

Chinese Serial-picture Storybook: A Case Study of Zhao Hongben

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a comparative study toward *lianhuanhua* 连环画, or serial-picture storybook, applying two works by a Shanghai-based *lianhuanhua* painter, Zhao Hongben. The chosen *lianhuanhua* by Zhao Hongben were completed in different historical periods: The Republican era (1939) and the post-1949 era (1962). Chinese *lianhuanhua* industry changed significantly regarding the training, publication, and distribution system after founding the People's Republic of China in 1949. Practitioners like Zhao Hongben within the industry correspondingly underwent the identity transition from the commercial *lianhuanhua* painter to the cultural worker employed by the communist regime. Along with the vastly altered industry, *lianhuanhua* itself is transformed from a commercial visual media popular in Republican Shanghai to a form of socialist visual art governed by the new cultural policies/doctrine after 1949. These alternations ultimately shaped/reshaped the visual characterizations and formal style of Zhao Hongben's pre- and post-1949 *lianhuanhua* shown in the thesis, which evidently reflect the different expectations and ambitions placed upon *lianhuanhua* in respective historical periods.

This paper raises an alternative perspective in understanding the widely accepted statement in the Chinese academia that post-1949 *lianhuanhua* are aesthetically and ideologically better than their Republican counterparts. The hierarchical perception to assert the superiority of post-1949 *lianhuanhua* overlooks the changed standard of defining a good *lianhuanhua* in the respective period as well as the role Republican *lianhuanhua* played during the development of the genre. Through comparing the given aspects of two works by the same author, a more dialectical and panoramic discussion will be cast in this paper to unveil the differentiations and connections between pre- and post-1949 *lianhuanhua*.

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Introduction

This paper is primarily dedicated to a comparative study of Chinese *lianhuanhua* 连环画 (Eng. Serial-picture storybook). Through exploring the causes and formation of the ideological and visual differences between two *lianhuanhua* completed in the Republican and post-1949 periods, I attempt to test the applicability of the prevailing statement claiming the total superiority of PRC *lianhuanhua* over its Republican counterparts. I argue that the statement is at least partially inaccurate, as not all differentiations between Republican and post-1949 *lianhuanhua* could be explained in the rigid, hierarchical manner. On the contrary, Republican *lianhuanhua* and its post-1949 counterparts have much more distinctions than similarities and could be essentially considered as two different genres of visual art. They fulfill different functions and used to be governed by different standards. Aesthetically speaking, pictures in Republican *lianhuanhua* are not satisfactory. But they indeed are highly comprehensible and engaging pictorial narrative of the given story filled with a lot detail. The priority in making pictures for *lianhuanhua* changed drastically after 1949. A picture, before everything else, should first be a very fine piece of drawing governed by the strict cultural policy valid for all socialist art forms, rather than an entertaining carrier of story plots. My research provides a more critical perspective to understand the origin and development of *lianhuanhua* produced in different historical periods and restores the enormously different makings driven by their respective designated purposes.

Lianhuanhua is the pictorial narrative of a story containing a series of printed pictures. Although the similar serial-picture storybooks had existed in China ever since the late Qing dynasty, *lianhuanhua* as a specific designation only emerged after 1925, when the World Press of Shanghai 世界书局 published their *Serial Illustrated Romance of the Three Kingdoms* 连环图画三国志 and first applied the term *lianhuan tuhua* (serial illustrations) in its title.¹ The particular term then started to be widely accepted and exclusively associated with the particular genre of the visual narrative of stories in China. *Lianhuanhua* shares some formal similarities with Japanese manga and American comic books, in which a story is also constructed with pictures and corresponding scripts. *Lianhuanhua* had gained significant popularity amongst the

¹ Shen Kuiyi, "Lianhuanhua and Mnhua-Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai," in *Illustrating Asia*, ed. John Lent (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 105.

working class and children since the 1930s, which lasted until the 1980s, followed by a rapid and abrupt decline. Throughout the heyday of *lianhuanhua* in China, generations of professional *lianhuanhua* painters created countless masterpieces generating enormous cultural influence upon the readers. This paper exclusively focuses on one of the most representative *lianhuanhua* painters, Zhao Hongben 赵宏本 (1915-2000), and his two works completed during different historical periods: *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* (1939) and *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* (1962). I select the term “painter” to conclude his career and role due to the fact that he always created pictures for *lianhuanhua* using ink and brush, and he often applied the Chinese term *lianhuan huajia* 连环画家 to describe his own identity. *Lianhuan*, as mentioned before, means “serial” and *huajia* means “painter”.² However, his responsibility in producing *lianhuanhua* appears to be more comprehensive than that of painters focusing on single-framed painting. During the Republican era, in particular, Zhao also designed the overall storyline of a *lianhuanhua* and determined the textual contents. He was more of a designer rather than mere painter in the first half of his career. Nevertheless, his duty was significantly pared down after 1949, when the general narrative of stories in *lianhuanhua* started to completely rely on script writers. Painting pictures in accordance with the given scripts, instead of designing the entire *lianhuanhua*, became his sole concern in several decades. Even though I eventually apply “painter” to maintain the terminological conformity and emphasize the picture-oriented nature of his career, the term itself is by no means beyond question and awaiting further modifications.

Born in Shanghai, Zhao Hongben first became a commercial *lianhuanhua* painter in his twenties after the eight-year harsh apprenticeship in his master’s studio. *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*, finished in 1939, was his debut work as an independent *lianhuanhua* painter. This work reflected the preferences of the mass market upon *lianhuanhua* in 1930s Shanghai---thrilling, romantic, easily digested, and visually compelling. Also, due to these qualities, *lianhuanhua* was regarded as a lowly, cheap entertainment for working-class and less-educated groups. After this work, Zhao gradually became one of the most famous *lianhuanhua* painters in Shanghai and produced many best-selling works loved by his readers across several regions of Asia. However, despite its popularity, *lianhuanhua* remained excluded from the realm of fine art

² Zhao Hongben, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian* (Beijing: Zhongguo lianhuanhua chubanshe, 1990), 8.

after its birth in China, to the degree that even established *lianhuanhua* painters like Zhao did not own a position in the circle of visual artists of Republican Shanghai.

This situation changed dramatically after 1949 when the regime of the Nationalist Party was overthrown by CCP, and the PRC was eventually founded after twenty-two years of civil war (1927-1949). As professionals served the urban working and proletariats class, commercial *lianhuanhua* painters in Shanghai received “re-education” as mandated by the Party, focusing on painting skills and ideological reform. In the case of Zhao Hongben, he had completed his “reformation” as an underground CCP member prior to the establishment of PRC and became an instructor during the post-1949 re-education provided to Republican commercial *lianhuanhua* painters in Shanghai. Appointed to the position of chief editor within a government-run publishing house, Zhao gained much higher social status and became politically important after 1949.³ He co-authored the *lianhuanhua* *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* in the early 1960s with his colleague Qian Xiaodai 钱笑呆 (1911-1965) as a culture cadre and civil servant of the newly founded communist regime. His later works demonstrated decidedly different formal styles and material features in comparison to his previous output produced in the 1930s. It is common to institutionally and artistically categorize this later period as cultural products representing the fruitful progression of the post-1949 cultural reformation.⁴ This general treatment of Zhao Hongben’s two works made in different historical eras conforms with the widely accepted superiority of post-1949 *lianhuanhua* over its Republican counterparts in most existed discourses.

³ Zhao Hongben, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 28.

⁴ Yi Ke, Wei Ming and Wang Jun, *Xiaorensu de lishi* 小人书的历史 (Chongqing: Chongqing Press, 2008), 49.

State of the Field

Because of *lianhuanhua*'s enormous popularity within the Chinese society throughout the 20th century, the secondary sources in Chinese dedicated to the study of *lianhuanhua* are abundant. Zhang Yongfeng 张勇锋, an expert on media studies, delivered his article in *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication*, in which he exclusively focuses on the reception and intended demographic of *lianhuanhua* before 1949.⁵ Mai Lihong 麦荔红 and Wan Shaojun 宛少军 both presented the general development of *lianhuanhua* in the form of a socio-historical survey with the obvious emphasis on the PRC stage. The *History of Comics* (Xiaorenshe de lishi) co-authored by Yi Ke 一可, Wei Ming 未名, and Wang Jun 王军 is another example of the typical survey of *lianhuanhua* usually carried out by Chinese scholars. These scholarships provide many valuable pictures and historical recounts of Shanghai-based commercial *lianhuanhua* painters and other practitioners in the industry from the emergence of the genre in the late 1920s to its final decline in the 1980s. However, due to their nature as the general survey of *lianhuanhua* throughout the 20th century, the detailed analysis of the visual language and style of *lianhuanhua* involving specific works appears to be relatively sparse in these books.

Ideologically speaking, the mentioned Chinese scholarly publications concerning the Republican and post-1949 *lianhuanhua* share a joint statement: the post-1949 *lianhuanhua* were artistically and ideologically better than those made in the Republican period.⁶ This conclusion, however, is rarely accompanied by the evident comparison or contrast concerning the visual characterizations and content of the post-1949 *lianhuanhua* and its Republican counterparts. Many scholars writing in Chinese are more likely to take the statement as a self-evident and generally acknowledged fact, which should effectively summarize the overall development of Chinese *lianhuanhua*. In *History of Comics*, for instance, the post-1949 reformation of *lianhuanhua* is described as the juncture of the “resurrection” for the genre, because of which *lianhuanhua* headed toward a completely different and socially significant route.⁷ Wan Shaojun,

⁵ Zhang Yongfeng, “Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuanhua wenhuashuxing luelun,” *Chubanshi yanjiu* vol. 11; Mai, Lihong, *Tu shuo zhongguo lian huan hua* 图说中国连环画 (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2006).

⁶ Wan Shaojun, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century* (Nanning: Guangxi Fine Arts Publishing House, 2012), 43-61; Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorenshe de lishi*, 23-28; Mai, *Tu shuo zhongguo lian huan hua*, 40-55; Zhang Yongfeng, “Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuanhua wenhuashuxing luelun,” 109-110.

⁷ Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorenshe de lishi*, 72.

similarly, demonstrated the important role government played during the heyday of *lianhuanhua* in the 1950s and 60s and the satisfying outcome of a thorough reformation targeting at the content, techniques and style of *lianhuanhua* after 1949.⁸ The Republican *lianhuanhua*, to the contrary, are often roughly labelled as vulgar, erotic, seductive to the youth and aesthetically valueless.⁹ Nonetheless, in most post-1949 discourses, the Republican commercial *lianhuanhua* painters are not regarded as the culprit of the poor quality displayed in pre-1949 *lianhuanhua*. Instead, they were venerable victims of the corrupted society and exploited by the publishers monopolizing the industry to produce those inferior yet profitable *lianhuanhua*. Many commercial *lianhuanhua* painters, according to the cited recounts in Wan Shaojun's book, eventually died of oppression, poverty and opium abuse.¹⁰ Indeed, the listed phenomena reveal some important aspects within the pre-1949 *lianhuanhua* production in Shanghai, but still could not convincingly support the claim regarding the hierarchical differences between the Republican and post-1949 *lianhuanhua*.

On the other hand, Zhang Yongfeng offers an alternative point of view upon pre-1949 *lianhuanhua* through indicating the distinctive core pursuit of Republican *lianhuanhua* painters, which was to make entertaining and easily comprehended works for the readers. He admits the stylistic and ideological diversity of Republican *lianhuanhua* as well as the importance of the vibrant market formed in Republican Shanghai. Instead of completely denying the value of pre-1949 *lianhuanhua*, Zhang adheres to the continual development of *lianhuanhua* and treats the popularity of Republican *lianhuanhua* as a necessary foundation for the post-1949 socio-political reformation of the genre.¹¹ Nevertheless, as the discussion is unfolded employing the media study and market theory, the visual characterizations of the Republican *lianhuanhua* have not been touched upon.

The Chinese primary sources, including the memoirs, journal articles, and conference proceedings, also play an essential role in this thesis. The memoir of Zhao Hongben, composed in the 1990s, is the most valuable recount to obtain the first-hand information on the creation and publication of his Republican and post-1949 works. He extensively wrote on *Monkey King*

⁸ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 79.

⁹ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 61; Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorenshe de lishi*, 27.

¹⁰ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 58.

¹¹ Zhang, "Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuahua wenhuashuxing luelun, Chubanshi yanjiu," 111.

Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon drawn in 1962, discussing the choice of style, the process of production, and visual characterizations. For some unknown reasons, he did not mention in detail about his Republican *lianhuanhua* commissioned by the commercial publishers including his debut work, *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. The memoir of Jiang Weipu 姜维朴 (1926-2019), the late chief editor of *Lianhuan Huabao* (Pictorial of *Lianhuanhua*) published by People's Fine Arts Publishing House, provides abundant details on the left-wing intervention on Shanghai *lianhuanhua* industry before 1949 and the later reformations during the post-1949 stage. He played an important role during the process of "revolutionizing" *lianhuanhua* and offers an internal perspective as a high-ranked cultural cadre. Like almost all the contemporary and later cultural workers of China, he firmly asserted the superiority of PRC *lianhuanhua* produced during the genre's "golden age," namely the 1950s and 60s, while dismissing all Republican *lianhuanhua* into the pornographic, reactionist, and absurd sort.¹² Li Lu 黎鲁 (1921-), the former deputy chief editor of Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House during the 1950s, recollected the nationalization of the *lianhuanhua* industry and the formation of a new standard to regulate *lianhuanhua* production after 1949. He also recounted several concurrent political movements and how these political events formally and ideologically reshaped *lianhuanhua*. He appears to be less radical than Jiang Weipu when he evaluates the value of Republican *lianhuanhua* and very briefly mentions the advantages of Shanghai commercial *lianhuanhua* painters active before 1949 in his memoir.¹³

One of the major post-1949 art periodicals, *Meishu* 美术, is another crucial primary source to provide panoramic and comprehensive insights on the reception, production, and distribution of *lianhuanhua* in the 1950s and 60s. The periodical was an important venue for scholars, art critics, cultural cadres, and even amateur readers of *lianhuanhua* to address their opinions on those newly published works during the first two decades of the PRC. In fact, most Chinese sources on *lianhuanhua*, both primary and secondary, likewise adhere to the hierarchical development of Chinese *lianhuanhua* chronologically divided by the founding of the PRC in

¹² Jiang Weipu, "Guanghui yongzai, jiaoyi changcun," in *Lu Xun lun lianhuanhua*, ed. Jiang Weipu (Beijing: Lianhuanhua chubanshe, 2012), 68-71.

¹³ Li Lu, "Tan wushiniandai lianhuanhua de chuanguo yu chuban," accessed Nov. 2, 2020, http://book.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2012_08/19/16913715_0.shtml.

1949. Again, very few contextual, aesthetic, or formal comparisons have ever been made to verify the credibility of the given statement.

English secondary sources exclusively concentrating on *lianhuanhua* appear to be less than those in Chinese. By far, very few English monographs dedicated to *lianhuanhua* have been published. The critical and informative English surveys, on the other hand, include the related sections in *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* by Julia Andrews; one chapter in *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humor Magazines, and Picture Books* contributed by Kuiyi Shen; and a section in *The Art of Modern China* co-authored by Andrews and Shen. Andrews evidently and convincingly analyzes the reformed new style and the juxtaposition of visual tradition and Westernization of *lianhuanhua* after 1949. The discussion offers a pivotal starting point for further study on the specific visual language of *lianhuanhua* created in PRC.

