, it can be seen as the adaptation of a 1963 pre-Cultural Revolution film into Cultural Revolution-appropriate material. The lianhuanhua adaptation of the film *Little Soldier Zhang Ga* from 1972 omits several key scenes. One deleted scene includes Gazi's fight with another child over the ownership of a toy wooden gun. To win the battle he knows he will lose, Gazi resorts to selfishly biting his opponent. Gazi is subsequently scolded by his Eighth Route Army superiors for engaging in conduct not worthy of the organization (by harming a civilian that he is supposed to protect). This modification from the film fits more into the common tropes of lianhuanhua that have child protagonists, more of which will be discussed in the next chapter. As described above within Jiang Qing's "Three Prominences," a hero of the Cultural Revolution narrative must have generally positive characteristics and attributes. While Gazi is proven a hero by the end of this tale, this scene was perhaps too provocative or morally ambiguous for Cultural Revolution censors.

By breaking down artistic and narrative modes in the lianhuanhua *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*, we can see how the use of lianhuanhua as a propaganda tool was particularly useful for the CCP, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Although locating agency and individualism or artists and writers within lianhuanhua is a challenge, art and literature in the Cultural Revolution was not a black and white process; lianhuanhua were created through the efforts of many. Understanding how lianhuanhua are consumed by readers will help reveal exactly how the image of the child was used within this form of art/literature. The next chapter will delve further into how the child was portrayed during

the Cultural Revolution and why this symbol within lianhuanhua is particularly indicative to the thoughts and minds of people at the time.

### **Chapter 3: Little Heroes: Images of Children in Cultural Revolution** **Lianhuanhua**

Lianhuanhua comic books reveal insightful glances into the everyday discourse of the Cultural Revolution. In an era where images were prime, plastered across public streets in the cities and even in the privacy of the home in the form of posters, bulletins, and political messages, lianhuanhua were an important part of Cultural Revolution visual and literary culture. Within lianhuanhua, art left the realm of urbanity and refinement and entered the domain of mass popular culture. Although the fictionalized stories portrayed in lianhuanhua appear on the surface to be simply didactic storytelling, they actually can relate the overall ambiance of everyday life during the Cultural Revolution. As lianhuanhua were an important facet of daily life for many, read by the young and old, the urban and rural, and people of varying levels of education and literacy, they constructed a certain shared mentalité among people. The portrayal of children in these comics gives some insight into what values and ideals people affixed to children at the time. While these ideals and values were most likely not universally adopted by everyone in the same way, the image of the child that circulated during the Cultural Revolution was echoed in the minds of many. Why was the child an important visual and literary trope during the Cultural Revolution? What did the image of the child represent to people at the time?

By the term “image” I wish to relate both literary and visual constructions in portrayals of children. Both written descriptions and artistic depictions form the image of the child in this essay. This is especially evident in lianhuanhua, which combine both image and text in order to relay a narrative. This dualistic understanding of “image” can

allow a more complete overview of what the figure of the child has signified over time in China.

In this chapter I hope to analyze both the symbol of the child in a historical context and within the pages of Cultural Revolution *lianhuanhua*. By “child,” I am referring to children of roughly seven to thirteen years of age, or primary school children, commonly called *xiaonian* or *qingnian*.<sup>96</sup> Besides the prevalence of this group of children in *lianhuanhua* comic books, this age range is considered culturally significant in a variety of other contexts. For example, by neo-Confucian standards, the ages of children from roughly eight to fifteen *sui* were regarded as in the “first stage of learning” and were treated differently in an educational setting than children in other age groups.<sup>97</sup> By modern Chinese standards these children are not yet considered adults, but at the same time they are not young toddlers or infants. Although youthful, this age group theoretically has the ability to think and act independently. In addition, because these children attend school, they have a basic understanding of how the world works. Furthermore, this age range encompasses roughly the ages of children allowed to engage in socialist groups like the Young Pioneers. Being a Young Pioneer signifies the first step toward becoming a Chinese Communist Party member, and is exclusively for primary school children. In this organization, children are primed to emulate socialist organization and are educated in collectivism, leadership, and obedience to the party.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ping-Chen Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>97</sup> Limin Bai, *Shaping the Ideal Child: Children and their Primers in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005), 72.

<sup>98</sup> T.E. Woronov, “Performing the Nation: China’s Children as Little Red Pioneers,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 80 no. 3(2007): 656.

If a child is portrayed in the *lianhuanhua* as a protagonist, he/she is in this primary school age range. It is especially important to examine this age range of children in the Cultural Revolution because the first images that usually come to mind considering this era are Red Guard-aged youth, who are generally attending high school or university. While research into Red Guards and their activities is essential for the study of this era, the image of the primary-aged child is perhaps more prevalent than older youth in visual culture during the Cultural Revolution. Memoirs from people who lived through this era can help to illustrate how children lived and their individual experiences, but they do not provide a complete picture of the layers of meanings that the image of the child reflected in everyday life. How were the literal bodies of these children manipulated and employed subjectively by the party and everyday people?

In a fascinating study, Ann Anagnost examines how the child and its body became a site of societal desire for both national transcendence and the future in reform-era China. Anagnost looks at the child as a symbol of untapped national vitality that could be cultivated in order for China to “transcend its status as inferior.”<sup>99</sup> In much the same way, I want to look at the child of the Cultural Revolution as a site for aspirations of the future that emerged out of the chaos of this era. Besides more obvious overtures by top members of the communist party like Chairman Mao who declaimed to youth that “the world is yours...you young people, full of vigor and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you. The world

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<sup>99</sup> Ann Anagnost, “Children and National Transcendence in China,” in *Constructing China: The Interaction of Culture and Economics*, ed. Kenneth G. Lieberthal et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 2010), 197.

belongs to you. China's future belongs to you,”<sup>100</sup> the visual prominence of the child spread in other official and unofficial realms as well.

However, the image of the child during the Cultural Revolution does not simply encompass one meaning that is often attached to it: nationalism. In some studies that examine Cultural Revolution propaganda posters and language, the child as a symbol of nationalism is the only connotation discussed. While this is relevant to *lianhuanhua* representations of children, there are additional ways to interpret children as symbols at this time. Additionally, this sense of nationalism is not simply decided by top Communist leadership who controlled various modes of propaganda. Through the investigation of these *lianhuanhua* comic books, I hope to reveal multiple meanings for the image of primary school children. Besides nationalism, I hope to show the child as the allegorical site to relate innocence, ideological superiority, the future, the past, and as a sense of nostalgia. In addition, as related in the introduction of this paper, the image of the child has a long historical tradition that also encompasses a variety of meanings and can be projected on the present. These other interpretations are revealed by placing the Cultural Revolution image of the child in negotiation with both historical and contemporary images within other Cultural Revolution mediums. By doing this, the children portrayed in the *lianhuanhua* come to encompass more than just the symbology of national succession and nationhood, but can comprise of a variety of other meanings that are counter-hegemonic to the Party's narrative.

Using *lianhuanhua* as a medium to illustrate the discourse concerning the child during the Cultural Revolution is valuable for several reasons. First of all, because

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<sup>100</sup> Yarong Jiang and David W. Ashley, *Mao's Children in New China: Voices from the Red Guard Generation* (New York: Routledge, 2000), viii.

lianhuanhua are in the realm of fiction, they can be read on many different levels, depending on the reader. As opposed to supposedly real events that depict children (like model children), the majority of children in lianhuanhua do not exist in the real world and can be more effectively appropriated with additional meanings, attitudes, and beliefs. While some lianhuanhua are based on true events, the stories are fictionalized to a certain degree that there is a lot of space to interpret it as a relatively untrue event. Second, because lianhuanhua are not simply a single image, but a dynamic multi-imagined story with a beginning, middle, and end, there is more in-depth opportunity to understand the character of the child and what he/she represents. A child on a Cultural Revolution poster is stagnant, and can only relate as much as a single panel can convey. The combination of both graphic and textual meanings can relate much more complex thought processes than other artistic mediums. Finally, lianhuanhua are widely circulated and commonly read objects that reached the hands of many, and are read on a personal level. A single person reads a lianhuanhua, and they can form their own ideas and feelings about the book in the privacy of their own minds.

In this chapter, I hope to accomplish two tasks. First, I will analyze various aspects of lianhuanhua stories with a primary-aged child as the protagonist in hopes of understanding all features of the image of the child in this type of literature. Second, I want to compare the children in lianhuanhua with images of children in other mediums, like posters, model children, and children's books. What are the associations attached to children at this time? Can these images reveal cultural expectations of children in this era? In answering some of these questions, I hope to uncover why the image of the child is so central during the Cultural Revolution.

### **The Image of the Child in Cultural Revolution Lianhuanhua**

In order to examine the visual and literary image of the child in lianhuanhua, I will examine several key features of the comic books, including the setting, background of the protagonists, the protagonist's character, and the protagonist's physical characteristics. Examining these central features will provide a complete look into lianhuanhua comic books featuring children. By looking at these comic books together as a unified whole, they can help to reveal discourse on the image of the child during the Cultural Revolution and how it relates to the image of the child throughout Chinese history. In addition to the nationalistic child, the precocious, innocent, naughty, and studious child can all be observed in lianhuanhua.

#### **Setting**

The child protagonists within lianhuanhua comic books exist within a few limited time and place settings. These settings consist of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the era of Collectivization (1958-1970s), and periods around the date of publication (early 1970s). In addition, place settings are limited to villages in the countryside and border regions. These areas are usually unspecified country towns, but occasionally the setting is more specified. Cities are mostly entirely absent from these books, with the exception of smaller cities that are depicted during the Second Sino-Japanese and Korean wars. For example, in the lianhuanhua entitled *Deep Friendship* which is set during the Korean War, the setting is near the city of Shenyang in Northeast China which puts the characters in proximity to North Korea. Most often or not, even the specific time period is unspecified, often presenting the date as missing the last digit (for example, 195X, as seen in *Flying Eagle Cliff*).

The vagueness of the time and place in *lianhuanhua* stems from the desire to make these stories relatable to a multiplicity of readers. The events of a story could be happening almost anywhere and anytime in China, which relates both the urgency and relevance of each comic's message. For example, *Spread out Sunshine Street* is set in a southern village that is "in a beautiful area...along a small river that stretches to a distant place."<sup>101</sup> This setting is purposely vague in order to convey the universal and idyllic nature of the countryside where the story is set, as this collective could exist just about anywhere within China. In addition, an ambiguous setting also serves to avoid certain political issues that affected these areas. For example, if set during the Great Leap Forward specifically, such dates might bring up upsetting memories for readers, as many small villages and communes were going through periods of starvation and hardship.

The setting also works in service of the young protagonist as a backdrop serving to emphasize his/his natural spirit and bright future.<sup>102</sup> Often, the first page of the *lianhuanhua* describes where the young hero lives and gives the reader an idea of what conflict is to come. The idyllic scene presented at the beginning of *Spread out Sunshine Street* shows the reader that the hero will attempt to preserve this tranquil area. Alternatively, *Deep Friendship* shows a scene of hardship during the chaos of the Second Sino-Japanese War: "In an evening in the twelfth lunar month, a north wind blew in making it bitterly cold...under the rule of the enemy puppet government, Shenyang was enveloped in darkness."<sup>103</sup> These descriptive cues set the tone for what the young

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<sup>101</sup> Haoran 浩然 [A], Xiao Binhua 肖斌华 [A] and Yang Yiming 杨一明 [I], *Pu man yangguang de lu* 铺满阳光的路 [Spread out sunshine street] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1975), 1.