Moreover, Shen Kuiyi in his chapter addresses very insightful arguments on Chinese *lianhuanhua* as a cultural product and accessible merchandise to a vast group of readers in Republican Shanghai. Shen places *lianhuanhua* into the interwoven network of painters, readers, publishing houses, and the market. Each profession within this vast commercial network played an indispensable role in promoting *lianhuanhua* throughout China and those adjacent regions in Asia. Therefore, *lianhuanhua* is treated as highly profitable merchandise in this article.¹⁴ According to Shen, Republican *lianhuanhua* became increasingly popular because it was cheap, easy to read, and covered a broad range of popular subject matters for the intended audience, from well-known history stories to popular movies. This research reveals an essential yet often overlooked fact about *lianhuanhua* that the visual language of *lianhuanhua* is ultimately determined by very different factors under respective historical backgrounds. In *The Art of Modern China*, *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* (1962) is taken as an example to display the stylistic characterizations of post-1949 *lianhuanhua* combining Chinese traditional drawing and Western art conventions, which appeared to be the officially approved visual paradigm governed the *lianhuanhua* production.¹⁵ Pictorially speaking, images created by mainstream, well-known *lianhuanhua* artists after 1949 demonstrate a closer association with scientific perspective and anatomy and Chinese antique line drawings. Andrews and Shen

¹⁴ Shen, "Lianhuanhua and Manhua-Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai," 104.

¹⁵ Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 179-180.

describe the visual features shown in this *lianhuanhua* as the “technical finesse” with a vivid three-dimensionality.¹⁶

However, several recent English publications raise rather inspirational discussions on Chinese mass culture in general including animation and serial-picture storybooks. In *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940s-1970s* by Daisy Yan Du, a chronological survey toward Chinese animation is unfolded with an emphasis on the “national style”, which guided animated filmmaking and intellectual debates in the 1950s and 60s, echoing the aesthetic features in Zhao Hongben’s post-1949 *lianhuanhua*. Du acutely points out the rigid, exclusive, essentialist, and even xenophobic characterizations of animation under the influence of national style, which was also shared by many contemporary *lianhuanhua*.¹⁷ On the other hand, she proposes a dialectical reading upon the national style, indicating that national style and national identity are not fixed or timeless concepts, but instead are fluid, shifting, and historically contingent.¹⁸ The article titled “Fantastic Laughter in a Social-Realist Tradition? The Nuances of ‘Satire’ and ‘Extolment’ in *The Secret of the Magic Gourd* and Its 1963 Adaptation” in an edited book, *Maoist Laughter* published in 2019, inspirationally and informatively investigates the treatment of stories containing fantasy and ironic contents in 1950s and 60s.¹⁹ It is tightly associated with the mythical theme seemingly in discord with the socialist new reality such as *Monkey King Thrice Defeated the Skeleton Demon* illustrated by Zhao Hongben in 1962. Rosemary A. Roberts, the author of “The Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes of the ‘Red Classics’ in Lianhuanhua of the Reform Era” published in the edited book *The Making and Remaking of China’s “Red Classics”: Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture*, makes quite insightful stylistic and content comparisons between 1950s/60s and post-2000s *lianhuanhua* dedicated to didactic subject matters. The author explicitly clarifies the vital effect of socialist-

¹⁶ Andrews and Shen, *The Art of Modern China*, 180.

¹⁷ Daisy Yan Du, *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940s-1970s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2019), 14-17.

¹⁸ Du, *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940s-1970s*, 137.

¹⁹ Yun Zhu, “Fantastic Laughter in a Social-Realist Tradition? The Nuances of ‘Satire’ and ‘Extolment’ in *The Secret of the Magic Gourd* and Its 1963 Adaptation.” In *Maoist Laughter*, ed. McGrath, Jason, Zhu Ping, and Zhuoyi Wang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2021), 89-107.

realist doctrine on the PRC *lianhuanhua* during 1950s and 60s, and the changed visual features of post-2000s *lianhuanhua* when the influence of the given aesthetic preference has faded.²⁰

Two more recent English publications by Christine Ho and Gu Yi, *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China* and *Chinese Ways of Seeing and Open-Air Painting*, despite the absence of *lianhuanhua* within the spectrum of both books, provide inspirational insight on the refashioned PRC art circle, to which *lianhuanhua* was strategically annexed after 1949. These two books offer a broader, highly nuanced observation on the protocol of transforming “old” art forms to genres of socialist fine art, which simultaneously occurred during the reform of post-1949 *lianhuanhua*.

Gu Yi points out the processive evolution of aesthetic standards during the 1950s and 60s which governed all genres of visual arts, including *lianhuanhua*. The political control over art had exceeded the limit of visual characterizations and content and extended to the more abstruse realm of the audience's understanding and practice of perceptions. The post-1949 creation of historical/classical *lianhuanhua* and *guohua*, or national style painting, underwent a gradual amalgamation concerning aesthetic standards, ideological contents, and artistic techniques.²¹ The ever-changing standard during the 1950s and 60s to regulate the creation of *guohua* in a way was also effective and influential for *lianhuanhua* practitioners.

A concurrent publication of Gu Yi's, “Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China” written by Christine Ho, also adds inspirational vision to the vastly changed realm of fine art after 1949. She raises the issue of the transformed self-identity of PRC artists, which was omnipresent in every field of visual art during the first seventeen years of PRC. The process of artists being transformed into socialist cultural workers was deeply intertwined with the changed method of art practice and the principal norm all “workers” ought to follow. Even though *lianhuanhua* is by no means the focal point of this book, the in-depth discussions regarding the formation of post-1949 socialist fine art perfectly fit into the history of *lianhuanhua* throughout the 20th century. Ho incisively points out that the tension between elites, technical and bureaucratic associations with the fine arts, and the famous address sought by revolutionary mass culture largely shaped artists' and administrators' struggles to define socialist

²⁰ Rosemary A. Roberts, “The Politics and Aesthetics of Rediscovering Heroes of the “Red Classics” in Lianhuanhua of the Reform Era.” In *The Making and Remaking of China's “Red Classics”: Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture*, ed. Li Li and Rosemary A. Roberts (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018), 115-35.

²¹ Yi Gu, *Chinese Ways of Seeing and Open-Air Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2020), 183.

fine art and socialist realism in China. This continual contradiction had long been existed since the second Sino-Japanese War and oriented with the debates previously staged within the Republican-era art world.²² The given claim is also valid concerning the development of Chinese *lianhuanhua*, as the Republican *lianhuanhua* had long been regarded as a vulgar and purely vernacular form of commercial media with little aesthetic value until the post-1949 reformation in the 1950s.

On the other hand, the range of practitioners of *lianhuanhua* after 1949 had been extended beyond the commercial *lianhuanhua* painters like Zhao Hongben and reached the circle of fine art, especially *guohua* artists. The once overt division between *lianhuanhua* and other visual art genres simultaneously became less significant. The reformation targeting post-1949 *lianhuanhua* could almost be considered an epitome of the birth of socialist fine art and the corresponding aesthetics and reception theories.

Methodology

In the previously mentioned post-1949 publications, the Republican *lianhuanhua* often appear to be a mere “control group” to further unveil the post-1949 works' superiority and seldom receive the immediate attention from academia. Republican *lianhuanhua* have always been compared to its post-1949 counterparts and been categorized through a rough, almost stereotypical, manner. All Republican *lianhuanhua* placed into the sheer dichotomy are collectively encased into a convenient pack and remain a vague, contrastive “Other” within many public discourses. This status quo leads me to consider and attempt to answer specific questions: Despite the charge of poor quality, what does a typical Republican *lianhuanhua* look like? Which features of Republican *lianhuanhua* lead to the given accusation regarding the poor quality after 1949? How and why are Republican *lianhuanhua* different from its post-1949 counterparts? To what extent could these differences verify/debunk the previously mentioned hierarchy and superiority of the post-1949 *lianhuanhua*?

Driven by these questions, a systematic comparison regarding the visuality, content, and the overall *lianhuanhua* industry between a Republican *lianhuanhua* and a post-1949 one will be made to contextually unveil the differences of the selected works. I intentionally choose two

²² Christine Ho, *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 13.

works by the same *lianhuanhua* painter, Zhao Hongben, to avoid the distraction of the personal styles of different practitioners. Both works were completed at the turning points of Zhao's career. While *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* is the very first work of Zhao after he finished the apprenticeship in Republican Shanghai, *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* is his most well-known and celebrated masterpiece during the post-1949 era.

In order to make the comparison as explicit as possible, I will pick the same aspects of the selected *lianhuanhua* by Zhao Hongben to structure my paper. These aspects include the training Zhao Hongben received before drawing each work, the publication and distribution of each work, as well as the content and visual characterizations of each work. The first two sections are primarily built upon the first-hand textual records and memoirs published by actual practitioners of Chinese *lianhuanhua*, especially Zhao Hongben, and participants of those associated events. Phenomena and facts listed in the primary records become the plausible tool to socially and historically explain the making of each work and visual differentiations shown in the final product of the respective system---various external factors were affecting the production of *lianhuanhua* besides the author's agency. Through carefully examining the primary rhetoric, one could discern a shared pattern in either historical era, that *lianhuanhua* was eventually molded within the given social-political contexts and produced accordingly to fulfill its designated functions. In the last section, on the other hand, I will apply a more analytical tone to thoroughly comprehend the visual characterizations and ideological content of each work. The visual analysis could lead to a comprehensive understanding toward the visual differentiation and necessity of the chosen visual languages under different historical backgrounds.

Zhao himself, too, had always been an important figure in the *lianhuanhua* industry during both historical stages. He was quite acute in perceiving popular trends of the *lianhuanhua* market as well as socio-political waves outside the profession. This acuteness helped him become one of the few Republican commercial *lianhuanhua* painters who successfully adapted into the post-1949 art world and flourished further. The stylistic transformations shown in his two works closely echo the changed identity in different historical periods from an independent commercial painter to a cultural cadre of the communist regime. His career almost epitomized the historical trajectory of *lianhuanhua*, the genre prevalent in Chinese society throughout the 20th century. He, therefore, is a representative amongst *lianhuanhua* painters of his generation undergoing a

series of social turmoil and the final shift of political power. His works materially and pictorially imply the mechanism of two vastly different systems to produce *lianhuanhua*.

Outline of the Thesis

In the first chapter, my primary focus is on the debut work of Zhao Hongben in the late 1930s, *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. The first section within this chapter examines the drawing training received by Zhao prior to the publication of the given *lianhuanhua* when he was a teenager. His experience as a disciple in the master's studio was quite typical amongst *lianhuanhua* painters of his generation during the Republican era. Young apprentices of the profession learned from their masters and directly engaged with the market at the early stage of their career. In Zhao Hongben's case, merely three months after joining his master's studio, he drew his first-ever picture storybook based on a rough script written by his master.²³ The quality of these pictures, as described by himself, was relatively poor.

Nevertheless, his master still managed to sell this work drawn by his 16-year-old apprentice at an acceptable price. During the apprenticeship stage, the master determined what he could draw according to the trend of the market.²⁴ His debut work was still influenced by this market-oriented inertia and demonstrated similar features to his previous works finished during his apprenticeship as well as other contemporary popular *lianhuanhua* sold in Shanghai. The second section of Chapter One investigates the publication and distribution of Zhao's debut work in 1939. Through tracking the process of producing, publishing/printing, and distributing this *lianhuanhua*, one could briefly understand the mechanism of a mature, thoroughly commercialized *lianhuanhua* industry in Republican Shanghai. The third section of Chapter One is dedicated to the content and stylistic characterizations of this *lianhuanhua*. Why were the particular story and visual style chosen by Zhao Hongben for his debut work? In fact, the final visual effect presented in this *lianhuanhua* compromises the author's earlier training, the publication and distribution system, and, ultimately, the market need.

The structure of Chapter Two is quite similar to that of the first. Concentrating on Zhao Hongben's post-1949 *lianhuanhua* *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, the first section explores the "re-education" focusing on communist ideology and art skills Zhao received

²³ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 13.

²⁴ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 14.

as a leftist and latter underground CCP member in the 1940s. This was the root of his later style exhibited in *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* completed in 1962. After the PRC was founded, Zhao Hongben underwent the identity transformation from a left-wing commercial *lianhuanhua* painter to a cultural cadre of the new regime. On some specific occasions, he could also be the educator/instructor for those Republican *lianhuanhua* painters who failed to “ride the tide” like he did before 1949.²⁵ The second section of Chapter Two is about the publication and distribution of the *lianhuanhua* finished in early 1960s. A unified, government-run distribution network of *lianhuanhua* was established in 1955.²⁶ The process of publishing *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* fully demonstrated those key features of the new distribution system, through which this *lianhuanhua* was shaped as a prestigious cultural product serving completely different purposes in comparison to Zhao’s Republican work. The last section of the second chapter investigates the visuality and formal style of this *lianhuanhua*. Again, the visual features and subject matter were chosen due to complicated reasons reflecting the concurrent socio-political environment as well as the core function of PRC *lianhuanhua* as a form of socialist visual art.

Through carefully investigating the mentioned aspects of two selected *lianhuanhua* by Zhao Hongben as well as the trajectory of his own career, I intend to raise an alternative perspective on the differentiations and connections between Republican *lianhuanhua* and post-1949 *lianhuanhua*. The ultimate effort was made by the communist regime to elevate the status of *lianhuanhua* into the realm of “high art” after 1949. From the case of Zhao Hongben, however, one could discern that this continual process had started long before the establishment of PRC and decisively reshaped/reinterpreted Chinese *lianhuanhua* as a form of socialist visual art instead of commercial pop art. Through comparing the chosen works, I attempt to recontextualize the widely accepted statement in Chinese academia claiming “post-1949 *lianhuanhua* are overall better than Republican ones” and explain the changed expectations and ambitions placed upon *lianhuanhua* in the different historical periods.

²⁵ “Gongzi zhidu gaige,” Office of Shanghai Chronicles, accessed May 24, 2021, <http://www.shtong.gov.cn/Newsite/node2/node2245/node4471/node56246/node56251/node56253/userobject1ai42807.html>.

²⁶ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 80.

Conclusion and Contribution to the Field

As stated in earlier sections, English publications on Chinese *lianhuanhua* are still sparse. Meanwhile, restricted by the cultural and political censorship, scholarly publications in Chinese mostly adhere to a ruptured development of *lianhuanhua* and treat the Republican and post-1949 *lianhuanhua* separately. Upon the establishment of PRC, a clear hierarchy has been implanted within the public discourse on *lianhuanhua* in mainland China, that the post-1949 works are aesthetically and ideologically better than those created before 1949. The disjointed and hierarchical history of *lianhuanhua*, however, is by no means self-evident or beyond question. The fact is that the thorough visual and content analysis upon Republican *lianhuanhua* could rarely be seen in previous Chinese or English publications. Could an assertive conclusion be made without carefully testing one of the subsets within the dichotomy? Could pre- and post-1949 *lianhuanhua* be compared under the universal and dogmatic standard proposed in Chinese academia? This paper provides several feasible answers to these questions, while at the same time reveals the significantly distinctive natures of Republican and post-1949 *lianhuanhua*. Hopefully, my writing could bring the initial clue on the missing piece within the historiography of Chinese *lianhuanhua* and unveil some overlooked facts of Republican *lianhuanhua*.

Section I *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants and Lianhuanhua* in Republican Shanghai

Introduction

In this chapter, the scope of discussion will be restricted to the Shanghai-based, traditionally trained commercial *lianhuanhua* painters represented by the figure of Zhao Hongben. These *lianhuanhua* painters worked for the *lianhuanhua* industry dominated by small, private publishing houses scattering along those cramped alleys of Shanghai. Their typical works were quite distant from the contemporary artistic or political movements and solely served the sales and profits as well as tastes of their intended audience. It is widely accepted in Chinese academia that Republican *lianhuanhua* are mostly ostentatious and vulgar. The aesthetic and ideological values of the genre did not improve until the PRC cultural bureaus started the reformation against the Republican *lianhuanhua* since 1950s.²⁷

²⁷ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 55.

At the same time, even though many scholars associate *lianhuanhua* with *manhua* and place both genres under the same category when discussed the history of commercial art in China, their respective origins and trajectories of development are fundamentally different.²⁸ Celebrated artists engaging with *manhua* creation such as Zhang Leping 张乐平 (1910-1992) and Ye Qianyu 叶浅予 (1907-1995) were often regarded as visual artists and cultural elites, and barely, if at all, participated in the *lianhuanhua* production during Republican era.²⁹ While *manhua*, the important component of Shanghai commercial art, is repeatedly discussed in various academic fields, *lianhuanhua* has received much more neglect than the attention it deserves to gain.