<sup>102</sup> Lang Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), 117.

<sup>103</sup> Yang Yingbiao 杨英鏢, *Shenhou de youyi* 深厚的友谊 [Deep friendship] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1972), 1.

protagonist will encounter, and helps to portray the quality and nature of the young protagonists.

Additionally, the setting changes with the level of hardship or success the hero faces: struggles often show the hero battling harsh winds and rain, while success is represented by sun and light. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below show this contrast. In figure 3.1, Huzi from *Little Eighth Route Army* is seen battling harsh winds and rain in order to find the Eighth Route Army after his grandmother is brutally killed by Japanese troops. In contrast, Erniu (13 years old) from *The Old Locust Tree's Secret* is shown in a victorious pose atop the titular locust tree after he single-handedly defeats a group of armed Japanese sentries with a slingshot, one of his shoes, and a dead snake. He is triumphantly described with “sunshine illuminating his figure, appearing especially powerful and sturdy.”<sup>104</sup> Lines emanate from the light of the sun to encompass his heroic figure. Nature and environment help to set off the main hero and provide depth to various lianhuanhua characters. Furthermore, the sun is a ubiquitous symbol often used in Cultural Revolution imagery as a representation of Mao Zedong.<sup>105</sup> Heroes and Heroines of lianhuanhua are often depicted with the sun shining brightly behind them (fig. 3.2) which is meant to represent Mao’s oversight and approval of the figure.

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<sup>104</sup> Xu Bin 徐斌 [A], Chen Guangyi 陈光镓 [I], Sheng Liangxian 盛亮贤 [I], and Wang Yiqiu 王亦秋 [I], *Laohuaishe de mimi* 老槐树的秘密 [The old locust tree’s secret] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1976), 50.

<sup>105</sup> Maria Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China: 1949-1984* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), 165.



3. 1. Huzi traveling in stormy weather. Shanghai shi mu'ou jutuan 上海市木偶剧团 [Shanghai puppet troupe], *Xiao balu* 小八路 [Little Eighth Route Army] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1971), 25.



3. 2. Erniu standing in triumph. Xu Bin 徐斌 [A], Chen Guangyi 陈光镒 [I], Sheng Liangxian 盛亮贤 [I], and Wang Yiqiu 王亦秋 [I], *Laohuaishe de mimi* 老槐树的秘密 [The old locust tree's secret] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1976), 50.

### Protagonist Background

Besides the protagonists of these lianhuanhua being roughly seven to thirteen years of age, there are many commonalities across the personal backgrounds and personal histories of these lianhuanhua children. All of the main protagonists have good class backgrounds and are most likely from poorer families. This is seen in the number of young heroes who are members of the Young Pioneers, signified by the red scarves that

they wear. Young Pioneers is a group exclusively for class-appropriate children of seven to thirteen years of age, after which they can qualify for the Communist Youth League.<sup>106</sup> In addition, in order to show these children as poor, many of the environments where the children live often appear quite shabby and conventional. This is not simply done to show the pitiable nature and environment of the main heroes, but to share with more well-off readers the simple and uncomplicated nature of rural life. While the characters' homes often look outdated, they are presented as homey and relaxed. In *Little Barefoot Doctor*, the protagonist lives in a simple home complete with thatched roof and old-style brick ovens. While this device does not convey the modern conveniences one would find elsewhere, it is presented as ideal. In *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*, the young protagonist shares a bed with his grandmother in an old rickety home before she is killed by the Japanese. In this case, the dilapidated nature of the buildings is related to the chaos of Japanese aggression.

Besides class background and lack of wealth, the most obvious characteristic that lianhuanhua protagonists share is that they are either orphans or nearly orphans. While some of these children still live with their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or a sister, not a single child protagonist in lianhuanhua stories has a living father. This idiosyncrasy can be read in a couple of different ways. First of all, it is reminiscent of early Chinese mythological children described above, who suffered hardships and abandonment as children and were subsequently blessed with both strength and exceptional character, in contrast to aristocratic and spoiled children who grow into corrupt adults because of indulgence in their youth. The children in these lianhuanhua can be seen in this same way as having a direct perspective into the sorrows and hardship of revolution and war.

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<sup>106</sup>Woronov, "Performing the Nation," 656.

Growing up without parents, they understand the concepts of the revolution more acutely because of the loss of their families. On the other hand, children of landlords that are portrayed in *lianhuanhua* have a living father, but act as spoiled, ignorant children who cannot understand basic socialist concepts. For example, in *A Case of Mauser Pistols*, the hero Tuan Tuan (10 years old) encounters Ma Chengzhi, son of the local landlord, hunting for frogs in the collective's fields. Tuan Tuan attempts to stop him, suggesting that "teacher says frogs eat insects, which protect the rice paddies. Why do you capture them?"<sup>107</sup> Ma Chengzhi explains that he is catching frogs for his sick grandfather, because there is a superstition that frog meat can cure sickness. Ma Chengzhi's motivation stems from Confucian beliefs of being filial to one's elders, which in this context is presented as being both feudal and misguided. When Tuan Tuan tells him that frogs cannot cure sickness, Ma Chengzhi retorts "this all belongs to my family! Even that ox is my family's! You didn't know?"<sup>108</sup> From this exchange, the son of the landlord who has supposedly never experienced hardship is presented as both superstitious and spoiled, not even understanding something as simple as a frog's role in nature. On the other hand, Tuan Tuan has naturally absorbed the ideas of socialist collectivization. Ultimately, Tuan Tuan has bypassed Ma Chengzhi's feudal obsessions and is loyal to the collective.

Another reason for the protagonist's orphan status is that because these children have no parents, their father figure is essentially an extension of Communist power. Often in the form of a party secretary or People's Liberation Army officer (usually a captain or other midlevel officer), the children find guidance, love, education, and support. For example, in *Little Eighth Route Army*, young Huzi (13 years old) thrives

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<sup>107</sup> *Yi zhi bo ke qiang* 一支驳壳枪. [A case of Mauser pistols] (Shanghai: renmin chubanshe, 1972), 20.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

under the guidance of PLA captain Yang Biao after his grandmother is murdered by the Japanese. Huzi, who initially only wants a gun in order to enact his revenge, is instructed by Captain Yang that guns are not the only thing that the PLA relies on: “In the Eighth Route Army, we rely on having no fear, no bitterness, the spirit of revolution, and we rely on the masses for support!”<sup>109</sup> Huzi is then able to relinquish his childish obsession for a gun, and participates heroically in the battle against the Japanese. With no authoritative father figure to teach these children correct ways, the various embodiments of socialism and the Communist Party stand in their stead.

In addition, by having no blood relatives, these stories can emphasize class solidarity over blood kinship.<sup>110</sup> In *Spread out Sunshine Street*, after the protagonist Lai Hai’s (10 years old) mother dies leaving him an orphan, the party branch secretary “uncle” Tian Da of Lai Hai’s collective offers to take him in, because “we in the agricultural commune, each and every household are all family.”<sup>111</sup> However, when Lai Hai’s maternal blood uncle comes from a nearby city to adopt him, Lai Hai is forced to go with him. Unknown to secretary Tian Da or Lai Hai, Lai Hai’s uncle is a “capitalist roader” who left his own commune to participate in underhanded business practices. What is more, it turns out that he adopted Lai Hai so he could save the money of hiring an outside laborer. When Lai Hai discovers this he cries, “I do not want to go down that road with him!”<sup>112</sup> In the end, Lai Hai ends up living with Tian Da, where he grows into a responsible and knowledgeable young man in the commune. From this, we can see that

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<sup>109</sup> Shanghai shi mu’ou jutuan 上海市木偶剧团 [Shanghai puppet troupe], *Xiao balu* 小八路 [Little Eighth Route Army] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1971), 38.

<sup>110</sup> Lang Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution*, 45.

<sup>111</sup> Haoran 浩然 [A], Xiao Binhua 肖斌华 [A] and Yang Yiming 杨一明 [I], *Pu man yangguang de lu* 铺满阳光的路 [Spread out sunshine street], 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

kinship ties mean less than class ties. These protagonists are not necessarily selfishly serving their family; they are dedicated to communism and in this case, the collective commune.

One last reason why heroes are orphans is because these children, instead of being average, are essentially the successors of the revolution. As their fathers and the rest of their families have given their lives to the revolutionary cause, these children will ultimately have the same ability. In this “theory of descent,” a parent’s class status is passed on to their children, but so is their parent’s heroism and sense of self sacrifice.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, for these young heroes to be heroes, they need heroic parents. In *The Old Locust Tree’s Secret*, Erniu volunteers for the dangerous mission of distracting Japanese sentries so that the PLA soldiers can destroy a stockpile of weapons that they are guarding. Erniu’s father was a guerilla captain that was captured when protecting the masses and subsequently violently killed by Japanese troops. While at first the PLA captain is worried that Erniu is too young for the mission, he allows him to go, because he feels that in his heart, Erniu is much like his father.<sup>114</sup> In this way, the child’s body is shown in a succession of inherited revolutionary activity and commitment, emphasizing that “every generation is red.”<sup>115</sup> As successors of the tragedies of war, these children are in the position to take over the reins of revolution.

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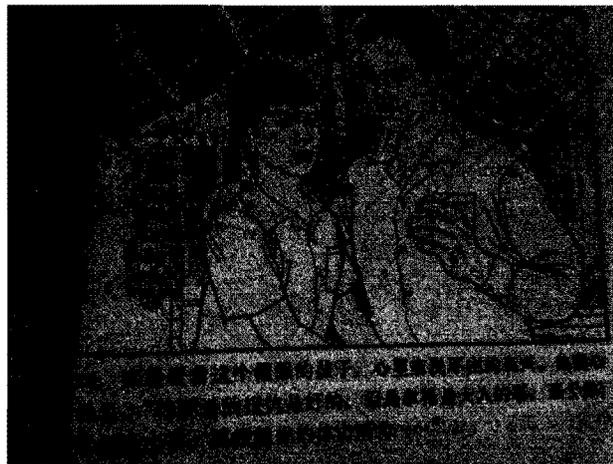
<sup>113</sup> Lang Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution*, 43.

<sup>114</sup> Xu Bin 徐斌 [A], Chen Guangyi 陈光镒 [I], Sheng Liangxian 盛亮贤 [I], and Wang Yiqiu 王亦秋 [I], *Laohuaishe de mimi* 老槐树的秘密 [The old locust tree’s secret], 13.

<sup>115</sup> Stephanie Donald, “Children as Political Messengers: Art, Childhood, and Continuity,” in *Picturing Power in the People’s Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, ed. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999), 89.