Taking Zhao Hongben and his Republican work, *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* (1939), as the primary example, I attempt to evidently unveil the important yet neglected facts of *lianhuanhua* production in Republican Shanghai as well as the aesthetic and stylistic features of a typical market oriented *lianhuanhua* represented by the selected work of Zhao Hongben.

1. Training/Apprenticeship of *Lianhuanhua* painters in Republican Shanghai

a) Apprenticeship

Zhao Hongben was born in Shanghai to a poor family originated from Northern Jiangsu Province, which could not afford any formal art training for young Zhao during his early age. Therefore, after cultivating an interest on drawing, he had to completely rely on self-teaching. His primary and only accessible sources were traditional line-drawing manuscripts such as *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* 芥子园画谱 and *Album of A Hundred Illustrated Celebrities of Qing Dynasty* 清代一百名人图集 borrowed from his neighbor free of charge.³⁰ Young Zhao Hongben learned drawing through the most commonly seen and long-standing method in China: copying the old masters, which was influenced by the praxis of traditional Chinese ink-and-brush painting, one of the most prestigious art mediums.³¹ In fact, quite a few commercial *lianhuanhua* painters back in the 1930s carried out the same type of pre-apprentice

²⁸ Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorensu de lishi*, 40-46; Shen, Kuiyi. "Lianhuanhua and Manhua-picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai," 111-117; Zhang, "Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuanhua wenhuashuxing luelun," 105-111.

²⁹ Zhang, "Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuanhua wenhuashuxing luelun, *Chubanshi yanjiu*," 108.

³⁰ "Lianhuanhuajia Zhao Hongben: cong shehuidiceng dao yidaidashi 连环画家赵宏本:从社会底层到一代大师," Sina News, accessed Nov. 27, 2019, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2006-07-21/155610497855.shtml>.

³¹ Ho, *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China*, 6.

practice in traditional Chinese line drawings and ink paintings before officially entering the industry.³²

Zhao then entered the *lianhuanhua* industry through becoming the apprentice of a *lianhuanhua* master named Wang Yifei 汪逸飞 at the age of fifteen. He worked for his master for eight years but still remained almost penniless by the time he left the studio. Apprentices, according to the code of ethics in many traditional professions of China, were not supposed to be paid the same as their masters, even though they did the most work.³³ Zhao Hongben was a particularly valuable asset to his master, as he already knew many drawing skills before entering the studio and could skip the starting stage of drawing patterns on costumes or background for the ordinary disciples.³⁴ Indeed, he made money for his master almost immediately after joining the studio. The master of Zhao, despite the poor drawing skills despised by his disciple, had very acute awareness of the trend within intended audience of *lianhuanhua*. Zhao recounted in his memoir that his master took him to watch the phenomenally popular show of Carl Hagenbeck's circus in Shanghai and urged him to draw a new *lianhuanhua* based on the exotic animal show. Zhao finished drawing two volumes in one month, which expectedly won great popularity amongst readers.³⁵ Master Wang, according to the recollection of Zhao Hongben and other contemporary figures, was more of a shrewd and successful businessman rather than a professional *lianhuanhua* painter. He was the representative of his generation of practitioners within the industry whose primary concern was to gain a stable share within the *lianhuanhua* market. Wang was so financially successful that he even held enough capital to start his own publishing house, *Min Zhong Shu Ju* 民众书局.³⁶ Zhao Hongben, therefore, was not only his apprentice, but also a highly profitable employee with satisfying drawing skills.

Zhao Hongben gradually became famous as an apprentice of Master Wang during 1930s. Masters in *lianhuanhua* industry of Republican Shanghai held potent agency over the publication of *lianhuanhua* within their own studios. Based on Zhao's memoir, the contents of his early works were often determined by Wang. The popularity of Zhao Hongben's earliest *lianhuanhua* during his apprenticeship might be partially attributed to the market-oriented contents chosen by

³² Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorensu de lishi*, 49-52.

³³ Huang Ruogu and Wang Yiqiu, "Zhenzheng laopai, jinfang jiamao," *Lianhuanhua yishu* issue 1 (1989): 119.

³⁴ Huang and Wang, "Zhenzheng laopai, jinfang jiamao," 119.

³⁵ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 14.

³⁶ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 13-14.

his master. This acuteness toward the trend of market was a necessary skill for *lianhuanhua* practitioners, Zhao Hongben included, to survive in the industry of Republican Shanghai.

b) Master-disciple Relationship of the Industry

By 1939, Zhao Hongben had spent eight years in his master's studio before he managed to terminate the apprenticeship in a quite unpleasant manner. He regained freedom in the same year through paying a considerable amount of "ransom" to the master.³⁷ When Zhao received the commission of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*, he was still in a dispute with his former master, an influential figure within the circle of *lianhuanhua* publishers and painters in Shanghai, who threatened to expel Zhao from the industry as he refused to continue drawing and earning money for his master after eight years of apprenticeship.

Masters of *lianhuanhua* profession indeed held power over their disciples in various ways. The terms within contract between the master and disciple, *guan shu* 关书, are usually rather strict. Disciples were not allowed to accept commissions without the master's permission. When the disciple's term of apprenticeship ended, the master had the priority to hire his former disciple to continue working for him.³⁸ The disciple ought to learn necessary skills from his master and simultaneously return the favor through drawing for the master with very little financial reward. As previously mentioned, during his apprenticeship, Zhao had already established his reputation as a skillful *lianhuanhua* painter and created many popular works. He, thus, became a proverbial "cash cow" for his master. His three-year term was forcefully elongated due to the considerable profit made by his work.³⁹ Master Wang reacted so fiercely toward Zhao's attempt of leaving his studio, that few publishing houses dared to cooperate with Zhao right after he ended his apprenticeship. At this time, a small publishing house, *Lian Yi She Shu Ju* 联益社书局, called upon Zhao Hongben to create a martial legend serial-picture book for them.⁴⁰ This *lianhuanhua* became Zhao Hongben's debut work as an independent commercial *lianhuanhua* painter and well represents his personal style established during his apprenticeship in Wang's studio.

³⁷ Sina News, "Lianhuanhuajia Zhao Hongben: cong shehuidiceng dao yidaidashi."

³⁸ "Guan Shu," Lianhuanhua Zaixian, accessed Nov. 11, 2020, <https://www.a8z8.com/thread-598000-1-1.html>.

³⁹ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 14.

⁴⁰ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 16.

2. Publication of Zhao's Debut Work and Distribution System of Republican *Lianhuanhua*

a) Before the Publication: Story and Background

Zhao's *lianhuanhua* adaptation of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* follows the classic storyline of the famous Chinese martial art legend 武侠小说 written by a Qing dynasty author, Shi Yukun 石玉昆 (ca. mid-19th century), in which good could always defeat evil and justice is attained for the vulnerable and powerless. The novel is based on the tale of renowned Song dynasty official Bao Zheng 包拯 (999-1062), who is regarded as an ultimate symbol of righteousness and rectitude in Chinese culture. As a literati official, his virtue won him the loyalty from legendary martial heroes such as Zhan Zhao 展昭 and Ouyang Chun 欧阳春. In the novel, when the powerless encountered the oppression of the privileged class, the only salvation they could expect is the uprightness of the literati official and the superior martial arts skill of heroes.⁴¹ The stories of Bao Zheng and his vigilant guards holding remarkable martial arts skills are so loved by and familiar to Chinese people, that a variety of film, serial-picture storybook and stage performance adaptations have been produced during the Republican period.

This *lianhuanhua* series published in 1939 contains several volumes and the National Library of China collects eight of those. Zhao selected some certain episodes from the original, lengthy texts for his pictorial re-narration. The first half of the original novel focuses on Lord Bao Zheng and his fearless struggle against those treacherous and ruthless aristocrats in the court (e.g., the emperor's concubine and ministers). The second half mainly depicts the adventures of martial heroes serving as Lord Bao's guards outside the court.⁴² In the *lianhuanhua* adaptation by Zhao Hongben, martial heroes such as Zhan Zhao 展昭 and Ouyang Chun 欧阳春 play more important roles than Lord Bao and his fellow officials. Zhao hence fully displayed his capability of depicting the lively and thrilling action scenes of heroes and villains.

However, the fiction might not be the only source of Zhao's *lianhuanhua* adaptation. In his memoir, Zhao admitted the significant influence of Peking opera upon his earlier works. In fact, he was so enraptured by Peking opera that he originally planned to become a scenic design apprentice instead of that of *lianhuanhua*.⁴³ The Peking opera *Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* performed during 1930s was also based on the same novel and gain enormous success in

⁴¹ Shi Yukun, *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2004).

⁴² Shi, *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*.

⁴³ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 12.

Shanghai. The original stage scripts in the collection of *Fu Lian Cheng* 富连成, the largest Peking opera troupe of China during the Republican era, also place much greater emphasis on the stories of heroes outside the imperial court.⁴⁴ These stories are accompanied by flamboyant martial arts actions, love stories between heroes and beauties, and the despicable conspiracy plotted by the villains. It, in a sense, resembles the golden age of Hollywood commercial films, differing only by applying a vernacular theatrical language familiar to Chinese readers.

In Republican Shanghai, the boom of martial art legend spreading across various medium had been underway ever since the early 1930s after the screening of hit martial art movie *Huoshao Hongliansi* 火烧红莲寺 (Eng: *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*) in 1928, which gained an enormous success amongst Shanghai citizens.⁴⁵ This fervent audience preference toward depiction of the martial art legend significantly affected *lianhuanhua* production. Almost ninety percent of *lianhuanhua* produced around 1931 in Shanghai were about those celebrated martial heroes and their adventures.⁴⁶ Famous Chinese left-wing writer, Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981), mentioned this heated boom of the martial art movies in his essay, entitled “Fengjian de xiaoshimin wenyi” (The Backward-looking Literature and Art for Philistines). As Mao Dun observed, movie audience in Shanghai firmly believed that those legendary deeds actually occurred, and those martial heroes indeed existed. The audience thus generated fanatical enthusiasm and single-minded belief towards the fictional world depicted on the silver screen. When they did not have the access to movies, interested parties would turn to the cheaper and much more accessible replacements, namely those *lianhuanhua* adaptations of the popular stories. Movie characters continued their heroic deeds on paper to satisfy their desiring fans.⁴⁷ Martial art legends hence became one of the most familiar and beloved subject matters of *lianhuanhua* amongst Chinese readers. Zhao’s choice of content for his debut work, one of the most familiar and popular martial art legends for Chinese readers, was thus highly reasonable and wise within the profit-driven industry.

Moreover, as a young apprentice, Zhao Hongben was also a keen audience of traditional martial arts performed in the street corners of Shanghai. The close observation toward martial

⁴⁴ “Fu Lian Cheng Script Collection,” Fu Lian Cheng, accessed Feb. 3, 2020, <http://www.fuliancheng.com/script>.

⁴⁵ Mao Dun, “Fengjian de xiaoshimin wenyi,” *Dong Fang* 30, issue 3 (1933): 21.

⁴⁶ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 55.

⁴⁷ Mao, “Fengjian de xiaoshimin wenyi,” 21.

moves and postures provided the initial inspirations and visual sources for Zhao's martial legend *lianhuanhua*.⁴⁸ The initial interests of Zhao Hongben toward Chinese martial arts and Peking opera had soon been developed into a distinctive personal style when he became a full-fledged professional *lianhuanhua* painter.

b) *Lianhuanhua* Publishing Houses: *Lian Yi She Shu Ju* 联益社书局 and More

The *lianhuanhua* version of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* was published by Lian Yi She Shu Ju 联益社书局, one of the small publishers exclusively dedicated to *lianhuanhua* publication. It is a private press established by entrepreneurs Wu Chengqian 吴承乾 and Wu Chengyuan 吴承元 in 1938. At least one of the founders was, according to the historical documents, a tailor before entering the much more profitable *lianhuanhua* industry.⁴⁹ By the time of the production of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*, Lian Yi She had been in the business for only one year and had just gained the membership into the Shanghai *Lianhuanhua* Publisher Society 上海连环图画书业同业公会 as well as the license to participate in the regular book trade amongst all qualified publishers of *lianhuanhua*.⁵⁰ This autonomous “book society” concentrating solely on the publication of *lianhuanhua* was completely independent from other publisher associations of Shanghai and had its own unique protocol of operation.

The members of the society gathered regularly for the internal trade and exchange of those newly published *lianhuanhua*. The elected personnel took charge of managing and dispatching the new books from all publishers before the final sale was made. This protocol was necessary when the books by celebrated painters such as Zhao Hongben and unknown ones were released on the same day. In order to maintain the decent sales for every publisher, the society was responsible to make the final arrangement and balance the possible gap of sales on the given day. They might arrange for those *lianhuanhua* by less famous painters to be released on an alternative date to avoid the competition with the popular ones. On the other hand, the price of

⁴⁸ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 31.

⁴⁹ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 50.

⁵⁰ Wu Xianming, “Yong Lianhuanhua xuanchuan kangri,” Cartoonwin, accessed Sep 19, 2021, <http://www.cartoonwin.com/personage/mjft/mjftxt.php?im=ltws&nam=ylhxc>.

new *lianhuanhua* was solely determined by its publisher. Publishers could raise or lower the price accordingly to generate stronger profits.⁵¹

The speed in which new *lianhuanhua* was released was also quite vital for the smaller *lianhuanhua* publishers to survive the intense competition. Once they had entered the industry and gained the necessary license, private-owned publishing houses like Lian Yi She were permitted to buy necessary materials such as paper and ink on credit before the publication and pay out fees after the book was released. It allowed the business owners to enter the market with limited capital, and the rapid circulation of sales and profits would guarantee adequate funding to maintain the operation of business.⁵²

These facts of Republican *lianhuanhua* industry in a sense explained why Lian Yi She decided to commission this *lianhuanhua* with Zhao Hongben. Zhao Hongben had already earned a reputation amongst *lianhuanhua* audience because of the drawing skill and intriguing contents shown in his earlier works. Meanwhile, the experiences of working for a stingy master had bestowed Zhao Hongben the ability to draw rapidly. In fact, it only took Zhao three months to finish drawing all five volumes of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*.⁵³ As a new publisher, *Lian Yi She* urgently needed a bestseller to earn a position in the competitive market. Fortunately, they made the correct choice toward the author and content, since Zhao Hongben's first *lianhuanhua* as an independent *lianhuanhua* painter achieved a great success. Lian Yi She thus earned satisfactory profits and later expanded its business to contiguous regions of Shanghai including Suzhou and Nanjing.⁵⁴ Shrewd businessmen like the owners of Lian Yi She were quite affirmative on the effect of star *lianhuanhua* painters and the earning potential of their works. Celebrated *lianhuanhua* painters naturally could earn much more than their less-famous peers.

c) Distribution: The Network and Changed Industry

When *lianhuanhua* first emerged as an independent form of commercial art in early 1920s, the situation was quite different from what would occur during the 1930s and 40s. Some large, quite prestigious presses such as *Shi Jie Shu Ju* 世界书局, or World Book Publishing House, were still in the game through publishing the first batches of popular *lianhuanhua* and ignited the

⁵¹ Huang and Wang, "Zhenzheng laopai, jinfang jiamao," 118.

⁵² Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 49.

⁵³ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 17.

⁵⁴ Wu Xianming, "Yong Lianhuanhua xuanchuan kangri."

boom of *lianhuanhua* in the following decades. *Shi Jie Shu Ju* insisted on selling their *lianhuanhua* in the complete set. They utilized higher quality materials and set up stricter standard regarding the original drawings and printing. Correspondingly, the price of these *lianhuanhua* was much higher than those printed by small private publishers. In order to promote the sales, *Shi Jie Shu Ju* also invited famous commercial artists such as *Chen Danxu* 陈丹旭 to draw a series of historical *lianhuanhua* in the late 1920s. Despite the fine qualities of pictures, the intended audience of *lianhuanhua* including school children and working class of Shanghai found it was impossible to afford these high-end *lianhuanhua*.⁵⁵ At the same time, as the competitor of larger presses like *Shi Jie Shu Ju*, private publishers invented an unprecedented yet genius distribution system exclusively serving the publication of *lianhuanhua* ---to cooperate with rental stalls at street-level and make the stalls act as the agent between publishers and customers. Publishers started to sell their *lianhuanhua* to rental stalls instead of readers. Then the readers went to the stalls to find the *lianhuanhua* they preferred. The cost of rental was significantly lower than purchase. One could enjoy forty or fifty *lianhuanhua* at one time after paying a few pennies. Even the poorest could have abundant choices as long as they had spare change and chose to stop by a rental stall.⁵⁶ The distribution network of *lianhuanhua* formed by tiny rental stalls was enormous: there were still more than 2300 rental stalls in Shanghai in 1950, a year after the founding of PRC.⁵⁷ Through cooperating with the vast network of rental stalls, private publishers further lowered the readers' cost of consuming their *lianhuanhua*, and at the same time raised the speed of circulation of those newest works. As a result, by the beginning of 1930s, large presses such as *Shi Jie Shu Ju* had to completely retreat from the *lianhuanhua* market of Shanghai.⁵⁸ The industry henceforth started to be dominated by smaller and private-owned publishers just like *Lian Yi She Shu Ju*.

Besides those prevalent rental stalls, another important distribution portal of *lianhuanhua* faced the selected oversea markets with large population of Chinese immigrants. The *Zhengxing Company* 正兴公司 based in Singapore occupied the oversea trade of *lianhuanhua* in 1930s and 40s. With branches in Hong Kong and Malaysia, the company expanded the market of Shanghai

⁵⁵ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 49.

⁵⁶ Huang Ruogu and Wang Yiqiu, "Cong beigongyili dao taoyuanlu—jiu lianhuanhua dutede faxingfangshi," *Lianhuanhua yishu* issue3 (1989): 116.

⁵⁷ Huang and Wang, "Cong beigongyili dao taoyuanlu—jiu lianhuanhua dutede faxingfangshi", 119.

⁵⁸ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 49.

lianhuanhua to Southeast Asia and even outside Asia.⁵⁹ Therefore, Shanghai *lianhuanhua* also generated a certain level of influence amongst Chinese immigrants in various regions across the world.

This significant success achieved by Republican *lianhuanhua* across Asia clearly reveals the essential importance of popular stories favored by sinophone audience accompanied by the affordable price as well as the constant and timely accessibility in the market. The ultimate success of an individual *lianhuanhua* painter and their work in Republican Shanghai was, nevertheless, determined by the content and style of the pictorial re-narration of a familiar story.

3. Content and Visual Characterizations of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*

a) “Master of Martial Art Legend”: The Style of Zhao Hongben

In 1918, twenty years before the creation of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*, two professional painters, Liu Boliang 刘伯良 and Zhu Zhixuan 朱之轩, drew one of the earliest serial-picture storybooks based on the Peking opera, *Li Mao Huan Taizi* 狸猫换太子 (Exchange the Prince for a Leopard Cat), which is also originated from the serial fictions *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. This early *lianhuanhua* adaptation of the popular opera shows the very close formal associations with the stage performance. Authors faithfully copied all elements from the stage setting including costumes, props and even the positioning of characters (fig. 1). The background also follows the stage model and is ultimately simplified. In a sense, this earliest *lianhuanhua* adaptation is more of a “stage sketch” rather than a proper pictorial re-narration of the given story.

Zhu Runzhai 朱润斋 (1890-1936), the most important model of Zhao Hongben in learning the drawing techniques at the early stage of his career, was regarded as the pioneer in visually reforming the prototype of the serial-picture story books and making the images of *lianhuanhua* resemble real life scenarios rather than the stage performances.⁶⁰ Zhu primarily focused on stories which required antique costumes and often depicted the characters wearing the costumes of Peking opera, which earned him the profound admiration from the readers of Shanghai during

⁵⁹ Huang and Wang, “Cong beigongyili dao taoyuanlu—jiu lianhuanhua dutede faxingfangshi,” 116.

⁶⁰ Shen, “Lianhuanhua and Mnhua-Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai,” 102.

the 1920s.⁶¹ In his pictorial adaptation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, for instance, he added details such as real horses and scenic background to prompt a more close-to-life representation of the given story (fig. 2).

When Zhao Hongben was still a disciple, he felt disappointed at the poor drawing skill of his own master and turned to intensely copy the works by Zhu Runzhai to learn the basic skills of creating *lianhuanhua* through the process of modelling.⁶² After becoming a full-fledged commercial *lianhuanhua* painter, Zhao Hongben further developed the style of the previous masters into an even more entertaining and dynamic visual language deeply favored by his readers. In addition to those familiar features often seen in *lianhuanhua* drawn in the earlier stage, he willingly added once foreign elements, discussed in further detail below, extracted from various accessible sources to pictorially narrate the story in a rather amusing and comprehensible manner. This reformulated visual language in a sense resembles some certain cinematic effects and provides the immersive reading experiences longed by his readers. Meanwhile, to better remediate cinematic qualities in his work, Zhao abandoned some certain features of traditional line drawing while inserting uncommon elements inspired by Western cartoon and movies into his works. After all, the *lianhuanhua* production in Zhao's age was under the constant influence of film industry, which provided one of the fanciest (and usually most expensive) leisure activities for the urban population of Shanghai.

Accompanied by the stylistic combination of Western and traditional features, the content of pictorial re-narration of the familiar tales by Zhao Hongben is primarily centered on hero-protagonists and demonstrates, through the highly dramatic plots, a universal pattern often seen in the traditional martial art novels of China. Each volume of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* contains several episodes loosely organized by the chronological order. Heroes usually encountered the unlawful villains at the first half of their respective story. Many scoundrels are rather cunning and powerful, thus bring various ordeals to those upright characters. Nevertheless, heroes could always discern and defeat villain's guiles. In general, pictures within Zhao's Republican *lianhuanhua* are quite plot-oriented, containing almost all necessary information for readers to fully comprehend the story: the textual conversations framed by dialog bubbles, the delineation of characters' actions and the pictorial narrative of given plots.

⁶¹ Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorensu de lishi*, 26.

⁶² Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 11.

1) Non-traditional Features: Cinematic Lighting and Background

Compositions and background shown in Zhao's work manifest his attempt to absorb the popular elements of Western culture while maintain a recognisable visual language familiar to Chinese audience. Resonating with the hero-focused content, main characters are often the compositional center within each picture in this Republican work of Zhao Hongben. In comparison to the precedent *lianhuanhua* inspired by the same series of stories published in late 1910s, Zhao's pictorial adaptation contains much more dynamic and diverse actions, postures and verbal interactions amongst characters. Together with the more true-to-life design of background filled with details, the visual features chosen by Zhao deliver a more well-rounded and closer resemblance to the actual world rather than a mere stage. As stated in the previous section, under the continuous influence of movies and other new media widely disseminating in Republican Shanghai, the general trend of pursuing "compositional fullness" within the pictures of *lianhuanhua* had been unceasing ever since mid-1920s.

Li Lu 黎鲁 (1920-), one of the key participants of the nationalization of *lianhuanhua* industry during 1950s, observed the similar phenomenon in regard of Republican *lianhuanhua*. According to his recollection, *lianhuanhua* painters active in Republican Shanghai favored to fill the layout with abundant details within the background as well as decorative motifs on costumes.⁶³ The background shown in each picture of this *lianhuanhua* by Zhao Hongben echoes this trend within the profession. In this 1930s *lianhuanhua*, the flat and sparse rendering of background often seen in the traditional line drawings has been largely replaced by the fuller and more fashionable manner favored by Shanghai readers. To represent the night sky, for instance, the background is filled with dense parallel lines instead of leaving the empty space often seen in traditional line drawings of China (fig.3). Other cinematic shading implying the three-dimensional space could also be constantly found in this *lianhuanhua*. When Hu Zhihua, one of the major heroes of the series, is having a conversation with a servant in a night scene, the background illustrator intentionally applied dense lines of different length to delineate the shadow cast by the candlelight within darkness (fig.4). Similarly, in the fourth volume, the candlelight generated the dark shadows of the characters casting on the wall (fig.5). The distribution of shade suggests that the illustrator attempted to imitate a roughly reasonable

⁶³ Li, "Tan wushiniandai lianhuanhua de chuanguozuo yu chuban."

lighting effect and present the sharp contrast between light and shade often seen in the early monochromatic films. The specific attention placed upon light and shade barely seen in *lianhuanhua* produced in 1920s reflects the ultimate influence of movies, in which lighting techniques play a vital role during the production.

Intriguingly, in many cases, the celebrated *lianhuanhua* painters did not own the authorship of the backdrop within their own work. The most commonly seen procedure of completing pictures in a Republican *lianhuanhua* could be roughly divided into three stages: 1. Professional *lianhuanhua* painters drew the major human figures and decided the overall composition; 2. Apprentices/junior painters drew the patterns on characters' costumes and the backdrop based on the intention of the professional painter; 3. After the pictures were completed, the publishers would hire text-copyists to fill all conversation bubbles left blank with appropriate lines and textual captions fitting the plots.⁶⁴ The first two steps usually occurred within the studio of professional *lianhuanhua* painters, in which the master and his apprentices worked jointly to create the pictorial section of *lianhuanhua*.⁶⁵ This prevalent “assembly line” of producing pictures allowed popular *lianhuanhua* painters to maximize their productivity, as the trivial sidelines had been allocated to the assistant personnel. Background and decorative details, apparently, were considered “trivial” regarding the storytelling and by no means the central concern for most practitioners within the profession.

Due to the current evidence, the actual process of producing *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallant* in late 1930s still remains unclear. We cannot confirm whether Zhao also allocated those “trivial” parts within pictures to others as a majority of his contemporary peers did. However, several details demonstrated in the pictorial sections might unveil the fact that the background indeed was added to the composition after the completion of human figures. In the fifth volume, for instance, a tiny blank area contoured by the body and one arm of a hero is not filled with the dense lines indicating the shadow on the fortress wall within the background (fig.6). The person responsible for drawing the background, whoever they were, missed filling the overlapped part of the character and backdrop with necessary lines to achieve a consistent shading effect.

⁶⁴ Huang and Wang, “Zhenzheng laopai, jinfang jiamao,” 119; Lianhuanhua Zaixian, “Guanshu,”; Zhang, “Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuahua wenhuashuxing luelun,” 109.

⁶⁵ Zhang, “Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuahua wenhuashuxing luelun,” 109.

Despite the uncertain authorship of the pictorial backgrounds, Zhao Hongben and his team, if there was in fact anyone assisting him, intentionally emphasized the lighting effect within the pictures, which had not become a concern of *lianhuanhua* painters one generation prior to Zhao Hongben. The increasing influence of the film industry upon *lianhuanhua* production, in fact, went beyond the sheer background and appeared to be prevalent in almost every aspect of the pictorial narrative of the given story.

2) Non-traditional Features: Cinematic and Cartoonish Narrative of the Story

As discussed in earlier sections, the film industry indeed generated a great impact upon the production of Republican *lianhuanhua*. This cinematic method of storytelling is particularly overt in those dynamic action scenes within *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallant* produced by Zhao Hongben in 1939.

Action scenes are without a doubt one of the key attractions of a martial arts legend picture storybook. This explains why Zhao Hongben used a considerable number of pages, or frames in the cinematic term, to delineate those breath-taking duels between the heroes and villains. In those earliest *lianhuanhua* published during the 1910s and 20s, the characters are often posed in the quite static and theatrical manner, which reflected the profound influence of Peking opera (fig.1). Zhao Hongben fully wielded his imagination to design much more dramatic martial moves for his heroic characters to introduce the readers a cinematic and more thrilling reading experience. A significant proportion of the moves in his work could hardly be found or realized on the opera stage. For instance, martial heroes within Zhao's story could easily jump across the high walls carrying a person on his back (fig.7). Zhao could even hang on the eaves of tall attics whilst upside down and eavesdrop on the conversation occurring inside without being spotted (fig.8). The dramatic and vigorous moves of characters drawn by Zhao Hongben further highlight the incredible power and skills of these ancient superheroes. Zhao's exposure to the real-world martial art performance might further assist him to create more dynamic and astonishing action scenes which were unprecedented in Chinese *lianhuanhua*. Martial heroes in this *lianhuanhua* were no longer confined to the prototypical representation of the opera characters or spatial limitation of the stage but demonstrated various modern characterizations to match the expectation of the contemporary audience deeply fond of movies.

In addition to the design of individual martial arts moves, the visualization of fighting scenes in this *lianhuanhua* is also heavily influenced by the cinematic language. Each page plays as one

frame and many frames form a complete scene. The numerous frames in depicting one action scene almost serve as a storyboard of the motion picture and provide the readers a highly consistent series of martial acts. In the fourth volume, for instance, Zhao Hongben applied seventeen pages to delineate a fight between Hu Zhihua and several villains (fig.9-12). Unlike its post-1949 counterparts, these pages containing the consistent martial moves do not serve the total moral or didactic theme of the story. They merely exhibit the pictorial details longed by the readers---the weapon and unique tricks applied by the hero as well as all steps of the defeat of villains. On the other hand, the textual captions within these pictures are particularly sparse and only provide quite brief commentaries on the fight. Due to the informative pictorial contents, captions under these scenes are usually rather incoherent, even lacking the subjects (fig. 13-14). When Hu Zhihua defeated the villains, for instance, the captions on two adjacent pages read:

“(…) stepped on the bandit’s wife, tied up the bandit.”
“(…) interrogated their crime.”⁶⁶

After all, the genre of martial arts legend *lianhuanhua* as an affordable replacement of movies for a majority of readers in Shanghai ought to resemble the motion picture to the greatest extent, in which the plot development mainly relies on the rapid change of scenes and concurrent dialogues amongst characters. Therefore, Zhao divided the duel into as many frames as possible to visualize each martial move of the characters throughout the entire process. The core attraction of the fighting scenes resembling the film could only be achieved by the serial pictures instead of textual narrative. In fact, every volume within this series contains multiple fighting scenes constructed by the lengthy and consistent frames. These scenes commonly occupy one fourth of all pages within a single volume, if not more.⁶⁷ The emphasis on the impressive and film-like fighting scenes requires more pictures and inevitably increases the workload of the painter---Zhao Hongben completed 1154 pictures in total for this *lianhuanhua* series consisted of eight volumes.

Other than the carefully designed and flamboyant action scenes, another key factor to enhance the visual impact of the pictures is the non-traditional features inspired by the Western cartoons. Emerging from Shanghai, the Far East metropolis, Chinese *lianhuanhua* became more

⁶⁶ Zhao Hongben, *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* (Shanghai: Lian Yi She, 1939), 552-53.