### Physical Characteristics of the Main Protagonists

Despite the geographic, ethnic, and age differences between the child protagonists, they all share similar physical qualities across different lianhuanhua. Boy protagonists all have short stark-black hair, round faces, and thick eyebrows. If one looked at pictures of these boys out of the context of their narratives, determining which lianhuanhua they were originally from would be difficult. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 below are good examples of average lianhuanhua protagonists. For example, although the artistic styles are different, both boys are similar in appearance. However, one child is a Vietnamese boy named Afu from the story *Afu* about South Vietnamese children in the Vietnam War, and the other boy is Huzi, a Han boy from *Little Eighth Route Army*. Both boys look remarkably similar and are probably what one would consider “good looking,” at least in comparison to the antagonists in the works, who often appear twisted and unattractive. In fact, they hardly appear like children at all with their thick eyebrows and mature expressions across their faces.



3. 3. Vietnamese hero Afu. Huang Baozhu 黄宝柱, *Afu* 阿福 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1972), 25.



3. 4. Han hero Huzi. Shanghai shi mu'ou jutuan 上海市木偶剧团 [Shanghai puppet troupe], *Xiao balu* 小八路 [Little Eighth Route Army] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1971), 24.

Besides that fact that *lianhuanhua* authors used stock templates to produce the likenesses of the characters based on the concepts of socialist realism, there are other reasons for this physical similarity. In his book on novels of the Cultural Revolution, Lang Yang notes that stock physical qualities of the novel's heroes is due to the tendency for heroic characters to be depicted as handsome, which correlates to the character's inner superior ideological consciousness.<sup>116</sup> In addition, emphasis on the eyebrows and eyes stem from their ability to create “awe-inspiring” expressions with the ability to distinguish the identities of class enemies and counter-revolutionary behavior.<sup>117</sup> In figure 3.5, we see Huzi with his mentor Captain Yang. Even though Captain Yang is a great deal older than thirteen year old Huzi, their features are remarkably similar. Down to the shape of their mouths they are nearly identical with exception of Captain Yang's size and more defined chin (compared to Huzi's round one.) This similarity of appearance extends to other medium during the Cultural Revolution, where depictions of figures like Zhou Enlai show similar thick eyebrows and strong features.

<sup>116</sup> Lang Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution*, 49.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 53.



3. 5. Huzi and Captain Yang. Shanghai shi mu'ou jutuan 上海市木偶剧团 [Shanghai puppet troupe], *Xiaobalu* 小八路 [Little Eighth Route Army] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1971), 82.

While the majority of the children in these comics are young boys, girls are also the main protagonists of the *lianhuanhua*. Often boy protagonists have young female supporting characters, who are depicted as just as strong and capable as the boys. For example, *Heroic Little Eighth Route Army* features five protagonists: three boys and two girls. Despite their difference in gender, the children are all depicted in a similar fashion, wearing the same school uniforms and the red scarves of the Young Pioneers. The two female characters have shorter hair, which makes them blend in with the male characters. In addition, the girls are depicted just as capable of bringing down the Nationalist spy who had infiltrated their village in hand-to-hand combat. These girls are not necessarily being masculinized in order to be on the same level as the male heroes. They are just put to the same standard as any other heroic figures within *lianhuanhua*. In fact, their sex is written out entirely of *lianhuanhua*, as a hero's gender is never commented upon, only his age or status.

While there are Han female heroes portrayed in *Heroic Eighth Route Army*, the majority of female heroes are often of one of the 55 Chinese national minorities. For example, the heroine of *Flying Eagle Cliff* is a young twelve year-old Yao minority girl named Xiu Liping who is orphaned when class enemies kill her mother, because she refused to sell her house and her daughter to pay unwarranted debts. While her hair is depicted as longer, this could be perhaps due to her minority status. In fact, at the end of the book when Xiu Liping grows up into a PLA hero, her hair is cut short. More on minority heroes in lianhuanhua will be discussed in the next chapter.

In addition to having similar facial features, the children in lianhuanhua are depicted as being physically and mentally strong. Not only can they outsmart their enemies, these children can overcome them physically in hand-to-hand combat. In *Little Eighth Route Army* Huzi is able to drown an attacking Japanese enemy by himself. In *Flying Eagle Cliff*, Xiu Liping is able to deter her class enemy by pushing him off a cliff in order to escape. In *Li Village Battle Song*, the hero physically beats down a spy of Chiang Kai-shek. If they cannot physically defeat their enemies alone, several children combined are able take down their enemies by force.

Although children are often depicted as shorter than the adults they battle against, when they confront or fight their enemy they often appear larger than their foes, who are often shown hunched over and physically crooked. In addition, their features appear more grown up and they look to be more adult than primary school-aged adolescents. While in real life a seven to thirteen year-old would have difficulty engaging a grown man in battle, within the pages of the lianhuanhua it is entirely possible. This relates that although small,

these children have ideological superiority that allows them to exert additional force outward in relation to their enemies who are mentally and ideologically weak.

### Character and Personality

The children in lianhuanhua, despite being in different settings and scenarios, all convey certain personality traits. The personality of the characters is perhaps the most important feature, as these lianhuanhua serve to suggest how children and adults alike should act in Cultural Revolution China. Besides the heroism that is essential for any piece Cultural Revolution art or literature,<sup>118</sup> children perhaps have more personal depth than their adult counterparts. Because they are children, there can be a certain amount of artistic license in their portrayal, seen in the relative boisterousness and naughtiness of some lianhuanhua children as opposed to adult heroes and heroines. While these heroes can be seen in some ways as simply “little adults,” they also have a childish side that is curious, pesky, and spirited. Therefore, these children are somewhere between Houji, a child who acted as an adult, and Feng Zikai’s children, who are mischievous and innocent.

First of all, the level of maturity of the main character varies slightly between lianhuanhua. I would argue that the level of maturity of the character correlates with the level of maturity of the potential reader. For example, in *A Case of Mauser Pistols*, the heroes Tuan Tuan and Quan Quan (10 years old) are initially depicted as a mild nuisance, begging an old man to take care of the commune’s ox by taking it out to graze and drink. While Tuan Tuan and Quan Quan’s stated intentions are to help a *wubaohu* (an older unattached person deserving of special benefits) so he can attend a production team meeting, the two children in actuality want to enjoy a fun time taking the ox to the mountains for play. They beg the old man incessantly until the party secretary comes by

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<sup>118</sup> Galikowski, *Art and Politics*, 165.

and laughingly allows them to take the ox out. In this case, Tuan Tuan and Quan Quan's maturity level is low, as they are still initially considered pesky children by the old man. In addition, Tuan Tuan and Quan Quan rely on their teacher's sayings and stories told to them from before collectivization to understand and identify a class enemy. Even though they are naturally inclined to disbelieve a lying landlord, (who untruthfully assures the two boys that he is no longer a class enemy and willing to cooperate with the collective,) the two boys naturally distrust him and discover a stash of Mauser pistols he had intended to use for a counter-revolutionary effort.

Another good example of this is from *Heroic Little Eighth Route Army*, where one of the five heroes, Xiao Ming, is given the task of guarding a telephone post, which is used to relay information of an attack back to the commanders. Although he is instructed by his peers to "protect the telephone and don't make a mistake,"<sup>119</sup> he gets bored and goes outside to catch crickets, making him nearly miss an important phone call that signaled an oncoming attack. The other four children chastise him for his poor job, stating "you are too fond of play, you were too scared and you did not hit the warning bell. If you do it like this, more people will be in danger. Chairman Mao teaches us 'serve the people.' How are you going to serve the people?"<sup>120</sup> In this way, the juvenile behavior of one child is set off by the other more responsible ones. Xiao Ming is later redeemed when he helps to uncover a plot by Nationalist spies.

While Tuan Tuan, Quan Quan, and Xiao Ming are at the more childish end of the spectrum, the unnamed twelve year-old narrator from *Deep Friendship* exhibits a much more mature attitude. As his father was killed by Japanese soldiers, he has effectively

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<sup>119</sup> *Yingxiong xiao balu* 英雄小八路 [Heroic Little Eighth Route Army] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1973), 33.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

taken the role of man of the house. While his mom works in the city, the narrator takes care of all the chores within his household. This child does not engage in play, but only works to help his struggling mother. For fun, he studies a book about Korea with his neighbor. In essence, the only indicator that the narrator is a child is his depiction in the artwork. He has adult attitudes and responsibilities. Similarly, Xiao Xin (12 years-old) from *Little Barefoot Doctor* engages in acupuncture and medicine-making techniques that are well beyond his years. Alone, he is able to nurse an ailing PLA soldier back to health.

The juvenile nature and mistakes made by lianhuanhua children also have a moral dimension. By examining the hero's mistakes and reaction to those mistakes, the readers are invited to join the character in the learning process of his moral development. For example, the protagonist from *Little Soldier Zhang Ga* named Gazi suffers from some childish tendencies like stealing a handgun from his superior. The spirited nature of Gazi was commented upon by children who were interviewed after viewing the original film version of the story. Wu Ben, a middle school student, remarked that "Zhang Ga has a prominent advantage, which is that he has the courage to admit his mistakes, and then correct the error. Up to this point, I have not done enough good, I must certainly learn from Zhang Ga and have to courage to admit and correct my own mistakes."<sup>121</sup> Because like all children (and people in general) Gazi is susceptible to erroneous behavior, the strength of these characters is to admit when they have made a mistake and subsequently make amendments for them.

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<sup>121</sup> Miao Junjie 缪俊杰, "Dang hao wuchan jieji geming jieban ren—Beijing shi shaonian gong xiaopengyou zuotan yingpian 'Xiaobing Zhang Ga' he 'Jimao Xin' 当好无产阶级革命接班人--北京市少年宫小朋友座谈影片《小兵张嘎》和《鸡毛信》" [To be good successors of the proletarian revolution—the Beijing children's palace discussion of the film 'Little Soldier Zhang Ga' and 'Jimaoxin'] *People's Daily*, August 26, 1965: 6.

In addition to their maturity, children in *lianhuanhua* often have some type of passionate and deep-seeded hatred toward their enemies which defines their actions. It is as if from the depths of their souls, they feel intensely for the communist cause and revolution. For example, in *Little Barefoot Doctor*, Xiao Xin has a gut feeling that a character named Qian Heixin is not what he seems. When he first sees Qian Heixin, his “heart had doubts, and his suspicions grew.”<sup>122</sup> Then, when he meets Qian Heixin in the woods by chance, although Qian Heixin acts pleasant and denies that he is a class enemy, Xiao Xin looks at him and “from the bottom of his heart he was disgusted.”<sup>123</sup> On some level, even though Qian Heixin at this point has not done anything devious, Xiao Xin was still able to feel hatred toward him.

Besides innate feelings of suspicion against the story’s antagonists, characters have deep seated passion for their missions. This includes intense feelings of purpose and resentment toward their enemies. In *The Old Locust Tree’s Secret*, Erniu wants nothing more than to get revenge on the Japanese for the murder of his father. As he sits in contemplation about what to do about the Japanese, Erniu gnashes his teeth and clenches his fists, as “class enemies and ethnic hate burned in Erniu’s heart.”<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Xiu Liping from *Flying Eagle Cliff*, when she is found by PLA soldiers after she fled from landlords who wanted her dead, was able to “pour out her pent up bitter and deep-seeded hatred.”<sup>125</sup> These intense feelings are what motivate the children in these stories. In some

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<sup>122</sup> Cai Jiong 蔡炯 [A], Yu Fangde 余方德 [A], Lu Ruhao 陆汝浩 [I], *Xiaochijiao yisheng* 小赤脚医生 [Little barefoot doctor] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1977), 9.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>124</sup> Xu Bin 徐斌 [A], Chen Guangyi 陈光镒 [I], Sheng Liangxian 盛亮贤 [I], and Wang Yiqiu 王亦秋 [I], *Laohuaishe de mimi* 老槐树的秘密 [The old locust tree’s secret], 10.