⁶⁷ Vol. I contains 29 pages of fighting scenes out of 146 pages; vol. II contains 28 out of 142 pages; vol. III contains 30 out of 133 pages; vol. IV contains 33 out of 143 pages; vol. V contains 30 out of 143; vol. VI contains 38 out of 143 pages; vol. VII contains 40 out of 143.

culturally diverse during the 1930s than ever. Once unfamiliar features inspired by the Western cartoon and comics gradually infiltrated within the visual language of Chinese *lianhuanhua*. Zhao Hongben, one of the most celebrated commercial *lianhuanhua* painters in Shanghai, timely recognized and capitalized on the trend through adding those foreign features in his work to create a fashionable appeal to his readers. For instance, when Zhan Zhao 展昭 thought hard about his countermeasure against the villain's conspiracy, a huge question mark emerges above his head to indicate his perplexity (fig. 15). The appearance of modern punctuations in the mundane entertainment for urban working class and school children, namely *lianhuanhua*, mirrored the influence and aftereffect of the New Culture Movement which occurred in the 1910s and 20s. Advocators of the aforementioned movement, mainly intellectuals and cultural elites, criticized the classical Chinese ideas and promoted a new Chinese culture based upon western ideals such as democracy and science.⁶⁸ Abstruse classical Chinese rooted in the imperial examination system lasting for over a thousand years simultaneously received intense oppositions and started to be gradually replaced by the vernacular written Chinese, also known as *baihua* 白话 involving standardized punctuations. Before the official proposal of promoting Western punctuations released in 1920, modern punctuations such as question mark, exclamation mark and ellipsis never existed within Chinese language.⁶⁹ After a decade of dissemination, the correct application of these once foreign punctuation marks had become rather familiar to ordinary Chinese people by the end of 1930s. A question mark could provide a more lucid pictorial hint for readers to well comprehend the given plot than the lengthy textual explanation, meanwhile reduces their reliance upon the textual contents.⁷⁰

In those dynamic action scenes designed by Zhao Hongben, at the same time, many “auxiliary elements” are added accordingly to enhance the dynamism of designed actions as well as the overall intelligibility of the story. As shown in fig. 3, a “sprint line” is attached behind the character to indicate the incredibly fast speed of his move. In addition to lines implying the speedy sprint, Zhao also applied lines of various lengths to demonstrate different visual effects including the violent collision of blades (fig. 10) and the trajectory of moving swords (fig. 9).

⁶⁸ "Before and After the May Fourth Movement," Columbia University, accessed March 23, 2021, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1750_mayfourth.htm.

⁶⁹ A Ying, *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1981), 240.

⁷⁰ In February 1919, Hu Shi (1891-1962) published his monograph “An Outline History of Chinese Philosophy”, which was the first book applied vernacular Chinese and Western punctuations in Chinese history.

The similar features could often be seen in the popular American cartoons such as *Tarzan*, which used to be one of the major inspirations for Zhao Hongben (fig. 16).⁷¹ These additions with foreign origins are no doubt are powerful tools to stress the dynamism of motions through offering the concrete trajectory and consequence of each action. Accompanied by these auxiliary features, gory or violent scenes appear to be more intimidating. When Hu decided to decapitate a bandit, some clean curves are added after his blade to show how fast and unhesitating the execution is (fig.17).

These non-traditional features barely seen in the previous *lianhuanhua* of the 1920s, along with the compositional fullness, form the quite easily digested as well as immersive visual language for less educated readers and school children. Except for the fighting scenes, even the abstract conceptions such as the passage of time become visible and more explicit through flexibly inserting/removing some certain alien features inspired by cartoons. For example, the presence and removal of the radial lines implying the candlelight, along with the dense lines indicating the night sky within two neighboring pages, acknowledge the bygone night as well as the advent of morning (fig. 4; fig.18). The textual captions within the given scenes thus become briefer, as the passage of time has been pictorially elaborated and requires no further explanation.

The visual language of the Republican *lianhuanhua* shown in Zhao's work was fluid, subject to change and often mirrored the concurrent tide of popular culture in Shanghai. It satisfied the shared interests of the common readers toward the modern entertainment and influenced the *lianhuanhua* painters to enrich the attractions of their works. The main purpose of visual language chosen by Zhao Hongben, similarly, was to improve the visual dynamism of his *lianhuanhua* and form an integral visuality closely resembling the popular martial legend films. It enhances the entertaining quality of the work, meanwhile pictorially providing readers with the necessary information to better comprehend the given story. Therefore, in this Republican *lianhuanhua*, the pictures hold the ultimate significance over the texts and were the major means of storytelling. Those novel visual features never seen in the prototypical *lianhuanhua*, along with the diverse and dynamic actions of the characters, might reflect Zhao Hongben's awareness toward the core need of market, which was the thrilling, entertaining and fantasy-stimulating stories with abundant visual details.

⁷¹ Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 71.

As a commercial *lianhuanhua* painter, Zhao Hongben firmly carried out the picture-centered approach, upon which the entire plot development is built. Correspondingly, Zhao intentionally condensed as much information as possible into the pictures, which provides the perspicuous visual assistance for readers to rapidly grasp the key plot development while lessening the necessity of textual captions. Echoing with the painter-centric procedure of creating a Republican *lianhuanhua*, texts in Zhao's work were of secondary importance and play as the mere annex to the pictorial sections.

3) Non-traditional Features from the West: Text-image Interplay

The evolved interplay of the texts and images in *lianhuanhua* since its emergence in early 20th century also reflects the increasing desire of the visual dynamism and immersive reading experiences amongst the readers. In Zhu Runzhai's work completed during the 1920s, the texts were inserted separately at the top of each page (fig.2). Zhao Hongben, along with many other peer painters, developed this conventional way of attaching texts in *lianhuanhua* into a more up-to-date and fashionable solution for the 1930s Chinese readers, namely adding the dialog bubbles/speech balloons inspired by the Western cartoons (fig. 4). The textual sections within Republican *lianhuanhua* are normally consisted by the dialog bubbles floating above the characters and the narrative captions at the bottom/top of each page (fig.19). The emergence of dialog bubbles, in fact, was the inevitable outcome of the picture-centric narrative of *lianhuanhua* resembling the cinematic visual effect. Through the usage of dialog bubbles, conversations between the characters and their corresponding pictures demonstrate much more direct and synchronous associations.

As explained in the previous section, textual contents within Republican *lianhuanhua* were added accordingly by the separate personnel after the completion of all pictorial parts. Therefore, the pictorial contents of *lianhuanhua* largely determined the corresponding textual insertions including the dialogs and narrative captions. Here, texts were generally of secondary importance and could not be fully comprehended without the pictorial assistance. The dialog bubbles, in particular, must coexist within corresponding pictures. For instance, in the third volume, the textual content of a conversation occurring in the farewell scene involving three martial heroes, Ouyang Chun and the Ding brothers, does not provide adequate information on the detailed identity of speakers by himself (fig.19). One has to refer to the picture to learn the concrete context of their dialogue. The content within the bubbles reads (from left to right):

“As we are about to depart today, I don’t know when we could reunite.”
“I do not own a settled place, so I could pay you a visit anytime at your convenience.”

While the narrative caption at the bottom reads:

“They entered the tavern. The brothers ordered a feast to see Ouyang Chun off.”⁷²

The readers could fully recognize the speakers only with the pictorial hint, thus easily grasp the complete plot: Ding Zhaolan, the elder brother, felt sentimental upon Ouyang Chun’s departure and Ouyang Chun promised to visit Ding brothers at their convenience. The dialog bubbles, along with the characters’ names attached aside, are merely the textual attachments, if not simply an extension, of the given pictorial section. The synchronization of the dialogs and pictures might also be attributed to the influence of film.

The narrative captions within this *lianhuanhua* are of the similar function and often briefer than dialogs. The briefness of captions might be partially attributed to the compositional fullness mentioned in the previous sections. The text-writers of *lianhuanhua* had to squeeze the necessary textual captions into the limited space left by the painter. This phenomenon is particularly true in those action scenes such as the fight between Hu Zhihua the martial hero and the vile bandits mentioned in the previous section, in which the attached captions very briefly describe the given pictorial content and contains no more information than the corresponding image. Therefore, the sheer existence of textual content within this *lianhuanhua* is in fact subordinate to the pictorial narrative. The primary importance of the pictorial sections and the minor status of texts within this *lianhuanhua* once more reveal the fact that the production of Republican *lianhuanhua* was dominantly picto- and painter-centric. Pictures are the major carrier and propeller of the plot development, while the author of pictures, instead of text-copyists, predominated the procedure of creating a *lianhuanhua*.

4) Republican *Lianhuanhua*: Tradition and Flaws

Nevertheless, the main audience of Zhao Hongben’s *lianhuanhua* were still the ordinary citizens of Shanghai. Another important component within the background of this *lianhuanhua*, landscape and architecture, still follows the stylistic paradigm exhibited in the traditional Chinese painting manuals such as *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* 芥子園畫譜.⁷³ Painters

⁷² Zhao, *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*, 328.

⁷³ *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* (芥子園畫傳, Jieziyuan Huazhuan) is a printed manual of Chinese painting compiled during the early Qing dynasty. It had long been used as the textbook for beginners in China for more than a century.

usually did not add the shading effect upon landscape to highlight the three-dimensionality and cinematic quality shown in the other sections within the pictures (fig.20). The volume and texture of mountains in this *lianhuanhua*, for instance, are demonstrated in the manner of traditional line drawings displayed in *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* (fig.21). The particular way of depicting scenic view underpins the visual “Chineseness” widely recognized by the intended audience and forms a classic stage of Chinese martial art legend.

Meanwhile, as mentioned in the previous sections, commercial *lianhuanhua* painters based in Republican Shanghai normally were trained through the old-fashioned apprenticeship, which never included the formal art education regarding the scientific perspective or accurate anatomy of human bodies.⁷⁴ It inevitably led to the false and rough executions of the body proportion and the perspective of the compositions as we have touched upon previously. For example, the perspective of the architecture in *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* shows the overt awkwardness and the vanishing point of the wall and lower roof on the right is always not correctly rendered (fig.22). Such problematic rendering of the backdrop could often be seen in the pictorial section of this *lianhuanhua*. The landscape within a scene illustrating an upright official greeting a servant sent by his colleague, for instance, contains the rocks and trees depicted from multiple, disjointed viewpoints, thus displaying a rather fragmented visual effect (fig.23). The scale of the hill at the lower left corner within the composition implies a much farther viewpoint than that of the adjoining rock. To pictorially display every plot with accurate perspective seemed to be rather a challenge for a Republican *lianhuanhua* painter, or, in many cases, the apprentices.

Similarly, the aesthetic aspect of the compositions is often neglected in this *lianhuanhua*. The characters are frequently placed around the horizontal central axis of the rectangular frame to display their interactivities and the plot development. The fixed method of positioning the characters occasionally causes the awkward imbalance or blankness within the given composition. In the second volume, when Ding Zhaolan and Ouyang Chun leaped across the palace roof and tried to locate the evil prince’s bedroom, two characters are placed to the opposite edges of the layout and appear to be disproportionately distant from each other (fig.22). The space in between is filled with unusually large edifice and landscape, causing a crowd and visually overwhelming composition. Another general consequence of the given arrangement of

⁷⁴ Li, “Tan wushiniandai lianhuanhua de chuanguozuo yu chuban.”

the characters is the unnecessary blank space at the lower section within the composition. In volume I, the landscape in backdrop is floating above the shoulder of Zhan Zhao, leaving half of the layout entirely empty (fig.24). As a matter of fact, the pre-set, central positions of the characters often engender the twisted perspective of the background and the problematic layout of the other visual elements. After all, the major concern governing the compositions in this *lianhuanhua* is, nevertheless, the unhindered delivery of the plot. The prevailing division of labor to produce a *lianhuanhua* evidently discloses the self-explanatory hierarchy amongst all steps of the procedure---the characters propelling the plot development were of the greatest significance. The other elements, such as the landscape and architecture, merely offer a close-to-life and convincing stage for the story.

In fact, the compositional balance, or aesthetic integrity, has always had to yield to the pictorial narrative of the stories as well as the timely completion of all pictures in a *lianhuanhua*. Due to the image-focused nature of the Republican *lianhuanhua*, the number of pictures required by a complete set of Republican *lianhuanhua* was often rather huge. Zhao Hongben and his helpers, if there was any, drew 1154 pictures for the eight-volume *lianhuanhua* adaptation of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. As discussed in the former section, the commercial *lianhuanhua* painters of the Republican Shanghai had to continue drawing in a rather hasty pace to maximize the profits for their publishers. The specific operational system of *lianhuanhua* industry in Republican Shanghai profoundly lessened the time for commercial painters to rectify and proof their drafts upon completion. It is reasonable to argue that the tight schedule of popular painters also partially led to the prevalent flaws regarding perspective and compositional rendering in this *lianhuanhua*.

In spite of those frequently seen flaws, Zhao's work still gained the great success in multiple areas across Asia. Pictures within this *lianhuanhua* form a lifelike world of martial arts heroes involving the thrilling plots and fashionable visual elements favored by his readers. The estimated number of Zhao Hongben's readers during the Republican era could achieve the astonishing hundreds of thousands, if not more.⁷⁵ The imbalanced composition, along with the flawed perspective, might not be considered a serious issue for Republican *lianhuanhua* readers as long as they could smoothly grasp the plot development and gain the exhilarating reading experiences.

⁷⁵ Huang and Wang, "Zhenzheng laopai, jinfang jiamao," 119.

Meanwhile, other celebrated *lianhuanhua* painters active in Republican Shanghai also developed their respective favored styles and subject matters, which became their ultimate trademarks in the mature distribution network of *lianhuanhua*. While the visual language of martial arts legend *lianhuanhua* by Zhao Hongben displays the overt traits of combining the features borrowed from films and Western cartoons with familiar characterizations inherited from the classic line drawings of China, his contemporary peers started to explore the different visual and content possibilities of *lianhuanhua*.

b) Choice of Market: Stylistic and Ideological Diversity of Republican *Lianhuanhua*

1) “Celebrated Four”

As stated in the earlier section, in Republican Shanghai, *lianhuanhua* production was decisively commercialized and appeared to be a highly profitable profession. At the same time, commercial *lianhuanhua* painters were never accepted by any art institution or school as academic artists. The styles created by commercial *lianhuanhua* painters, naturally, were not governed by any institutional restraint or stylistic paradigm. Except for the commercial profit, there were few mandatory standards to regulate the creation of *lianhuanhua* in Republican Shanghai. The major pressure of *lianhuanhua* painters was to earn a living through quickly producing bestsellers for the market. As long as the *lianhuanhua* well-received by the readers and generated considerable profits, publishers in Shanghai could not care less about its content or style. “We do not know what a ‘good’ *lianhuanhua* looks like,” a Shanghai *lianhuanhua* publisher told Chen Guangyi 陈光镹 (1915-1991) in the 1930s, “it automatically becomes a good *lianhuanhua* when the sales are good, even if all characters have no eyes or nose.”⁷⁶ It is an exaggerated expression to clarify the ultimate importance of the narrative function of pictures within *lianhuanhua* as well as the general indifference upon their pictorial quality.

Nevertheless, the choice made by Shanghai *lianhuanhua* readers proved that characters without eyes or nose would never appear in a good *lianhuanhua*. The most popular *lianhuanhua* painters within the industry during the 1930s and 40s, Zhao Hongben, Qian Xiaodai 钱笑呆 (1911-1965), Shen Manyun 沈曼云 (1911-1978) and Chen Guangyi, were entitled by their readers as the *Celebrated Four* (Ch.四大名旦) because of their distinctive styles and outstanding

⁷⁶ Chen Guangyi, “Suwei Tuhus xiaoshuoye gaijin yanjiuhui,” *Lianhuanhuayishu*, issue 1 (1988) : 101.

capability to pictorially tell an interesting story. All four painters were richly rewarded by the market with fame and financial benefits through being continually admired by their readers.⁷⁷ In order to snatch the drawing scripts from these popular painters, *lianhuanhua* publishers and press of Shanghai often offered the painters quite decent remuneration. Even during the wartime, these top-tier *lianhuanhua* painters could still have flexible wage determined by the concurrent rate of rice to reduce the influence of inflation.⁷⁸

Just like the other types of visual arts, the styles of celebrated *lianhuanhua* painters were often forged and copied by those less-famous painters to enhance their own sales. Zhao Hongben had already gained enormous popularity amongst audience from Shanghai, Hong Kong and even within Southeast Asia when his apprenticeship ended. His master secretly reappropriated some of his drafts upon his withdrawal and fabricated forgeries accordingly with the name of Zhao Hongben on the front page. These poor-quality forgeries also gained satisfying sales because of the reputation of Zhao Hongben.⁷⁹ Other celebrated *lianhuanhua* painters such as Qian Xiaodai also had their own “copycats”. The forgers cunningly applied pen names with very similar characters to those of famous painters. Careless readers could be easily fooled to pay for the *lianhuanhua* they did not attempt to read. The prevalent forgeries targeting the *Celebrated Four* further certify that their respective style had been widely recognized by Shanghai readers as the trustworthy trademarks, meanwhile reveal the inevitable side effects of the unregulated market.