<sup>125</sup> Liang Fanyang 梁梵扬 [A], *Fei ying ya* 飞鹰崖 [Flying eagle cliff] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1975), 31.

ways, they are able to activate feelings and concepts that are more adult than their childish bodies.

One final personality characteristic shared by protagonists in lianhuanhua is their studiousness. As the protagonists are primary school-aged and attend school (where it is not interrupted by wartime scenarios), in many cases the children are seen either actively learning from books or listening intently to those who have something to teach. For example, in *Heroic Eighth Route Army*, although the five protagonists do not attend school in order to participate in a self-created “support the front initiative,” they are seen constantly studying. With no adult overseeing their studies, the children still continue to work and learn. Furthermore, in *Deep Friendship*, the narrator’s Korean neighbor visits to teach him about features, people, and battles of Korea, in which he finds himself “deeply moved by North Korean heroic vitality in battle.”<sup>126</sup> Knowledge, both for school in general and of revolutionary principles, marks the identity of many of these children.

### **The Child in other Mediums during the Cultural Revolution**

From the descriptions above, the image of the child depicted in lianhuanhua is quite varied and dynamic. We have seen the child as a precocious prodigy who inherently understands the meaning of revolution and is not afraid to enact justice. We have also seen the image of the child as innocent and pure, a blank slate that actively adopts communist ideas. We have seen the naughty child, who engages in play and fun. We have also observed the resilient strength of children in the face of hardship, allowing them to persevere with the strength for their courageous tasks ahead. But what do these characteristics reveal about the image of the child?

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<sup>126</sup> Yang Yingbiao 杨英鏢, *Shenhou de youyi* 深厚的友谊 [Deep friendship], 63.

In this final section, I hope to analyze how the image of the child in lianhuanhua provides a more multifaceted view than other mediums during the Cultural Revolution. By looking at lianhuanhua children in comparison to model children, children represented in children's books, and posters, I hope to relate how lianhuanhua give a more complete and profound idea to what the figure of the child meant during this period.

First of all, in comparison to model children, lianhuanhua are more artistic and depicted in a more fantastic way. In China, models based on exemplary individuals were used to inspire and indoctrinate people with certain values and beliefs. They not only promote a succession of new ideals, but seek to displace traditional ones. By one scholar's reckoning, there are approximately 3-5 million models that circulated in Communist China, as models perpetuate within themselves and are spread by local units.<sup>127</sup> Possibly the most famous symbol to come out of China in this period was Lei Feng, a PLA soldier who lived an honorable and humble life. Lei Feng's supposed diary was circulated in China as an example of qualities others should emulate, as an effort to socialize certain values into average people.<sup>128</sup> Exemplars like Lei Feng were also directed toward children, as depictions of Lei Feng almost always have children surrounding his image.

Besides Lei Feng, there are child models that were designed to instill certain values in children. The images of children that these models provide both work with and against the images of children that we see in lianhuanhua. For example, the model Liu Wenxue is a ten year-old child from a commune that confronts former landlord Wang Rongxue, who he catches stealing the commune's peppers in order to sell them at a

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<sup>127</sup> Betty Burch, "Models as Agents of Change in China," in *Value Change in Chinese Society*, ed. Richard W. Wilson et al (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 123.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

higher price. Liu Wenxue challenges him, threatening to turn him into the commune's party secretary. In a tragic twist of fate, Wang Rongxue attacks and kills Liu Wenxue. While Wang Rongxue is eventually caught and punished for his crimes, the tale calls upon readers to recognize Liu Wenxue's heroism and resolve to protect the commune and socialist values. People are called on to remember that "Liu Wenxue is Chairman Mao's good child. In every part of the nation, young children resolve to act like and always remember him. Everyone should study Liu Wenxue's love of the Party, love of Chairman Mao, love of the people, and love of socialism. We should study his brave battle with his enemy, and his resolve to die rather than submit."<sup>129</sup>

Liu Wenxue's story is different from *lianhuanhua* in several ways. First of all, while this model child embodies many of the same characteristics of children examined in *lianhuanhua*, Liu Wenxue ultimately dies at the end of his tale. Children in *lianhuanhua* are always victorious at the end of the story and are portrayed celebrating their triumph under a giant portrait of Chairman Mao. This parallel can be seen in the *lianhuanhua* *The Little Barefoot Doctor*, where the protagonist Xiao Xin is also confronted by his class enemy in the woods when he is alone. However, Xiao Xin is victorious against his class enemy, effectively turning him into the commune authorities when it is revealed that he attempted to poison a PLA soldier. He is able to outwit and overpower his enemy. This distinction is most likely because model children supposedly represent actual children that lived in reality, while *lianhuanhua* children are based on a fiction. Although *The Little Barefoot Doctor* clearly wishes to reference the atmosphere of *Liu Wenxue*, it has the artistic license to allow for a victorious outcome. Model

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<sup>129</sup> He Yi 贺宜 [A], Zhang Guiming 张桂铭 [I], and Mao Guoxin 毛国信 [I], *Liu Wenxue* 刘文学, (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975), 24.

children, on the other hand, are grounded in reality, and must reflect real world outcomes. In reality, a small child would have a difficult time overpowering an adult, and this is shown with Liu Wenxue's tragic demise. Therefore, because lianhuanhua are in a fictionalized world, children can be symbolized in a more dramatic fashion.

Besides children depicted in the context of state-promoted models, youth in lianhuanhua are more dynamic than the children portrayed in children's books. Children's books during the Cultural Revolution relay similar messages and themes to lianhuanhua, but the protagonists and plots within them are not as developed or complex as the narratives in lianhuanhua. For example, comparing the lianhuanhua *Afu* to the children's book *Victory* emphasizes several differences. Although both books have the similar theme and setting of children in South Vietnam battling against oppressive American soldiers, children are represented differently. First of all, despite the fact that the children presented are within a similar age range, *Afu* is shown with more complex feelings and emotions than the children in *Victory*. The reader is introduced to *Afu*'s background, family, and internal motivations, but the children in *Victory* are simply depicted as against the Americans, with little explanation concerning their own thoughts and feelings on the matter. In addition, lianhuanhua portray higher levels of violence that are omitted from children's books. While *Afu* is shown actively exploding a grenade in the American army camp, the children from the children's book are more indirect with their resistance, like refusing American candy. The additional violence within lianhuanhua contributes to the more severity portrayed within the plotlines. In this way, within lianhuanhua we can see a different, more developed side to the symbol of the child.

Finally, in comparison to Cultural Revolution propaganda posters, *lianhuanhua* can help to deepen our understanding of the symbol of the child in a more comprehensive way. Some has been written on the image of the child within propaganda posters of the period, but they simply show only one facet of the image of the child during this period. Here we see the child as “political messengers” that are directly connected with the central state.<sup>130</sup> While this characteristic is also observed in *lianhuanhua*, children are represented as more complex symbols. Within *Lianhuanhua*, we see more aspects of the child not seen in static posters; we see the multifaceted thought processes and actions corresponding to children’s enactment of these so-called political messages of the government. We also see the whimsical side of the child. For example, in a poster of a child studying in class entitled “Deep in Thought,” the viewer can observe a child in contemplation considering both her studies and the future of China.<sup>131</sup> However within *lianhuanhua* we see that same child studying, and then enacting what he has learned into heroic actions. We also see these same children reading *lianhuanhua* themselves. Likewise, in the poster “Be a Good, Virtuous Student,” the child depicted is wearing a scarf of the Young Pioneers, representing an ideal child that carries the values of the Communist Party.<sup>132</sup> In the *lianhuanhua* on the other hand, we see these children actually enacting duties associated with the organization, and going further by stopping class enemies and Nationalist spies. Therefore, children in *lianhuanhua* represent a more complete form of the image of the child that Cultural Revolution Propaganda posters

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<sup>130</sup> Donald, “Children as Political Messengers,” 79.

<sup>131</sup> Stefan Landsberger, *Chinese Propaganda Posters: From Revolution to Modernization* (Singapore: The Pepin Press, 1995), 258.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 261.

simply cannot convey. The next chapter will discuss more about posters in comparison to lianhuanhua with regard to minority children.

Ultimately, the figure of the child was a powerful symbol during the Cultural Revolution, which can especially be observed within lianhuanhua. Not only did the child inherit certain qualities from the historical image of the child as seen in various contexts, but the image of the child was used in new ways to serve the needs of this chaotic era. From this discussion, the child is not a symbol directly determined by the central state, it has many origins and the various meanings that developed over time. In addition, lianhuanhua comic books can help us understand what the image of the child meant to people in a more comprehensive way, due to its narrative style, combination of image and text, and various themes and narratives portrayed. In the end, the child is a vessel that has the ability to not only promote nationalist beliefs, but can relate ideas like innocence, ideological superiority, the future, the past, and as a sense of nostalgia.

#### **Chapter 4: The “Other” Child: Minority Children in Lianhuanhua**

The image of the child in China during the Cultural Revolution was not restricted to the Han majority; in fact, within visual and literary discourse of the time, the minority child was also a prevalent figure. The representation of ethnic minorities in China has fascinated many over the years. The common perception outside of China is that its people are homogenous and share the same cultural heritage, beliefs, and ways of life. However, roughly 100 million people in China are officially recognized as culturally distinct from the majority Han Chinese.<sup>133</sup> In China’s long and complex history, the state’s management of these “outside” elements has long been a priority in an effort to uphold unity and peace. The Chinese state (especially after the formation of the People’s Republic of China) has made great efforts to maintain this delicate ethnic balance through classification<sup>134</sup> manipulation of imagery of ethnic minorities.<sup>135</sup> Putting a face on the often marginal elements that make up the country both promote a way to identify with ethnic minorities and a useful contrast in which to view one’s own world.

Scholars of minority representation in China often look at this topic in terms of gender: the minority feminine is almost always positioned in contrast with the Han masculine. The feminine minority is exotic, docile, and weak while the masculine Han is strong and powerful. Propagated images of minorities are often of a beautiful woman in full ethnic garb, dancing and singing. In the words of Dru Gladney, this type of “nationality discourse that parallels the valorization of gender and political hierarchies” is

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<sup>133</sup> Susan K. McCarthy, *Communist Multiculturalism: Ethnic Revival in Southwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), x.

<sup>134</sup> Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>135</sup> Anouska Komlosy, “Feminization, Recognition, and the Cosmological in Xishuangbanna” In *Marginalization in China: Recasting Minority Politics*, ed. Siu-Keung Cheung et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 138.

prevalent throughout much of China's history.<sup>136</sup> This depiction of minority peoples goes hand-in-hand with the construction of the Han majority. While other dynamics have also been observed (including viewing some minorities in a more masculine light<sup>137</sup>) scholars have generally focused on a gender dichotomy as the primary way the Chinese state characterizes ethnic distinctions.