Despite these side effects, the celebrated *lianhuanhua* painters active in Republican Shanghai held the liberty to make choice from a variety of subject matters and visual styles, as well as seek the inspirations from various cultural products available in Shanghai including Hollywood and Chinese movies, American cartoons, national or international socio-political events, popular fictions and traditional operas, as long as they could guarantee the satisfying sales of their works through transforming the given subject matter into an entertaining pictorial storybook.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorenshe de lishi*, 47.

⁷⁸ Huang and Wang, “Zhenzheng laopai, jinfang jiamao,” 119.

⁷⁹ Huang and Wang, “Zhenzheng laopai, jinfang jiamao,” 120.

⁸⁰ Zhang, “Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuanhua wenhuashuxing luelun,” 110.

2) Diverse Subject Matters

While Zhao Hongben was well known for his martial art legend stories with the sharp and clear contours as well as the vivid depiction of action scenes, his friend and colleague, Qian Xiaodai, was famous for the classic love stories marked by those elegantly delineated female characters. Chen Guangyi and Shen Manyun both enjoyed the reputation as the master of funny stories filled with exaggerated delineations and comical plots.⁸¹ As the stylistic distinctions amongst their works are quite obvious and even could be discerned by the average readers, their respective preferred subject matters attracted the slightly different groups of readers. While Zhao Hongben's heroic legends owned a rather wide range of audience in general, romantic stories drawn by Qian Xiaodai were particularly appealing for girls and housewives. School children loved the funny stories depicted by Chen Guangyi, of which main characters were often young kids of the same age as the intended audience.⁸² In the highly competitive market of *lianhuanhua* in the Republican Shanghai, the distinctive styles of these famous painters, along with the diverse subject matters of stories, appeared to be rather vital to guarantee the stable sales and secure the satisfactory profits for the publishers.

This observation is supported by the research of Zhang Yongfeng. According to Zhang, Republican *lianhuanhua* cover quite a wide range of themes and topics. Except for the traditional subject matters such as martial art stories and romantic tales, other genres and styles such as science fiction, thriller, adventure and mystery gradually emerged and gained a considerable popularity amongst readers across Asia. Progressive content conveying the overt political messages adhered by the left-wing activists and intellectuals such as Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936) who was also a noteworthy part within those newly emerged subject matters of Republican *lianhuanhua*.⁸³ The ideological diversity seen in *lianhuanhua* production in Republican Shanghai was in a way associated with less governmental intervention upon the industry. After the second Sino-Japanese war, the governmental control over the *lianhuanhua* industry of Shanghai was further weakened. In Autumn 1948, the Party Committee of KMT attempted to cooperate with the *lianhuanhua* professionals to publish a series of propagandistic *lianhuanhua* containing anti-Communist content. As an underground partisan of the CCP, Zhao Hongben actively organized

⁸¹ Li, "Tan wushiniandai lianhuanhua de chuanguo yu chuban."

⁸² Zhang, "Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuanhua wenhuashuxing luelun," 110.

⁸³ Zhang, "Yiyu suren de dazhongwenhua: minguo lianhuanhua wenhuashuxing luelun," 110.

the collective resistance against the commission, due to which the plan of KMT eventually failed.⁸⁴ Before 1949, the loosely organized *lianhuanhua* industry of Shanghai remained relatively autonomous and was propelled by the quite mature internal distribution network.

In order to stand out within the heated market competition, all *lianhuanhua* painters were urged to establish their own distinctive style and attract more attentions from the readers. The style and content of Republican *lianhuanhua*, along with the unique publication and distribution system, were ultimately shaped by the market-oriented nature of the industry. After 1949, however, *lianhuanhua* underwent an unprecedented change and was completely reshaped under the new socio-political context.

Section II *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* and post-1949 *Lianhuanhua*

Introduction

During the early 1950s, some unprecedented changes occurred to the publishing industry of China. Private press and publishing houses mentioned in the previous section started to be nationalized and the familiar market of *lianhuanhua* disappeared from the lives of professional *lianhuanhua* painters like Zhao Hongben.⁸⁵ The most significant element in shaping *lianhuanhua* painters' work during the Republican era, the market, vanished and a vastly different mechanism emerged immediately within this profession. This new mechanism permanently and fundamentally reshaped Chinese *lianhuanhua* as a genre of visual art.

In short, instead of the formerly autonomous, market-oriented system, the PRC *lianhuanhua* production was merged into the larger mapping of the new art policies and administrative institutions. Under the trend of economy nationalization, the most important and relevant regulation for *lianhuanhua* painters was the complete separation between the illustrating and scriptwriting during the *lianhuanhua* creation. Starting from 1953, the government-run publishing houses of *lianhuanhua* almost simultaneously set up the *Editorial Division* and *Illustration Division*. Under this newly established system, *lianhuanhua* painters would have to wait until an approved script was composed/revised by the professional text editors and sent to

⁸⁴ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 25.

⁸⁵ Andrews and Shen, *The Art of Modern China*, 161.

them to get illustrated.⁸⁶ This is to say that the choices of textual content and subject matter were removed from the *lianhuanhua* painters' agency. The lone task of *lianhuanhua* painters started to have no overt difference from their peers preoccupied by other visual art genres; the common goal of visual artists during this period was to produce qualified images to implement the new standard for all artistic mediums. The central concern of this new standard was "to place new wine into the old bottle", or, to put it more straightforwardly, that the contents of literature and art works should express the people and thoughts of the new age, and the forms express the vigor and style of the nation.⁸⁷ While the traditional art forms of China such as ink painting were still allowed or even encouraged, the requirements upon the contents of these forms became much stricter. In general, the contents of all arts, popular art included, were ultimately more didactic than their pre-1949 counterparts.

The *lianhuanhua* masterpiece *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* completed in 1962 by Zhao Hongben and his longtime colleague, Qian Xiaodai 钱笑呆 (1911-1965), was produced under the particular art policy and political environment of the PRC which lasted for decades. From the perspective of the PRC administrative institutions, *lianhuanhua* could be roughly divided into two categories after 1949: 1. Pornographic and poorly illustrated works; 2. Proper works which inculcated correct values and good historical/literary tales.⁸⁸ The former, apparently, were destined to a strict ban. The definition of the latter, on the other hand, was fluid in its usage during the first two decades after the PRC's establishment. It is yet another complicated topic deserving of further scholastic research. The range of prohibited subject matters for post-1949 *lianhuanhua*, however, appeared to be much wider than the proposed catalogue. Martial art legends, once prevalent in the Republican market of *lianhuanhua*, for instance, also belonged to the first batch of banned subject matters after the founding of PRC.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, this *lianhuanhua* version of the familiar story taken from the Ming dynasty novel *Journey to the West* has always been considered as a *good* adaptation ever since its publication. It meets the strict requirement concerning the didactic content as well as artistic expression and

⁸⁶ Chang Feng, "Tuijian lianhuanhua 'Ji Mao Xin'," *People's Daily*, Apr 15, 1951.

⁸⁷ Zhou Yang, "Wei chuangzao gengduode youxiu wenxue yishu zuopin er fendou—yijiuwusan nian jiu yue ershi si zai zhongguo wenxue yishu gongzuo zhe di er ci daibiaodahui shang de baogao" [Struggle to create even more excellent works of literature and art—Report on Sep 24, 1953, at the Second National Congress of Literary and Arts Workers], *Wenyibao*, no. 96 (1953): 12.

⁸⁸ Andrews and Shen, *The Art of Modern China*, 178.

⁸⁹ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 79.

thus is worth an in-depth analysis. In this section, I will discuss the formation of new standard to define a good PRC *lianhuanhua* as well as Zhao Hongben's individual pathway to achieve the given standard through carefully examining the preparation, creation and publication of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*.

1. Training/Re-education before the Creation of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*

Unlike other commercial *lianhuanhua* painters active in the Republican Shanghai, Zhao Hongben did not attend any workshop or training session held by Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture during the 1950s.⁹⁰ His career trajectory had already turned toward a different direction in comparison to a majority of his peer *lianhuanhua* painters long before the founding of PRC. His Republican activities earned him the outstanding status amongst Shanghai commercial *lianhuanhua* painters after 1949 as well as an administrative position within the new regime. From 1937 to 1949, Zhao Hongben was actively exposed to the leftist ideologies and eventually joined CCP in 1947. During early 1940s, he published a series of *lianhuanhua* containing the themes of patriotism, class struggle and miseries of the proletariat through *Serial-picture Bookstore* 连环书店, a publishing house launched by a group of left-wing activists of Shanghai. In 1940, Zhao Hongben organized the *lianhuanhua* Authors Guild 连环画人联谊会 on behalf of the underground left-wing league to attract progressive *lianhuanhua* painters within the industry. Qian Xiaodai, another author of the later *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, was the associate chair of this guild.⁹¹ Zhao and Qian both became quite important figures within the *lianhuanhua* profession after 1949 and appointed as the authors of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* in 1961. Zhao's experience during Republican period was closely associated with this post-1949 commission and worth an in-depth exploration.

⁹⁰ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 81.

⁹¹ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 22-23.

a) From Isolated Shanghai to Japanese Occupation of Public Concessions (1937-1942)

The first vital turning point of Zhao Hongben's career occurred even before the completion of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* in 1939. In 1937, right after the *Battle of Shanghai*, Zhao was introduced to attend the *Yu Rizhang Night School* 俞日章夜校 to improve his literacy by a friend working in textile factory named Gao Zhiping 高志平 (also an underground CCP member), where he acquired the access to communist ideology and left-wing literary works. According to Zhao Hongben's memoir, teachers in the night school were mostly young students at their twenties. The curriculum included not only Chinese geography and history, but also international politics focusing on concurrent Sino-Japanese war as well as the Japanese occupation of Northeast China. Zhao Hongben also recounted his first exposure to the sophisticated terms such as imperialism, patriotism and information on the provincial communist regime built in rural areas of China. Influenced by Gao, Zhao Hongben also maintained extensive exposure to the left-wing dramas and films, which later became the important inspiration for his own *lianhuanhua* works in 1940s.⁹² Also during this period, Zhao became a friend of Hu Shuiping 胡水萍, an educated journalist, amateur *lianhuanhua* painter and underground CCP member. Hu showed Zhao Hongben a series of essays composed by Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), in which the author defends the necessity and potential of *lianhuanhua* to be transformed into a progressive medium for new culture and thoughts. "I was deeply inspired and encouraged by these essays," Zhao recollected in the memoir, "as Lu Xun pointed out that even *lianhuanhua* painters hold the potential to become great artists just like Michelangelo and Da Vinci."⁹³

Zhao Hongben's creation henceforth proceeded along a different track in comparison to ordinary commercial *lianhuanhua* printed by private publishing houses of Shanghai. Driven by this new ideological inclination and concurrent Sino-Japanese war, in 1940, he participated and formed the *Lianhuanhua Authors Guild* 连环画人联谊会 along with an affiliated publishing house, *Serial-picture Bookstore*, exclusively dedicated to produce *lianhuanhua* promoting the idea of patriotism and left-wing ideologies. During the subsistence of the guild (1940-1942), Zhao and his peer painters of *lianhuanhua* worked closely yet secretly with Shanghai

⁹² Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 18.

⁹³ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 19.

underground communist league and produced a number of progressive *lianhuanhua* different from most of the mainstream works in the market. Based on Zhao's memoir, he voluntarily lowered the price of his drawing drafts for the bookstore and charged one third less than the usual.⁹⁴ *Lianhuanhua* completed during this period included *The True Story of Ah Q* based on Lu Xun's fiction, *The Watch* adapted from the Soviet novel by Leonid Panteleyev (1908-1987) and Zhao's original work, *Heaven and Hell* 天堂与地狱. *Heaven and Hell* was drawn in 1941, when Shanghai was under the control of Japanese puppet government led by Wang Jingwei 汪精卫 (1883-1944).⁹⁵ Zhao applied the metaphorical binary also familiar to Chinese people, hell and heaven, to imply the intolerable living conditions of Shanghai civilians under the Japanese tyranny. However, despite its didactic content echoing his post-1949 *lianhuanhua*, the formal style and visual characterizations of Zhao's *lianhuanhua* displayed little changes at this stage (fig. 25). The re-education received by Zhao Hongben seems to have primarily stayed at an ideological level and did not extend to the drawing techniques or artistic skills until the Sino-Japanese concluded.

This might be the first time Zhao Hongben exposed to the proletarian art movement, referred to as "new realism" (*xin xieshi zhuyi*), which was publicly articulated by Lu Xun in early 1930s. In its early formulation, new realism was bound up with the articulation of an art to liberate the new audience, the masses (*qunzhong*), through devised aesthetic stimulation. This new tone of leftist realism evolved during the Sino-Japanese war, driven by the urgency to develop painting appropriate to revolutionary China and demand for persuasive and easily produced propaganda.⁹⁶ However, commercial *lianhuanhua* painters were not officially included into the force to propel this artistic movement started by Republican cultural elites and academically trained artists. The major venue of conducting the revolutionary new realism during wartime was woodblock printing and its indigenous folk form in China, *nianhua*.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, as a commercial *lianhuanhua* painter, Zhao Hongben was still engaged with the grander scheme of the leftist war propaganda ideologically influenced by the new realism. In fact, during mid-1930s, left-wing cultural elites like Lu Xun had already noticed the potential of *lianhuanhua* to be reformed into a

⁹⁴ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 20.

⁹⁵ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 19-20.

⁹⁶ Ho, *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China*, 9.

⁹⁷ Ho, *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China*, 9.

propagandistic tool due its great popularity amongst the masses. In his memoir, Jiang Weipu recounted his conversation with Lu Xun occurring in 1934 in regard of contacting the *lianhuanhua* painters working for those private publishers while offering them some progressive scripts to be illustrated. Jiang particularly mentioned *The True Story of Ah Q*, but Lu Xun considered his stories too distant from the common contents of commercial *lianhuanhua*, and instead suggested *lianhuanhua* painters taking more appropriate initial steps.⁹⁸ However, their attempt eventually failed, as the operation of *lianhuanhua* publishers/rental stalls in Shanghai had its distinctive and exclusive rules and procedures. Most business-owners within the industry held absolutely hostile attitude toward any external intervention. They were immediately alarmed after hearing Jiang Weipu's request of "borrowing" their *lianhuanhua* painters and turned down the offer. *Lianhuanhua* painters feared to enrage the publishers and lose living space within the industry, and as such also declined to help.⁹⁹ Zhao Hongben, too, was able to form the guild and organize the left-wing publishing house only after becoming an independent *lianhuanhua* painter. After all, none of the practitioners within the business desired extra competitors to share the profits or market.

Nonetheless, retroactively examining the experiences of Zhao Hongben shows that the effort of leftists in Shanghai to reform *lianhuanhua* seemed to continue, only taking a more obscure and covert method in order to do so. During the spring of 1942, the *Serial-picture Bookstore* and *Lianhuanhua Authors Guild* came to an end after the Japanese troop took over the public concession of Shanghai, where the guild located. Some *lianhuanhua* painters within the guild, along with Gao Zhiping, departed for the *Northern Jiangsu Revolutionary Base of CCP* 苏北革命根据地 later that year. Zhao Hongben, on the other hand, stayed in Shanghai and continued his career as a commercial *lianhuanhua* painter for seven more years.

⁹⁸ Jiang Weipu, "Lu Xun yu Lianhuanhua," in *Lu Xun lun lianhuantuhua*, ed. Jiang Weipu (Beijing : Lianhuanhua chubanshe, 2012), 61.

⁹⁹ Jiang, "Lu Xun yu Lianhuanhua," 64.

b) Chinese Civil War (1946-1949)

After Japan surrendered and China claimed the victory of the Sino-Japanese war in 1945, Zhao Hongben attended the undercover art school led by a communist party member, Shen Fan 沈凡 (1912-2012), and became the first commercial *lianhuanhua* painter in Shanghai to systemically learn the anatomy, sketching and the theory of perspective. This could be regarded as the second stage of the re-education customized for Zhao Hongben, which enabled him to further approach the designated artistic standard for the latter “new” *lianhuanhua*. When Zhao Hongben finished the three-month training on necessary drawing skills and knowledge, Shen Fan recommended Zhao to start a new publishing house just like the previous *Serial-picture Bookstore*. The *Tuwen Chubanshe* 图文出版社 thus was established in 1946, through which Zhao and Shen planned to issue the first ever pictorial journal exclusively dedicated to *lianhuanhua*. Due to the increasing tension between CCP and Kuomintang, however, they had to terminate all activities of the new publisher to remain undercover. In 1947, Zhao Hongben officially became a member of CCP in Shanghai.¹⁰⁰

What was not mentioned in Zhao Hongben’s memoir is his simultaneous exposure to American comic books popular in Republican Shanghai, such as *Prince Valiant* and *Tarzan*. He thus was well equipped to work in the new styles after 1949, which required skills in Western drawing.¹⁰¹ The *Sea Storm* 海上风暴 completed in 1950 revealed the phased result of Zhao Hongben’s academic drawing training. The proportion and motions of figures appear to be more natural and accurate (fig. 26). The depiction of landscape such as waves also departs from the formal paradigm shown in the traditional drawing manuscript and displays the closer-to-nature qualities (fig. 27). Intriguingly, in *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* completed a decade later, the realistic, close-to-nature features shown in the landscape here again disappeared. After a series of alternations and adjustments, the function and primary “mission” carried by *lianhuanhua* had been fundamentally refashioned and fixed during the first decade of the People’s Republic of China.

¹⁰⁰ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 23.

¹⁰¹ Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 71.

2. Publication and Distribution of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*

a) Before the Publication: Content and Background

The political atmosphere of PRC changed significantly at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s due to a series of international and domestic affairs. The chimeric Great Leap Forward campaign (1958-60) and the subsequent famine generated the ever-increasing social and economic pressure to the government. At the same time, the Sino-Soviet alliance split in July 1960. Cultural controls were briefly liberalized between 1961-1963, perhaps to release these mounting social pressures.¹⁰² These occurrences temporarily loosened the noose strangling the entire *lianhuanhua* production, especially those stories “featuring antique costume, ghosts and demons” received intense criticism during the *Anti-Rightist Campaign* (1957-1959).¹⁰³ Approved historical stories once more became the popular subject matter of all visual and performance art forms during this time period. *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, one of the most familiar stories from *Journey to the West*, was amongst those officially permitted and promoted subject matters. This *lianhuanhua* version was under the direct influence of the popular *Shao Xing* opera 绍剧 released in 1960 instead of the original novel, which was highly praised by Mao Zedong after the premiere in the Forbidden City.¹⁰⁴ Several original plots points added by the screenwriter of the modern opera adaptation based on the traditional story also appeared in the later *lianhuanhua* drawn by Zhao Hongben and Qian Xiaodai.

The story *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* belongs to the well-known classic novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en 吴承恩 (c.1500-1582). The book title could partially epitomize the main plot structure: A Tang Monk and his three disciples encountered the cunning and wicked skeleton demon on their legendary pilgrimage to the “Western Regions”, and it is this skeleton demon who craves for the flesh of Tang Monk in order to achieve immortality. The demon tried thrice to capture Tang Monk through disguising itself as a harmless village girl, an old woman and elder man, but all attempts failed due to the acute insight of Sun Wukong, or Monkey King, one of the disciples of Tang Monk who slays all three

¹⁰² Andrews, *Painters and politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 102.

¹⁰³ Andrews, *Painters and politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 130; Jiang Weipu, “Xinlianhuanhua yishu de 35 nian,” *Meishu* Issue 7 (1984): 53.

¹⁰⁴ Zhu Yuan, “Sun Wu Kong san da baigujing’ youduo haokan?,” *Xinmin Evening News*, Dec 12, 2017, <http://wap.xinmin.cn/content/31341734.html>.

incarnations of the demon and saved Tang Monk's life. However, the monk was completely deceived by the demon's scheme and firmly believed that the Monkey King killed three innocent lay people for no reason. He thus dismissed the Monkey King from the team and forced him to leave immediately. Upon the dismissal of Monkey King, another demon, Yellow Robe Demon, seized Tang Monk as the other two disciples could not defeat it or save their master. Eventually, the second disciple, Zhu Bajie, had to turn to Monkey King for help and begged for his forgiveness, at which point the Monkey King finally agreed to come to Tang Monk's rescue and killed the Yellow Robe Demon.¹⁰⁵

Even though the *Shao Xing* opera version took the major storyline from the original novel, the PRC screenwriters made many subtle yet important alternations toward the narratives. For instance, in the opera, the Monkey King drew a circle surrounding his master and the other two disciples using his gold cudgel as an enclosure to protect them from the demon. No devil would hurt them as long as they followed the direction and stayed within the circle. This plot was created by the PRC screenwriter in late 1950s and became extremely well-known after being adopted by the later TV series *Journey to the West* (1986). The textual script received by Zhao Hongben and Qian Xiaodai needed to include this plot, which appeared in the pictorial section of their *lianhuanhua* afterward.

In fact, following the storyline of the *Shao Xing* opera version was the safest and most convenient choice for the painters of *lianhuanhua*, as the opera version was officially complimented by the highest authority of PRC, Mao Zedong (1893-1976). After viewing this new adaptation of the traditional tale, Mao wrote a poem to commentate on the opera on Nov 17, 1961:

一从大地起风雷，便有精生白骨堆。
A thunderstorm burst over the earth, so a devil rose from a heap of white bones.
僧是愚氓犹可训，妖为鬼蜮必成灾。
The deluded monk was not beyond the light, but the malignant demon must wreak havoc.
金猴奋起千钧棒，玉宇澄清万里埃。
The Golden Monkey wrathfully swung his massive cudgel, and the jade-like firmament was cleared of dust.
今日欢呼孙大圣，只缘妖雾又重来。
*Today, a miasmal mist once more rising, we hail Sun Wu-kung, the wonder-worker.*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Wu Cheng'en, *The Journey to the West* vol.2, trans. Anthony Yu (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 28-41.

¹⁰⁶ "Poems by Mao Zedong," Socialist Publishing, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://socialistpublishing.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/maopoems-newsetting.pdf>.

It is believed that Mao metaphorically referred to the class struggle situation of communist China back in the 1960s in this poem. The mythical tale was transformed into a politically charged fable, in which each character stands for a different faction of the complicated political conflicts faced by Mao and CCP in the 1960s.¹⁰⁷ The demon no doubt stands for the imperialist enemies of the PRC, especially the United States. The identity of the “deluded monk” is subtler and closely associated with the concurrent political situation of PRC during the 1960s. People generally believed that the Tang Monk, the master of Monkey King, represents those fooled by the revisionist Soviet Union under the reign of Khrushchev.¹⁰⁸ In Mao’s vision shown in his poem, Tang Monk was merely deceived by the devil and thus made the wrong decisions. He could still be educated and eventually retrieve his righteous position. In fact, Mao Zedong remained to be a keen reader of *Journey to the West* throughout his life. Monkey King, in particular, earned the admiration of Mao in various ways. He saw Monkey King’s rebellion against Jade Emperor as analogous to the revolution he led to overthrow the “old society”.¹⁰⁹ His personal interest toward the story, indeed, was a key dimension of the great popularity of *Journey to the West* during 1950s and 60s.

The specific socio-political environment, along with Mao’s personal passion, brought this mythical tale a quite special status amongst all approved stories requiring antique costumes, as well as contributed to the enormous popularity of its modern adaptations including the *lianhuanhua* during the 1960s. The *lianhuanhua* version was co-authored by Zhao Hongben and his colleague from the *Lianhuanhua* Authors Guild, Qian Xiaodai. Qian went through a slightly different track of career in comparison to Zhao—he received more systematic traditional art education of ink-and-brush painting from his father and started to sell ink portrait paintings at the age of seventeen. This early training largely contributed to his later style of *lianhuanhua*, of which hallmarks are meticulous brushstrokes and specialty in depicting elegant female figures. He is widely known as the master of illustrating classic and historical tales and stories. Even though he was not as “left-oriented” as Zhao Hongben during Republican period, Qian also belonged to the top-tier *lianhuanhua* painters in Republican Shanghai and remained to be so after

¹⁰⁷ Guo Moruo, “Yuyu chengqing wanli ai—du Maozhuxi youguan <Sunwukong sanda baigujing> de yishou qilv,” *People’s Daily*, May 30, 1964.

¹⁰⁸ Wu Jianye, “A Monkey King Picture-Story book Which Greatly Influence the 1960s China,” accessed May 30, 2020, <https://medium.com/@6646706092>.

¹⁰⁹ Chen Si, “Mao Zedong yu Xiyouji,” Communist Party of China News, accessed Sep 22, 2021, <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0403/c85037-31010431.html>.

1949.¹¹⁰ Zhao, at the same time, had already become the important administrative official of Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House 上海人民美术出版社, the only authorized press run by the government to publish *lianhuanhua* in Shanghai after 1955.¹¹¹ Qian might be considered as prestigious as Zhao Hongben to receive this commission to co-author the *lianhuanhua* version of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*.

This extremely famed *lianhuanhua* won the first prize in the first National Contest of *lianhuanhua* held on December 26, 1963 and has been translated into four different languages ever since its completion (Japanese, English, German and French).¹¹² In a sense, the *lianhuanhua* *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* was regarded as the representative of PRC *lianhuanhua* and proudly presented to the global audience. The state-level promotion toward this *lianhuanhua* had inevitable connections with its content and aesthetic features, while also being deeply embedded within the broader socio-political environment of the early 1960s. Merely four years after the completion of this *lianhuanhua*, the Cultural Revolution broke out and critically hindered the development of *lianhuanhua* in various ways. This work in a sense represented the first "golden age" of PRC *lianhuanhua* before the catastrophic political movement. The second one, according to Chinese scholars, would not occur until the 1980s, when the *Gang of Four* was overthrown and the Cultural Revolution officially came to an end.¹¹³ In the following sections, I will discuss the publication and distribution of this *lianhuanhua* as well as the implicit agenda it bears concerning the cultural diplomacy and international appeal.

b) Transformed Identity and Integrated Publishing House

Like many his peer painters, Zhao Hongben underwent the significant transformation of personal identity as well as social status after 1949. This transformation of identity was closely associated with the unprecedented reformation occurred within the publishing industry. The private publishing houses of *lianhuanhua* in Republican Shanghai mentioned in the first section such as *Lian Yi She Press Company* ceased to exist because of the nationalization of the private economy. The new, massive and state-run publishing institutions started to be built in several major cities of China including Shanghai and Beijing. In Shanghai, the base of Zhao Hongben, more than one hundred private publishing houses of *lianhuanhua* merged into the New Art Press

¹¹⁰ Mai, *Tu shuo zhongguo lian huan hua*, 49.

¹¹¹ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 144.

¹¹² Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorenshe de lishi*, 49.

¹¹³ Jiang, *Lu Xun yu lianhuanhua*, 79; Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 148.

新美术出版社 founded in 1952, which later was amalgamated with the East China People's Fine Art Press 华东人民美术出版社 to form the famous Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House 上海人民美术出版社 in 1956.¹¹⁴ As a former underground CCP member, Zhao Hongben received an administrative position in the New Art Press in 1952. He was the deputy director of the editorial department there and soon promoted to the position of chief director of the *Illustrating Division* in Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House after the merger in 1956. From this point on, all resources and personnel within the *lianhuanhua* industry in Shanghai were integrated into one giant, government-owned publishing institution, which was under the direct and constant supervision of the Ministry of Culture and other municipal bureaus of Shanghai.¹¹⁵ When Zhao Hongben received the mission dispatched from the higher authority to draw pictures for *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* based on an approved script, he was no longer a commercial *lianhuanhua* painter as he used to be but a chief cultural cadre more frequently carrying out administrative duties than drawing.¹¹⁶

After 1949, many successful *lianhuanhua* painters just like Zhao Hongben started to enter the track of civil servants and ascend to the much more prestigious social-political status in comparison to the Republican era. However, Zhao's experience was by no means universal. To the contrary, he was amongst those quite fortunate *lianhuanhua* painters when the unprecedented and inevitable reformation of the industry occurred. A certain portion of the commercial *lianhuanhua* painters trained in Republican Shanghai, such as Shen Manyun mentioned earlier, were in much precarious situation after 1949 coping with the sudden change of social-political atmosphere and artistic standard.¹¹⁷ They struggled to anchor a position in the unseen political wave of China as well as the refashioned *lianhuanhua* profession. This was the inevitable side effect of the fully nationalized *lianhuanhua* production and distribution system in post-1949 China. While the commercial *lianhuanhua* painters were transformed from individual professionals bonded with private publishers to cultural workers employed by the government, the nature of *lianhuanhua* correspondingly changed to match the new role of the genre regulated by the authority.

¹¹⁴ Wan, *A Research on Chinese Picture-story Books of the 20th Century*, 80.

¹¹⁵ Andrews, *Painters and politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 161-163.

¹¹⁶ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 29.

¹¹⁷ Yi, Wei and Wang, *Xiaorenshe de lishi*, 52.

c) Distribution: Xinhua Bookstore and Cultural Diplomacy

While Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House took full charge of the *lianhuanhua* production in Shanghai after 1955, the contemporary national and international distribution of *lianhuanhua* completely relied on Xinhua Bookstore 新华书店, the largest and only nationwide chain brand bookstore run by the government. Emerged in 1942, Xinhua Bookstore has always been a key section of the Propaganda Department of CCP ever since the Sino-Japanese war. The present calligraphic logo of Xinhua Bookstore was written by Mao Zedong in 1948, marking the superior position of this organization within the publishing industry of PRC.¹¹⁸ By the time of the publication of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* in 1962, Xinhua Bookstore had already built more than 4,000 provincial sales departments across the country. The highly unitary distribution network governed by a single agency held all state-approved material resources and sales channels facing the entire country. This distribution method enormously boosted the circulations of all approved *lianhuanhua*, amongst which some could even reach the total sales of a million copies.¹¹⁹ Naturally, the amount of *lianhuanhua* readers also increased significantly, while the influence of officially promoted *lianhuanhua* toward Chinese readers became more marked than in the Republican era preceding it. The printing copies of the paperback edition of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* reached 95,000 units, almost ten times more than the average number of Zhao's Republican works. Prior to the paperback edition printed in 1963, however, a hardcover edition was first released in 1962 with much more limited circulation. The design of this edition is quite special, deliberately resembling the Chinese antique books. The thread-bound book is in the *chancery octavo* format instead of the smaller *chancery sexto decimo* format often applied by *lianhuanhua* (fig. 28). The printed title mimicking the calligraphic writing is exhibited on a piece of fine *Sajin* paper 洒金纸 with a cinnabar-like seal at the bottom. This exquisitely decorated *lianhuanhua* worth two *yuan* is almost ten times more expensive than its paperback edition, of which price is only 0.26 *yuan*. The hardcover version of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, apparently, did not aim at the common readers, as the monthly salary of junior workers back then was only 30

¹¹⁸ "Xinhua Shudian Dashiji," Xinhua Shudian Zongdian, accessed Nov 15, 2020. http://www.xhsdzd.com/Category_25/Index.aspx,

¹¹⁹ Andrews, *Painters and politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 130.

yuan.¹²⁰ This initial edition is neither portable nor affordable to a majority of Chinese readers. Losing both advantages of common *lianhuanhua*, it is more of a well-designed cultural product strongly indicating China's national heritage and material exquisiteness and significantly different from those mass produced *lianhuanhua*.