However, by looking at representations of minority children and youth during the Cultural Revolution, this chapter hopes to examine an alternate way in which to view this Han/minority distinction. While the portrayal of minorities as children still places them in a subordinate role in relation to the Han, the positive way in which these children and youth are interpreted provides contrasting means in which to view minority/majority politics. Children, as we have seen from the previous chapter, are the moral compasses in society due to their innocence and impartiality and represent ethically pure paragons that have the ability to view the world in an untainted way. Children involved in revolutionary activities provide a moral baseline for the rest of society to emulate.

By looking at propagandized images of minority children and youth, this chapter will examine several discursive ways in which to view the minority children that are portrayed during the Cultural Revolution. In contrast to the previous chapter, this chapter will include an analysis of popular propaganda posters and lianhuanhua comic books that circulated during the later years of the Cultural Revolution. By looking at these two sources of minority representation, one can view and interpret the variety of devices used in the portrayal of minority children. In fact, lianhuanhua complicate the generally

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<sup>136</sup> Dru Gladney, "Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities," *The Journal of East Asian Studies* 50 (1994): 93.

<sup>137</sup> Ben Hillman and Lee-Ann Henfry, "Macho Minority: Masculinity and Ethnicity on the Edge of Tibet," *Modern China* 32 (2006).

recognized images of minority children: while the publically displayed posters portray minority children as innocent and harmless, *lianhuanhua* comic books, which are viewed in a much more private context, show minority children as intrepid paradigms of socialist strength and hope. The posters conform to the generality that minorities are weak, docile children that need guidance from the Han Communist state. Two types of images emerge: minority children as representing an infantilized replica of their minority and minority children as passive recipients of technology, education, and values from the Han majority. However, by taking *lianhuanhua* into account, children are conversely depicted as heroic exemplars and advocates of the Chinese Communist Party, the state, and socialist values. Contrasting these different images of minority children will reveal an alternate perspective of the state's representation of China's ethnic minorities and provide insight into the state's political agenda concerning minorities.

Images of minorities follow along similar lines: Regardless of ethnicity, all groups are represented as allies of the state that are also concomitantly working towards progress and modernization. These depictions are contrary to the actual situation many minorities faced from various policies. These claims to integration and tolerance are often offset by the fact that the reality for many minorities during the Cultural Revolution was exceptionally terrible; religious buildings were destroyed, people were persecuted for their differences, and many cultural items were lost forever.<sup>138</sup> For example, prior to the Cultural Revolution the policies of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the formation of communes and collectives caused a lot of stress in minority regions which had in the previous decade enjoyed relative autonomy from the state. It is estimated that

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<sup>138</sup> McCarthy, *Communist Multiculturalism*, 137.

Kazakh herders lost approximately 30% of their herded animals during this time.<sup>139</sup> Many minorities suffered from forced migrations and the arrival of new Han settlers to their regions,<sup>140</sup> while others were forced to relinquish certain customs and dietary restrictions because of Han policies.<sup>141</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, some minorities actively rebelled against the state. For instance, Hui minority populations were involved in a series of uprisings incited by Red Guards and CCP cadres criticizing religious authorities as “feudal” and destroying mosques.<sup>142</sup> With this reality in mind, representations of minorities in this period serve dual efforts to both reduce their perceived threat to the state and to include them into the revolutionary fold in order to make them useful symbols in Communist propaganda and ideology.

In addition to the minorities of China, this chapter will also examine images of Chinese foreign allies. Specifically, the two foreign countries most commonly portrayed in *lianhuanhua* are North Korea and Vietnam. While not minorities of China per se (although many Koreans do live in China), these two nations are likewise interpreted as ethnic “others” that are in line with Chinese state agendas. In the old tributary sense, these nations, like Chinese minorities, are depicted as the “little brothers” of China that require guidance in order to succeed in their endeavors. Likewise, the similarity of the struggles that are depicted concerning these other countries puts China and these other nations in comparable standing. At the same time, even though propaganda within *lianhuanhua* portrays friendship and camaraderie with these other nations, there are other

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<sup>139</sup> Linda Benson and Ingvar Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazakhs* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 120.

<sup>140</sup> Mette Halskov Hansen, *Frontier People: Han Settlers in Minority Areas of China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 178.

<sup>141</sup> Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang—China's Muslim Far Northwest* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 28.

<sup>142</sup> Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 137-138.

dynamics to consider which do not necessarily elicit international harmony or solidarity. Therefore, while this section will examine images of children of these nations, I hope to also identify some underlying forces at work on the national level.

With this in mind, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first part will look at common conceptions of minorities as children during the Cultural Revolution as seen on propaganda posters of the period. In order to stress the importance of *lianhuanhua* as a unique form of propaganda, in section two I will contrast these images with several *lianhuanhua* protagonist children to reveal a different way in which to view minority images in China. Finally, the final section will look at international “others” of influence in China to view how those images are portrayed. As viewed in the previous chapter, children as a motif extends beyond expressions of the self. By viewing depictions of minority children, I want to explore the use of the child motif in expression of the other.

### **Outside Lianhuanhua: Depictions of Minorities during the Cultural Revolution**

Contrary to *lianhuanhua* interpretations, minority children outside of this narrative mode are depicted in several set ways. These general interpretations of minorities are drawn from posters of the Cultural Revolution, and not much research has been written to add to this general impression. As posters are the most commonly studied visual mode of this period, one of the most common depictions of minority children show them as innocent wards of the state that require both protection and support. Contrary to the anti-feudal anti-Confucian messages of the time, these representations tend to be communicated through a Confucian allegory paralleling a hierarchy of familial relations: the minority children look up to and obey their “father,” symbolically Mao and other top

CCP leaders. This type of representation parallels the rhetoric of minority children as the “little brothers” of the Han.<sup>143</sup> These children, in effect, are representative of their minority as a whole. These types of images homogenize the numerous culturally distinct minorities and reduce their cultural uniqueness to the traditional garb worn by the children. Viewers of these posters are reassured of the unity between the Han/CCP state and the entirety of minority cultures in China, despite the various tensions described above.

Figure 4.1, a poster entitled “Celebrate a Festival with Jubilation” (*Huandu jiajie*) provides a clear example of this motif. Although from a period slightly after the Cultural Revolution, it still feeds into the ideals that came about in this period. The image shows several top CCP leaders including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Liu Shaoqi seated around a festive table laden with bountiful foods. Surrounded by many different children dressed in a variety of cultural costumes, a number of minorities are represented. In the foreground a Hui girl dances while another Li minority child tugs on the Chairman’s arm. The atmosphere is festive and exultant with symbols of good luck, happiness, and prosperity distributed throughout the image.

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<sup>143</sup> McCarthy, *Communist Multiculturalism*, 13.



4. 1. Wei Zhigang 魏志刚, *Huandu jiajie* 欢度佳节 [Celebrate a festival with jubilation] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe), 1983, 105x57 cm, Landsberger Collection, <<http://chinese posters.net/posters/e13-363.php>>.

While minority children are wearing the distinctive garb representative of their respective minorities, there is little else that gives any indication of their cultural distinctiveness or unique customs. In fact, all parties depicted in the image seem peacefully unified in the celebration. No matter which minority, all are universally a part of China and included within the scope of the state. The message is clear: with the guidance and supervision of top CCP leadership, the various minorities will prosper and live bountiful and joyful lives. Moreover, despite the problems the state has with some minorities, they are all homogenized into one whole to limit their threat and cultural particularities.

This type of image shows that a model minority is both docile and child-like. Popular opinion concerning minorities at this time is not as forgiving, for as described above, many were persecuted for displaying symbols of their unique culture. The state's solution to this problem was to completely homogenize all minorities and include them

within the state's political grasp. Even as there was much unrest among some minority populations (some of whom wished to leave China completely), the state maintained an image of harmony and peace as a strategy to convey their commitment to containing and overseeing these minority groups. Portraying minorities as a part of one big family with the Han effectively achieves this purpose.

In addition to the depictions of minorities as children subordinate to the “parent” state, minorities are also often depicted as the passive recipients of state mechanisms and advanced goods. By showing minority children receiving and handling these new technologies from the state, it delivers a message that the next generation of the minority populations will be faithful citizens of the PRC in the future and thus not a threat to the state. It relays that the CCP state (and by extension, the Han majority) can benevolently pass on “tangible fruits of development” that will in the future allow the minorities to be more completely integrated within the majority group.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, it sends the message that all minorities are like children, and need the guidance and support of the Han to advance and develop them into civilized citizens of the nation.

Image 4.2 is a poignant example of this theme. The 1977 poster entitled “The Grasslands are Connected with Beijing” (*Caoyuan lian Beijing*) shows four children seated in a picturesque meadow listening to and handling a transistor radio. Two baby lambs also join the smiling children, representing the innocence and naivety of the minorities. In contrast to the poster described above, these children are not dressed in full ethnic garb. While they are depicted with enough material indicators that they can be identified as minority children, their clothing is plainer and even contains some Han Chinese components. For example, the child on the far right, although wearing an ethnic

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<sup>144</sup>Landsberger, *Chinese Propaganda Posters*, 162-163.

scarf on her head, also wears the red scarf of the Young Pioneers around her neck, indicating that she and her family are supporters of the Communist regime. In addition, the child on the far left wears her hair in pigtails. As these children receive Han technology and are connected with major urban centers like Beijing, they become more modern and integrated into the Chinese nation.



4. 2. Wang Zhiping 王执平 and Guo Zhongguang 郭重光 *Caoyuan lian Beijing* 草原连北京 [The Grasslands are Connected with Beijing] (Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1977), 53x77 cm, Landsberger Collection, <<http://chinese posters.net/posters/e13-334.php>>.

A poster from the early 1970s (figure 4.3) also portrays this similar theme. Entitled “Showing Loving Care,” this poster depicts Han doctors tending to and caring for Tibetan children in the remote grasslands. As indicated in the lower right hand corner of the composition, a “Beijing Medical Team” has traveled to the margins in order to tend to, immunize, and check out the health of the minority children. Despite the presence of syringes (which most children would be frightened of) all the children are smiling joyfully and flexing their muscles as if suddenly blessed with good health. The unsophisticated tent-houses and wild horse riders in the background are in stark contrast to the crisp uniforms of the doctors and nurses. The message communicated here is that the rough and undeveloped areas in the margins require Han Chinese aid and the

direction of the CCP state in order to allow their children and communities to thrive and survive in the modern world.



4. 3. Anonymous, *Showing loving care*, early 1970s, Landsberger Collection, <<http://chinese posters.net/themes/national-minorities.php>>.

These types of posters contain a variety of messages for the gaze of both Han and minority eyes. First of all, as minorities, they are all portrayed in settings that represent an earlier, more primitive stage of development. These depictions of minority children using and benefitting from new technology and ideas reveal them to be “a foil against which the Chinese nation as a whole can be promoted and strengthened.”<sup>145</sup> In other words, images of minorities as undeveloped and rough build up the Han self-image as the more successful and the more advanced group. The state’s advantageous developments are so great that they can even benefit the “less fortunate” at the country’s edge. These posters represent an ideal that minorities will join the “developed” ranks of the Han and help to contribute to the revolutionary spirit of the nation.

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<sup>145</sup> Colin Mackerras, *China’s Minority Cultures: Identities and Integration Since 1912* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 208.

During the Cultural Revolution, both of these representations of minority children were viewed mostly by Han eyes and in very public settings. Minority children and youth that were depicted as helpless charges of the state or as docile beneficiaries of Han/state technology reveal the almost colonial nature of the state and subsequently the strength and supremacy of the Han. While these very public portrayals might be what one expects from a strong, central, and majority Han state, these very public images contrast greatly with the more privately viewed *lianhuanhua* comic books.

### **Lianhuanhua: Minority Children as Heroic Exemplars of the CCP and State**

The above examples of posters provide insight into how the state publically portrays minority children. However, by looking at *lianhuanhua* comic books from the Cultural Revolution, minority youth and children can be seen in a much different light. Instead of the simple, docile and sweet representations that are seen in the posters, *lianhuanhua* minority youth are strong, heroic, communist exemplars that protect the nation and the CCP ideology. This persona of minority children is in direct contrast to what many expect when representing minorities: weak, feminine, and culturally exotic. Instead, minority children in *lianhuanhua* are more masculine, and any cultural distinction is offset by the hero's first priority: the protection of the People's Republic of China and the CCP. This is perhaps due to both the sensationalist nature of graphic books and the more private setting in which they are viewed. Yet, these representations still contain a parallel message to the more public posters: minorities are children that need the help and guidance of the state to become successful in the CCP controlled nation.

The depictions of minority youth and children in these late Cultural Revolution *lianhuanhua* are relatively different from the propaganda posters discussed above. There are several reasons for this. First of all, because the posters are universally viewed in public settings, quaint and passive minority children are preferred to the rather robust and resilient youth in the *lianhuanhua* books. Second, the books are not just a singular image of a minority child, but a sequence of pictorials that articulate a coherent narrative. Therefore, more than just the visual appearance of the character needs to be established, and the character's individual disposition needs to be developed. Finally, the didactic natures of *lianhuanhua* comic books follow certain tropes and plotlines that seek to reveal the heroic and strength of China and the proletarian subject in general. Even if the subject of the work is a minority child, this type of message comes across in almost all other *lianhuanhua* comic books of this time. In fact, many *lianhuanhua* featuring minority heroes directly parallel similar examples that include Han protagonists, which is significant considering that in posters Han and minority children are not as interchangeable.

A good example of this theme of minority youth as heroic figures can be seen in a *lianhuanhua* published in 1976 entitled "Li Village Battle Song" (*Licun Zhange*). The story is set in 1963 on the island of Hainan, where members of the Li minority valiantly prevent Chiang Kai-Shek's armed agents from secretly entering the country. The hero of the story is Wang Liyuan, a Li minority youth serving as a deputy assistant in his local militia branch of the PLA. He locates the enemy spies and deceives them into following him to his home, where he overpowers them physically in battle. Wang Liyuan is able to

singlehandedly outsmart and overpower the spies and prevent any harm from coming into China.

Wang Liyuan is depicted as youthful, but also strong and heroic. Figure 4.4 shows Wang Liyuan charging into the unknown after hearing his village's alarm drums. The hero is artistically situated in the center of the composition and framed by the moon and detailed tropical foliage. Unlike the pictures of minority children seen in the posters, there is a sense of strength and determination in the figure of Wang Liyuan, who holds a rifle in his clenched fist. His features are also decidedly masculine. Although slightly boyish looking, he has a strong square jaw, thick eyebrows, and a determined expression across his lips, much like the depiction of Han children as observed in the previous chapter.



4. 4. Wang Liyuan jumping into action. Ji Yide 季一德 [A] and Yao Zhengfu 姚正富 [I], *Li cun zhan ge* 黎村战歌 [Li village battle song] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1976), 3.

While Wang Liyuan wears the ethnic dress of his minority and slightly primitive dwellings are shown in the background, there is little else that specifically points to the hero's minority status. In fact, Wan Liyuan is able to recite the "Three Main Rules of

Discipline of the People's Liberation Army" (*san da jilu*) on command.<sup>146</sup> In addition, he is technologically savvy; far from being a naive child clutching a transistor radio, in one scene Wang Liyuan repairs a village girl's flashlight after a hard day of training.<sup>147</sup> Therefore, Wang Liyuan breaks out of the stereotypes presented in the posters of naïve children attempting to grasp and understand Han ways. In fact, the hero of this story is depicted as both knowledgeable and capable.

Figure 4.5 most decidedly displays Wang Liyuan's strength. Easily overpowering one of the agents, he symbolically and literally beats down the threat to China. This type of masculinized image is not usually seen in the depiction of minorities and especially not of a southern minority which are often depicted in a more feminine way. Perhaps Wang Liyuan's youthfulness and indoctrination into the CCP's agenda downplay any threat of the "ethnic other" as he triumphs over a Han man. It points to the unity that is stressed in CCP ideology that promotes a universal revolution and revolutionary awareness of everyone around the globe. In this instance, Wang Liyuan is not a Li minority child, but a child of the CCP and China. Therefore, even a Li minority youth can participate in this type of activity.

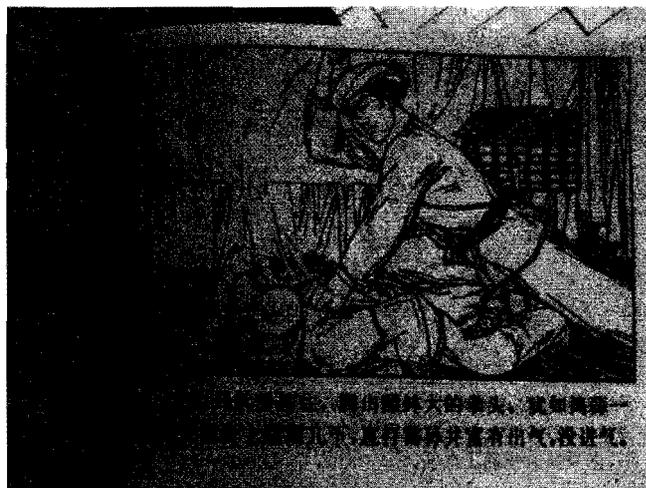
There is also a sense of distancing from the state in this example. The hyper-masculinity of Wang Liyuan in figure 4.5 could perhaps be read as an outlet to portray minorities in a more robust way during this period. Although it is unclear if any of these stories about ethnic minorities are from actual minority authors or artists, there seems to be some strength and agency in Wang Liyuan's character, even if it is presented within a Communist paradigm. These images appear in line with state ideologies, but there are

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<sup>146</sup> Ji Yide 季一德 [A] and Yao Zhengfu 姚正富 [I], *Li cun zhange*, 黎村战歌 [Li village battle song] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1976), 5.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 10

additional ways in which to read the following images of ethnic minority children in lianhuanhua.



4. 5. Wang Liyuan defeating his foe. Ji Yide 季一德 [A] and Yao Zhengfu 姚正富 [I], *Li cun zhan ge*, 黎村战歌 [Li village battle song] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1976), 71.

Minority children preventing the penetration of foreign elements into China is a common theme in many lianhuanhua stories. Conceivably, using minority characters to protect the marginal places they inhabit is a convenient literary device to show both unity in China and a hero that could have the opportunity and positioning to defeat the villains of the state. Similar to “Li Village Battle Song,” another story set in Xinjiang along the Sino-Soviet border also harbors this theme. A 1974 story entitled “Little Border Defense Patrol” (*Bianfang xiao shao bing*) tells the tale of three Kazakh minority children that assist the PLA border patrol and prevent Soviet spies from infiltrating China. The children (namely Beibei Shen, Hasang, and Yila) locate and physically fight the spies, and then run to give warning to their village. These brave children are then celebrated as heroic guardians of China.

This book was published at a time of strong Sino-Soviet border tensions. Prior to the Cultural Revolution in the early 1960s, many Uyghurs and Kazakhs fled harsh Chinese policies centered on the creation of communes and collectivization. Some

estimates indicate roughly half a million people crossed the border into the Soviet Union in 1962.<sup>148</sup> The CCP claimed that Soviet propagandists lured many minority populations in the area over to the Soviet side, exacerbating tensions between the two nations. Additionally, many Kazakhs were labeled “local nationalists” and in correspondence with foreign countries because of their adherence to certain customs, causing many to be harshly jailed.<sup>149</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, restrictions on minorities in the region increased, making it dangerous even to admit one had relatives on the other side of the border, as they could be accused of being or supporting a spy.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, by giving agency to a Kazakh minority heroine, there is an attempt to negate the feeling that minority populations in the area are at the whims of Soviet Propaganda, and even a small child can know the difference between the “right” and “wrong” country in which to reside.

The main heroine, Beibei Shen, is a young girl who leads her friends on the dangerous mission to find the Soviet spies, who are assisted by Kazakh minority traitors in an effort to infiltrate Xinjiang. Figure 4.6, shows her in a Mulan-esque pose bravely riding a horse to give warning to the village. The young girl’s heroic and determined posture is very unlike the dancing minority girls depicted in the posters discussed above. Instead of wearing her ethnic garb to sing or dance, Beibei Shen is expertly riding a horse with a strong-minded expression across her face. Although a member of the Kazakh minority, this young girl is dripping with the support and ideology of the Communist Party.

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<sup>148</sup> Christian Tyler, *Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>149</sup> Benson and Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads*, 120

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 149.



根喜”  
 贝贝什忘记了头上的伤疤，冲进马圈，点上火把，跃上海圈马，两腿使劲一抬马肚，海圈马就撒开四蹄，象离弦的箭往草原奔去……  
 火光和高喊声把人们都吸引过来了。为了给侵略敌人，从武学院兵到老人，孩子，人人出力，

• 49 •

4. 6. Beibei Shen riding a horse. Sun Genxi 孙根喜 [A] and He Zuming 何祖明 [I], *Bianfang xiao shaobing* 边防小哨兵 [Little border patrol] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1974), 49.

Figure 4.7 portrays the children attacking an adult Kazakh spy who is assisting the Soviets in an effort to invade Xinjiang. The children are able to heroically deter the agent despite their size and age. Similarly to Wang Liyuan, these children persevere over the much bigger enemies of the CCP. Notice that the children are not battling Soviets, but other Kazakh minority enemies. This image harks back to Uradyn E. Bulag's analysis of the *Heroic Sisters of the Grassland*, where the Mongol leadership constructed a Mongol "other" that represented a mutual enemy for both Mongol and Han alike. Despite the fact that many Kazakh minority populations were dissatisfied with Communist policy at this time, by providing a Kazakh minority heroine doing something in line with state policy, it sends a message suggesting unity and harmony despite the actual conditions of reality.



贝贝什  
冲到门  
口大声喊道：“依  
拉，抓住他，他就  
是‘斜眼狼’！”  
依拉一听，赶紧一把抓住“斜  
眼狼”的衣服，一边高喊着“抓‘斜  
眼狼’呀！抓‘斜眼狼’呀！”  
“斜眼狼”一听，吓得腿脚麻  
乱，惊慌失措，他恶狠狠地抓住  
依拉的腰就要往地下摔，贝贝什一步冲到“斜眼  
狼”面前，抓住他那只缺指头的手狠命咬了一口。  
“斜眼狼”疼得直咧嘴，他放开依拉，对准贝贝  
什头就是一拳。

贝贝什只觉得眼前一黑，倒了下去……

. 47 .

4. 7. Beibei Shen and her friends fighting a Kazakh foe. Sun Genxi 孙根喜 [A] and He Zuming 何祖明 [I], *Bianfang xiao shaobing* 边防小哨兵 [Little border patrol] (Shanghai : Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1974), 47.

Another lianhuanhua worth noting is entitled “Flying Eagle Cliff” (*Fei ying ya*).

Unlike both “Li Village Battle Song” and “Small Border Defense Patrol,” this story is not about defending China’s borders from infiltration, but about bringing class conscious and the spirit of revolution to marginal minority people. Published in 1975, the heroine of the story is a Yao minority peasant orphan girl named Xiu Liping that courageously defies the tyrannical landlords who run her mountain village. The story communicates how the ideals and messages of the CCP can reach peripheral areas and help the non-Han peoples realize the vision of universal revolution.

In the beginning of the story, the author reveals the “backward” and “feudal” ways of the Yao people prior to CCP influence. Xiu Liping initially lives with her mother after her father dies of sickness. The feudal landlords extort the poor family, telling Xiu Liping’s mother that she must sell her house, possessions, and daughter in order to pay

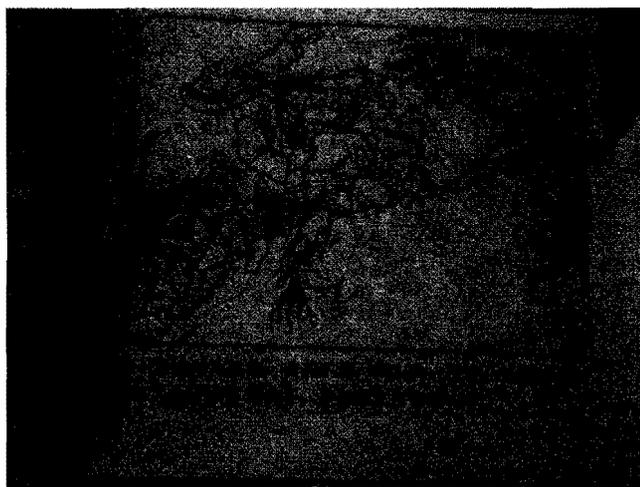
the landlords to hire a witchdoctor to exorcise the ghost of her father.<sup>151</sup> When her mother refuses, the landlords kill her mother by throwing her off a cliff, rendering Xiu Liping an orphan. Xiu Liping, understanding the injustice and feudalistic nature of the situation, decides to take revenge on the landlords by setting fire to their property and injuring the evil landlord by pushing him off a cliff. As she runs away, she is intercepted by some PLA soldiers in the region hunting bandits, who tell her that they have come to the Yao region to “capture bandits and fight villains to avenge the wrongs committed and wipe out their humiliation.”<sup>152</sup> She takes this lesson back to her village, where she transforms the class consciousness of her fellow villagers to bring down the corrupt landlords. She later joins the Communist party as a secretary and helps to spread the ideas of revolution elsewhere.

Figure 4.8 shows Xiu Liping bravely pushing her enemy (which she later learns is her class enemy) down the side of the mountain. Although a fellow member the Yao minority, she is still bravely defeating an enemy of the CCP. Even as a member of this “backward” minority, she can still defeat the CCPs enemies and join in the revolution. Once again, the image of a young child is seen fearlessly taking on a much larger and much older enemy. This young girl’s strength is fueled by the injustice she has experienced throughout her life, and this feeling of injustice is later focused by the PLA soldiers who enter the region. The lesson of this story points to the inevitability of the grand socialist ideals infiltrating all areas within China.

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<sup>151</sup>Liang Fanyang 梁梵扬[A], *Fei ying ya* 飞鹰崖 [Flying eagle cliff] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1975), 7.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid, 29.



4. 8. Xiu Liping pushing a Yao landlord off a cliff. Liang Fanyang 梁梵扬[A], *Fei ying ya* 飞鹰崖 [Flying eagle cliff] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1975), 25.

The Yao minority was considered somewhat of a “model minority” in the discourse of minorities during the Cultural Revolution. Newspapers articles hailed Yao villages for embracing the teachings of Mao Zedong and improving their communities. One article from 1974 discusses the amount of progress experienced by a Yao village as the result of the Cultural Revolution. While prior to assistance from the CCP the Yao were backward and primitive, the Cultural Revolution allowed them to thrive, allowing for everything from a diversified economy with enhanced irrigation and schools and doctors. One statistic suggested that “this brigade’s total output in 1973, compared to before the Cultural Revolution, has quadrupled.”<sup>153</sup>

The idea of children overcoming enemies of the CCP and state is a convention that is not limited to *lianhuanhua* about minorities. The concept of children defeating the common enemy of the state is a popular trope that also includes Han children. The idea that the young, innocent, and mentally developing members of society are embracing the ideals of the Communist party effectively relates to others the purity of the revolution and

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<sup>153</sup> “Yaozu renmin reqing gesong wenhua dageming 瑶族人民热情歌颂文化大革命” [The Yao minority’s warm praise for the Cultural Revolution,] *People’s daily*, June 9, 1974: 1.

shows that it is a virtuous mission. One popular example entitled “Little Soldier Zhang Ga” (*Xiao bing Zhang Ga*) published in 1972, explores how a young Han child is able to scout and help his community against the Japanese during the Anti-Japanese War. He is able to save his village from Japanese spies and receives commendation for his success, much like minority children in other stories. Similarly, another story “The Little Heroic Eight” (*Yingxiong xiao balu*) tells the story of children living on the Fujian coast that successfully protect China’s shores from the enemy. The use of children points to the greatness of the revolution, as children can represent the most ideologically pure and uncorrupt portions of society. If children, as the moral compasses in society because of their innocence and limited life experience, are grasping the ideas of Communism and the CCP, then others in society should as well. That stories about minority children are included within this trope shows that not only is this topic a common theme in *lianhuanhua*, but also that minorities are also a part of protecting China and upholding the revolutionary spirit.

The three above *lianhuanhua* all portray Chinese minority children as brave and honorable supporters of the Communist message. These children are far from the feminine, eroticized, and exotic dancing women that are traditionally seen in the depiction of minorities. The children are strong and able to defeat their much stronger and bigger enemies using the knowledge and spirit of the CCP. The use of children in the *lianhuanhua* points to several motivations by the state. First of all, by depicting minorities engaged in the same communist context as their Han counterparts, it relays the universality and importance of the CCP message. However, by using children as the vessels to display these qualities, they are still downplaying and lessening the threat of

minorities. For example, the government's difficulty with the Kazakh minority is their flight across the Sino-Soviet border. By showing children preventing such actions, the threat of this minority is lessened. If the children had instead been replaced with strong Kazakh men who dominate their enemies, the idea that this minority is strong, independent, and dangerous might cause criticism within CCP policy.

In addition, these children are convenient devices in which to hear stories from the margins and other peripheral areas. In order to show the omnipresent nature of the revolution, these areas must also be discussed. Putting children at the vanguard of this change shows that eager and uncorrupted minds can easily grasp CCP ideas and bring others to that realization as well. However, while these children are independent and strong, they are all still operating within a strict communist ideological context. For example, Wang Liyuan is practically a member of the PLA which serves the country, Beibei Shen works with the border guards to catch the spies, and Xiu Liping is heavily influenced by the PLA soldiers she meets. While in these *lianhuanhua* about minorities show sense of minority agency, they are in fact all still operating within the state's purveyance. Their connection to this greater political context can be seen in all three stories, as each child is recognized and a recipient of an award from the state for their service.

The three types of representation of minority groups in China all serve to relay a similar message: that Chinese minorities are part of the nation and equal partners (or at least full participants) in the creation of a communist China. Whether that child is playing with a transistor radio or beating up an enemy agent, the children and the minority they represent are part of and contribute to the nation. Although perhaps on a lesser tier of

significance than the majority Han, the minorities are symbolically included in the nation in an effort to consolidate power and prevent dissent. The representation of minority children during the Cultural Revolution provides an alternate way in which to view the minority/majority contrast. These *lianhuanhua* emphasize the strength and power of minority children that offers a balancing counterpart to views of masculine/feminine dichotomies. This shows the importance of youth and children as a major component in the representation of minorities.

### **The Global Other: Children and Allies of the PRC in *Lianhuanhua***

As the readers of *lianhuanhua* are within the borders of the PRC, the most common settings and subjects of these texts are concerned with strictly Sino-centric themes. This focus is not surprising, as it is a familiar terrain for most Chinese readers. As shown in the previous section, although minority children are depicted as an “other” by virtue of their distinct costumes and settings, they are still portrayed as PRC subjects that are to be included in the purview of national China. Therefore, the relatively few *lianhuanhua* set in other countries and that feature international characters deserve a special mention. The significance of *lianhuanhua* concerning countries like Korea and Vietnam rests in the message they send to Han readers: the internationality and friendship of countries following China’s lead of socialist values and communism. While these ethnic others most likely had access these *lianhuanhua*, the majority of readers were within mainland China.

These *lianhuanhua* that focus on other countries such as Korea and Vietnam also reflect the desire of the CCP to relay the commonality and central message of Communist values and struggles within China. In the Imperial era, both Vietnam and Korea were

considered at least nominally part of the Chinese empire as tributary nations and were often considered “little brothers” of China. Thus, the portrayal their individual issues and problems resonate with a Chinese audience both because of their common identity as an Asian nation and the similarity of their international struggles. Thus, events within both Korea and Vietnam are bestowed with distinct ideological overtones, whether or not they correlate with actual events. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two global events most described are the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1951-1975). These events are portrayed in allegorical terms with the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Although two disparate events with different international players, Korea and Vietnam are given a sense of solidarity with China as the narratives and actions of the characters within other *lianhuanhua* directly mirror *lianhuanhua* about these other countries.

This parallel between the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Korean War is most acutely observed in the 1972 *lianhuanhua* entitled *Deep Friendship*, as this comic covers both conflicts within its overall narrative. As the *lianhuanhua* opens, the nameless narrator, a Han boy of 12-13 years of age, lives with his widowed mother near the North Korean border on the outskirts of the city of Shenyang during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The narrator’s father had previously been tortured and killed by Japanese soldiers after he had attempted to strike at the factory in which he worked. When a Korean family suddenly moves in next door, the narrator grows curious about his new neighbors, especially after seeing their young son, Cui Changhao, constantly reading a book in their shared courtyard. When Cui Changhao’s father is unexpectedly arrested by Japanese soldiers, the two grow close, and Changhao shares his precious book (a history of Korea compiled by his father) and the two teach each other about their respective nations. When

the two are subsequently separated, Cui Changhao leaves the book with the young hero for safekeeping. The final part of the *lianhuanhua* shows the young narrator grown up and joining the People's Volunteer in order to "fight alongside the North Korean brothers to defeat the common [American] enemy."<sup>154</sup> He serendipitously comes across and aids a grown Changhao on the battlefield and the two reunite for a happy ending.

The narrative function of *Deep Friendship* is to relay the mutual hardships of both China and Korea to bolster support and understanding for a Chinese-North Korean alliance. This is shown in the similarity of the two protagonist's struggles. For example, just as both countries experienced the tyranny of Japanese occupation, both young protagonists lost their fathers to the conflict (although Changhao is later reunited with his father). This is most aptly expressed when the narrator's mother tells him: "Your father died at the hands of the Japanese devils; now Cui Changhao's family has the same problem. Japanese devils are a Sino-Korean enemy; we must all remember the 'tears of blood debts.'"<sup>155</sup> This shared victimization puts the two nations on a similar level and reminds readers that China is not alone in its past or future troubles.

While *Deep Friendship* puts China and North Korea on similar ideological levels during the Second Sino-Japanese War, the story also extends the comparison to the Korean War. This is done by portraying the respective antagonists in a negative light, with the "Japanese devils" being replaced by the similarly malicious "U.S. imperialists."<sup>156</sup> For readers, this connection between Japanese and American invaders reinforces general support for China's actions in North Korea. Additionally, it also

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<sup>154</sup> Yang Yingbiao 杨英鏢, *Shenhou de youyi* 深厚的友谊 [Deep friendship] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1972), 83.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 82.

resonates with China's anxiety towards American actions in Vietnam War. As *Deep Friendship* was published at the height of the Vietnam War in 1972, it was in the Chinese state's best interest to promote opposition to American imperial interests.

*Deep Friendship* is the only lianhuanhua in the University of Hawaii collection that features two children of different ethnic/national identity as the main protagonists. As observed above with interpretations of the minority children within lianhuanhua, if the hero of the story is a minority child, they usually exist within their own unique setting with the only Han interaction being with agents of the state. This integration of Chinese and Korean protagonists allows readers to put them both on a similar interpretative level: it shows that there is in fact no real difference between the two, and they mutually have much to learn from each other. This narrative scenario highlights the unbiased and innocent nature of a child in general, who is not afraid to become friends and admire someone who is not ethnically Chinese. If a child can identify himself with someone from a different country, the reader can similarly sympathize with Korean, and by extension, Vietnamese.

A second lianhuanhua that features a non-Chinese child is titled *Afu*. *Afu* is the story of a young South Vietnamese boy named Afu in the midst of the Vietnam War. His father was killed as a member of the National Liberation Front (NLF) because the United States and the Saigon "puppet" regime had "atrociously massacred South Vietnamese people."<sup>157</sup> Afu wishes to join the NLF to avenge his father and people, but is dismissed as too young to fight. In order to prove himself, Afu instigates various shenanigans where he outwits and fools American troops on several occasions. When his mother is arrested, he steals a grenade and destroys all of the stockpiled American weapons. In the end,

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<sup>157</sup> Huang Baozhu 黄宝柱, *Afu* 阿福 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1972), 2.

Afu's mother is freed and he is considered a hero by his village as the American troops are forced to leave the area.

The plot of *Afu* is extremely reminiscent of *lianhuanhua* that feature mischievous children who wish to join the PLA but are likewise turned down for being "too young" but ultimately end up becoming key players in defeating the enemy. A good comparison is with Huzi from *Little Eighth Route Army*, who is also told he is too young to join the war and cleverly fools Japanese soldiers into dropping their weapons or divulging valuable information over the course of the comic. This plot similarity with other *lianhuanhua* cannot be accidental; as these comics served to help readers connect the heroism of a boy from Vietnam with Chinese boys who fought during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Both have the ability to outwit Japanese or American imperialists and stop their advance into their respective countries.

*Deep Friendship* and *Afu* reflect the state's motivations during this time concerning both its international and domestic image. Both *lianhuanhua* were published in 1972, a time of increased economic aid to North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. As the war in Vietnam was escalated by the Americans, the CCP in China feared an American invasion into their own country and sought to create a buffer zone with Vietnam.<sup>158</sup> China's difficulties with the Soviet Union also spurred Chinese enthusiasm for supporting Vietnam, as they believed such actions would differentiate socialist China and a "socialist-imperialist" Soviet Union in the eyes of the Vietnamese and the world.<sup>159</sup> In fact, as one scholar notes, "from Beijing's perspective, no event could play a better role than this one to expose the true face of the Soviet revisionists and social-

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<sup>158</sup> Kosal Path, "Hanoi's Response to Beijing's Renewed Enthusiasm to Aid North Vietnam 1970-1972," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 6 (2011): 104.

<sup>159</sup> Path, 105.

imperialists.”<sup>160</sup> In other words, in light of the tense Sino-Soviet relationship coupled with fear of American incursion in China, Chinese leadership sought to distinguish their own brand of socialism as superior, which meant sending aid and volunteer support to Vietnam. Thus, by portraying links between Chinese experiences and Korean/Vietnamese ones, they sought to legitimate CCP goals and strategies. For internal readership in China, these links were clear (if not so much in Vietnam, whose anxiety over Chinese expansionist and chauvinistic attitudes brewed during the Cultural Revolution caused them to decline Chinese assistance).<sup>161</sup>

While *lianhuanhua* often covered domestic topics such as communes and other CCP policies, this type of literature could also extend to topics outside of the domestic sphere. In much the same way that other *lianhuanhua* offered country scenes for readers in the cities to understand, others focused on marginal or international topics. This genre offered readers to extend their scope of issues concerning past and contemporary China. In essence, *lianhuanhua* funneled certain CCP policies and agendas to the average reader. The use of children as messengers and agents of this policy allows these readers to identify personally with issues on the margins or abroad. Whether it concerns the Vietnam War or minority Kazakhs in Xinjiang, *lianhuanhua* bring these issues into light and personalize them for them for their audience.

By examining *lianhuanhua* interpretations of Chinese minorities and international others, it is clear that this narrative mode is unique in that it offers a different perspective in which to analyze popular and state attitudes toward the “other.” Far from the static image of the minority child as seen on Cultural Revolution posters, minority children

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<sup>160</sup> Path, 105.

<sup>161</sup> Path, 103.

depicted in lianhuanhua are expressed through a narrative story that contains multiple images and understandings of the subject. The reader can put themselves in the shoes of the “other,” providing a sense of unity and understanding. By taking the lianhuanhua image of the child into account, we can generate new interpretations of larger groups like minorities and other nations that are left behind in other mediums of art and literature.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

In this thesis I have tried to show how the examination of lianhuanhua comic books during the Cultural Revolution can reveal new avenues in which to explore the political and cultural history of this period. Additionally, the image of the child in these graphic narratives can uncover fresh insights concerning the nature of the Cultural Revolution itself. In a period often defined as one of strict state control, searching for the symbolic meaning of the child unearths a different picture: one where one can find meanings and understandings not associated with the state, but with the imaginations of actual people in China. While the child is a symbol of the state and nationalist beliefs, there are further implications associated with this symbol that are not necessarily connected with propaganda purposes.

First, I have illustrated how the development of lianhuanhua lends to its use as a source to understand cultural tendencies during this era. While lianhuanhua can be seen as a tool of the Communist State, there is also room to interpret this genre as something more. Discourse in newspapers that consider the viability of lianhuanhua as an artistic and literary source support my assumption that lianhuanhua were not simply a fixed Communist tool, but one that was in constant negotiation. In addition, certain conventions in the art of lianhuanhua reference earlier periods and times not necessarily compatible with Cultural Revolution ideals. Finally, the unique methods associated with reading and consuming lianhuanhua distance this art form from other examples during the Cultural Revolution: the combination of both image and text allows for a multitude of connections and understandings of lianhuanhua for the reader. It is within these spaces of

dissent that make lianhuanhua an ideal tool in which to explore the nature of both the Cultural Revolution and also the attitudes and beliefs of the average reader at this time.

Second, in this thesis I wanted to show how the image of the child was presented within many examples of lianhuanhua. Here I wanted to explore the various meanings of the child in this era by presenting the child not as an actual child, by one constituting adult imaginations, attitudes, and beliefs. By putting the child into dialogue with historical ones, I aspired to express the continuity of historical representations to the present. The child in China extends from a long continuum of historical archetypes that reach back to pre-modern times. Additionally, by analyzing different aspects of specific lianhuanhua stories, I show that the child has additional meanings, such as adult nostalgia for the past, innocence, and a sense of mischievousness. By comparing lianhuanhua children to representations of children in other mediums, I exhibited why the child was so central during the Cultural Revolution and especially present in lianhuanhua.

Finally, this study went beyond the image of the Han majority child and explored minority “others” within in lianhuanhua. By shifting focus to ethnic minorities, my paper used lianhuanhua circumvent standard binaries such as the masculine Han versus the feminine other. Instead, the ethnic minority in lianhuanhua is presented as strong, heroic, and clever—just as capable as any Han child. In addition, representations of children from other states like Korea and Vietnam relay a sense of unity and friendship with children of other nations. While images of minorities in this chapter seem to reflect state policies of minority inclusion during this time (despite the many atrocities committed toward them in this era), there is a sense of overt strength within minority populations that are not seen in examples of other Cultural Revolution artistic and literary mediums.

Thus, this analysis moves away from the state-centered approach and explores deeper connections and meanings.

Comic books as historical sources have gained popularity over the past decade in many places, but *lianhuanhua* have been relatively untouched by historians of China. Often dismissed as another example of propaganda, *lianhuanhua* were not explored on a more profound level in the past. Additionally, comic books are often categorized in the realm of children's fiction, and thus present no real use to historians who do not focus on youth culture. However, like comic books in other countries, *lianhuanhua* are not simply just for children, but are for the enjoyment of people of all ages. Fiction and art can be a valuable resource in which to think through the historiographical issues of a given period and supplement inquiries into more complex questions. In this paper, my use of *lianhuanhua* is used to challenge the traditional narrative of the Cultural Revolution as being a time of little or no individual ingenuity. Although *lianhuanhua* are a tool of the state, there is agency to be found within its pages.

Besides the fact that *lianhuanhua* are a unique source of inquiry, the analysis of children as symbolic images in the minds of adults can inform us to how people during different periods interpreted the world around them. The child is a universal figure that is utilized all over the world in distinctive ways. In China, the symbol of the child was prevalent during the Cultural Revolution through a variety of media. This interest in the figure has not dissipated since then, and children are continually being used to express different meanings. A recent example occurred during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, where children from every minority were paraded through the opening ceremony. This presentation of ethnic minority children was meant to elicit feelings of unity by

presenting the diversity of China as a nation to the world. However, the fact that these children were not actually members of ethnic minorities but Han Chinese children adds another dimension to the use of the image of the child in this case: it provides further evidence of the government's manipulation of the imagery and the use of children when looking at minority cultures in China.<sup>162</sup> The utilization of the image of the child is continually significant in China; understanding this symbol as one that can be interpreted in a variety of ways is key to adding depth to our understanding of China.

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<sup>162</sup> Richard Spencer, "Beijing Olympics: 'Ethnic' Children Revealed as Fakes in Opening Ceremony," *The Telegraph*, Accessed May 8, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/2563786/Beijing-Olympics-Ethnic-children-revealed-as-fakes-in-opening-ceremony.html>.

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