Moreover, in 1964, the Foreign Languages Press 外文出版社 based in Beijing published the French version of the *lianhuanhua*. It was also simultaneously serialized in the monthly journal *People's China* 人民中国, the main venue of the international publicity of PRC issued in English, Russian and Japanese.¹²¹ The *lianhuanhua* *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, from this point on, started to bear the additional function described by Christine Ho as “cultural diplomacy,” only displayed in the manner of visual art. The visuality within an artwork carrying the given task is expected to express the socialist cosmopolitanism values while maintaining the distinctive style of the national form.¹²² This implicit function generated a great impact upon the visual characterizations of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*.

3. Content and Visual Characterizations of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*

The commission of this *lianhuanhua* assigned to Zhao and Qian could be read as a political mission due to the very attention upon the story cast by the highest authority of PRC. Zhao and Qian thus quite cautiously chose the formal style and visual characterizations to be displayed in the pictures of this work. Almost every visual characterization and formal feature shown in the pictorial section of this *lianhuanhua* exhibits the vast differentiation in comparison to Zhao Hongben's Republican work. Those visible formal changes are deeply rooted within the fundamentally reformed genre itself. In this section, the general visuality of this *lianhuanhua* makes a strong appeal of cultural and aesthetic “Chineseness” accompanied by the compositional and proportional accuracy meeting the socialist-realist requirements.

¹²⁰“Gongzi zhidu gaige,” Office of Shanghai Chronicle, accessed Nov 15, 2020, <http://www.shtong.gov.cn/Newsite/node2/node2245/node4471/node56246/node56251/node56253/userobject1ai42807.html>.

¹²¹ Yi, Wei Ming and Wang, *Xiaorenshe de lishi*, 49.

¹²² Ho, *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China*, 18.

a) *Lianhuanhua* and Socialist Fine Art: Text-image Interplay

Zhao Hongben and Qian Xiaodai spent one year and nine months to complete a hundred and ten pictures within the *lianhuanhua*.¹²³ All of these pictures, as discussed in the previous section, strictly follow the officially approved textual script offered by the professional editors. Zhao repeatedly emphasized the decisive importance of the textual script to their succeeding work of illustrating the story. “The entire creation of this *lianhuanhua* was built upon the literary script,” Zhao recalled in his memoir, “It largely determined not only the ideological value but also the artistic value of the work. The spectacular script offered us a solid foundation to carry out our own job.”¹²⁴ Zhao quite affirmatively admitted the guiding role of the textual script during the production of a *lianhuanhua*. The ever-elevated status of texts led to a major adjustment toward the page layout of this *lianhuanhua*: textual contents became independent from the pictures and placed vertically on the right, resembling the old-fashioned typesetting of the classic Chinese (fig.29). Correspondingly, the conversations amongst characters are underlined by the traditional quotation mark “『』” often seen in classic Chinese instead of the Western punctuations once applied in Zhao’s Republican work.

The complete removal of texts (e.g., dialog bubbles) from the pictures, along with the increasing significance of textual contents, deprived one of the primary functions of the pictures within this *lianhuanhua*---they are no longer the indispensable agent of the storytelling as in those Republican counterparts. Instead, the textual script placed aside fulfills the entire narrative for the readers, as one could well comprehend the whole story through the texts without any pictorial assistance. In comparison to pre-1949 *lianhuanhua*, the textual content of this work appears to be much lengthier, more coherent, and informative. Instead of commenting on the pictorial contents, texts in this post-1949 work are the main carrier of the plot development. For instance, the text on the second page reads:

“While they are marching forward, it starts to get dark. They saw many precipitous cliffs towering into the sky while the ominous fog permeating the air. Monkey King thus forewarned the other two disciples: ‘Be aware of the demon around.’”¹²⁵

The textual captions on the following page read:

¹²³ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 29.

¹²⁴ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 29.

¹²⁵ Zhao Hongben, Qian Xiaodai and Zhang Xingbei, *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 1962), 2.

“Tang Monk at once frowned and hesitantly stopped his horse. Monkey King promptly comforts him: ‘Master, no need to be afraid as long as I am here---there would be no return for any demon if they dare to show up.’ And he advised his master to dismount from the horse and take a rest.”¹²⁶

These captions provide a relatively coherent plot development for the readers. At the same time, the correlative pictures on both pages only partially illustrate the key information offered by the literary script. Despite the conversation between Monkey King and the other characters occurring in the captions on the second page, no related details have been visually displayed in the corresponding picture (fig.29). Instead, in this picture, the Monkey King stands alone atop a coiled pine tree, occupying the upper position of the layout closer to the viewers, making his presence larger and more significant than the other characters. Except for the missing dialog bubbles, unlike Zhao’s Republican work, the minor information such as the passage of time is also not included in the pictorial delineation. The approaching nightfall mentioned in the textual caption on the second page, for instance, is absent from the picture. Viewers could only obtain full comprehension of the plot through reading the textual content.

On page sixty, a more apparent instance appears when Tang Monk received the fake “heavenly oracle” as schemed by the demon, addressing the absolute necessity of discharging Monkey King from the team (fig.30). Again, the Monkey King is placed in the foremost position within the layout, deliberately distanced from the hoodwinked gang. The Tang Monk, flanked by Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing, carefully holds the “heaven-sent” yellow silk with oracles in the background. The concrete content of the oracle’s message, however, is delivered to the readers separately through the textual captions outside the picture. The textual captions read:

“The yellow silk was accurately dropped at the feet of Tang Monk. Tang Monk picked it up and scried the oracle messahes: ‘The Buddhists should be merciful and never kill innocent people; if you still keep the monkey, it would be impossible for you to attain the divine sutra.’ It turns out to be the scheme of Skeleton Demon.”¹²⁷

In a similar scene within *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* (1939), to the contrary, the content of a letter written by Ding Zhaohui, the martial hero, is shown on the letter sheet at the lower-left corner of the composition (fig.31). Here, textual contents are displayed in the form of an actual letter instead of the sheer characters within the captions, meanwhile enlarged to deliver the necessary information for readers to grasp the plot development. Naturally, the letter is presented

¹²⁶ Zhao, Qian and Zhang, *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, 3.

¹²⁷ Zhao, Qian and Zhang, *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, 60.

as the props within an intact “stage” setting and an organic component of the scene. The particular presentation highlights the attempt to display the script in a pictorial method and organically intertwine the necessary texts within the picture-centered visual language.

Furthermore, the complete separation of the texts and pictures in this post-1949 *lianhuanhua* causes a significant change upon its pictorial sections, which started to carry much fewer details and information compared to the Republican *lianhuanhua* by the same author. The elimination of the dialog bubbles, along with the increased importance of the textual script, essentially reduces the consistency of the serial pictures and confines the pictorial contents of *lianhuanhua* to its corresponding textual captions. Each picture primarily illustrates the given texts rather than forms a coherent pictorial narrative. For instance, on page eighty-one and eighty-two, the pictorial contents are by no means strictly consistent (fig.32; fig.33). While Zhu Bajie and Monkey King both appear in the picture on page eighty-one, Zhu Bajie suddenly vanishes from the following scene, only leaving Monkey King and his entourage in the composition. The angry words left by Zhu Bajie and his unpleasant departure from Monkey King’s cave could only be learned through the attached texts. Then, without any pictorial hints indicating the in-between plots, the next appearance of Zhu Bajie is in the cave of Skeleton Demon on page eighty-nine (fig.34). Only with textual assistance, would the readers know that Zhu Bajie rushed to the demon’s cave right after leaving the Monkey King’s place and was caught by her minions immediately.

The prevalent omissions of the plots within the pictorial sections effectively reduce the number of required pictures in this *lianhuanhua*, which, as mentioned before, is a hundred and ten. Despite the lowered number of pictures, in comparison to the Republican period, to complete a *lianhuanhua* meeting the standard in the 1960s generally had to take much more time to complete. Even experienced *lianhuanhua* painters often needed to modify the drafts multiple times and made the careful arrangement of all elements in each picture. These pictures were supposed to be very well finished as not only one leaf within a serial-picture book but also an independent piece of drawing.¹²⁸ According to the autobiography of Zhao Hongben, during the process of creating this *lianhuanhua*, he acted as the penciller to create the original figurations and composition, while Qian was the inker to finalize the outlines using the fine-tip brush. This

¹²⁸ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 31; Yu Fei, “Lianhuanhua ‘Shi Wu Guan’ shi bu hao zuopin,” *Meishu* Issue 12 (1956): 43.

allocation of responsibilities, however, was not fixed. As mentioned by Zhao, they often exchanged positions to better evaluate and modify each other's drafts.¹²⁹

The enhanced capacity of the *lianhuanhua* painters active in the 1960s to implement the artistic composition and fine execution of technique, along with the unanimous ideological standard governed all art genres, weakened the barrier between *lianhuanhua* and those loosely defined "high arts", causing taxonomic differences to be less significant and easier to cross after 1949. The "segregation" within the circle of visual art that existed during the Republican era was shaken---academic artists also participated in *lianhuanhua* creation while *lianhuanhua* painters could join the *China Artists Association* and practiced alternative media. Zhao Hongben himself was a member of the CAA and the executive council member of its Shanghai branch. The newly formed Chinese Artist Association thus brought together communists and professionals to implement an ill-defined aesthetic doctrine.¹³⁰ The unification of aesthetic standards echoed the institutional reformation to specialize the art genres. Starting from 1953, the new Creation Committee of CAA contains six sections: painting, national painting, printmaking, cartoon (*lianhuanhua* and *manhua*), and sculpture.¹³¹ From this moment on, *lianhuanhua* was officially enveloped into the grand mapping of socialist fine art and obliged to be conducted and presented accordingly.

b) *Lianhuanhua* and Socialist Fine Art: National Style and Visual References

After being redefined as a genre of socialist-realist art, popular media such as Hollywood movies and cartoons have been decisively removed from the major references of the visual language of *lianhuanhua*.¹³² This is particularly obvious for those works requiring antique costumes, as Chinese classic literature appeared to be quite a special genre within all approved subject matters of PRC *lianhuanhua*. With the overt ancient background, these stories were chronologically remote from the "new reality" of China after 1949. To what extent the *lianhuanhua* painters could balance the historical *Chineseness* in the fictions and the socialist-realist representations was always a subtle and tricky decision to make. The art critics and readers of the historical stories back in the 1950s and 60s were particularly finicky on the

¹²⁹ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 29.

¹³⁰ Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 122.

¹³¹ Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 124.

¹³² Cai Ruohong, "Lianhuanhua de gaizaowenti," *Rebmin Meishu* Issue 1 (1950) : 18.

visuality of this type of *lianhuanhua*. In general, the approved aesthetics was to strategically look back at the traditional line drawing and avoid the overuse of Western stylistic features.

1) Line Drawing: “Purified” National Style

While the common features of *lianhuanhua* in Republican Shanghai, such as the expressional exaggerations and comical representations, were carefully removed from the post-1949 *lianhuanhua*, the close-to-life representations of characters and adequate visual details offered by Republican *lianhuanhua* were regarded as its advantages and ought to remain. Cai Ruohong 蔡若虹 (1910-2002), one of the important figures of the PRC art academy and Ministry of Culture before the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), saw these features of *lianhuanhua* as the necessary assistance for the audience to fully comprehend the given story.¹³³ The standard of the close-to-life delineation, however, had already been raised to the institutional height. The practitioners of the socialist visual art, such as the new *guohua* painters, had already been demanded to paint based on the drawing from life in the early 1950s, long before the commission of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*.¹³⁴ Even though *lianhuanhua* had never possessed a “drawing from life” tradition or systemically developed one at the beginning of the communist regime, before the creation of this important *lianhuanhua*, Zhao and Qian still went to the mountain area of Zhejiang province (where the Shaoxing opera version was produced) to collect the visual resources and inspirations from life.¹³⁵ Quite a few colleagues of Zhao and Qian followed the same protocol before making pictures for *lianhuanhua*, which appeared to become the routine of the *lianhuanhua* production during the 1950s and 60s.¹³⁶

Besides the preparation trip to Zhejiang, Zhao Hongben recalled that he and Qian also received plenty of advice before drawing this *lianhuanhua*. These pieces of advice, mainly focusing on the stylistic features, marked the general choice of the visual characterizations during the specific historical era. While some of their colleagues suggested applying the *manhua* style, the others advocated the style resembling the traditional Chinese drawing with decorative elements. Eventually, Zhao and Qian completed a *lianhuanhua* reflecting the ultimate influence of the latter. As described by Zhao himself, the artistic style of their *lianhuanhua* is after “the

¹³³ Cai, “Lianhuanhua de gaizaowenti,” 19.

¹³⁴ Andrews and Shen, *The Art of Modern China*, 162.

¹³⁵ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 31.

¹³⁶ Shen Peng, “Zhongshi yupuji gongzuo de lianhuanhua,” *Meishu* Issue 6 (1956): 18.

traditional iron-line drawing 铁线描 style with adequate decorative details.” At the same time, Zhao described the formal exaggeration of characters in this *lianhuanhua* as “adequate,” which does not hurt its overall realistic, life-based representations.¹³⁷ The models of adequate caricaturing chosen by Zhao and Qian include the figural woodblock printings of *Shui Hu Zhuan* 水浒传 (Eng. Water Margin) created by Ming dynasty painter Chen Hongshou 陈洪绶 (1598-1652) and figure paintings by late Qing dynasty artists Ren Xiong 任熊 (1823-1857), Ren Yi 任颐 (1840-1895) and Ren Xun 任薰 (1835-1893). As recollected by himself, Zhao Hongben had already copied and learned from these Ming and Qing dynasty masters even before becoming a professional *lianhuanhua* painter in Republican Shanghai.¹³⁸

Despite many notable features Zhao Hongben learned from the old masters like Chen Hongshou, the “drawing from life” demand within the *lianhuanhua* profession emerged after 1949 reveals the increasing influence of Western academic art. As one of the most eminent painters active during the late Ming period, Chen Hongshou followed the figure painting tradition of the Ming dynasty and emphasized the facial features of figures through disproportionately enlarging their heads. The other body parts of the figures created by Chen Hongshou were not governed by the anatomical rules, either. The female characters in Chen Hongshou’s illustrations made for Chinese literature classics *The Romance of West Chamber* 西厢记 are overly slender and delicate, marked by extremely narrow shoulders and thin necks (fig. 35). Therefore, Zhao and Qian made great efforts to fix the excessively unnaturalistic representations of the human bodies shown in those earlier Chinese line drawings through building a relatively accurate structure beneath the cloth. One of the incarnations of the demon, a village girl, demonstrates much more scientific body proportion and advanced anatomical accuracy compared to the Ming dynasty model (fig.36).

On the other hand, the visible “shell” of each character remains recognizably faithful to the familiar style of Chinese line drawing. The top-tier *lianhuanhua* painters like Zhao and Qian were well aware of the stylistic integrity of conventional line drawing and intentionally kept those visually perceptible features of the style. The rendering of the folding or floating fabric in this *lianhuanhua* is skillful and diverse, reflecting painters’ in-depth understanding of the

¹³⁷ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 30.

¹³⁸ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 30.

traditional line drawing. They meticulously arranged the fine lines to indicate the texture of the folding fabric (fig. 37). Even though Zhao Hongben claimed that they were following the iron-line drawing style, their treatment of lines should better be described as a combination of the iron-line and *Gaogu yousi* 高古游丝 drawing (trans.: Lines like flowing silk threads following the antique tradition). The iron lines are remarkably full of strength and sharp twists resembling the bending metal wires (fig.38). *Gaogu yousi*, however, is much softer, thinner, and more flowy (fig. 39).¹³⁹ While the former indeed is one of the main techniques applied in Chen Hongshou's *Shui Hu Zhuan* illustrations, one of Zhao's models for this *lianhuanhua*, to depict the rough texture of the fabric, the latter is often seen in costumes of Zhao and Qian's characters accompanied by iron lines. The most overt adoption of the iron-line drawing in this *lianhuanhua* is the delineation of the rocks instead of fabrics (fig. 40).

In fact, in comparison to Zhao's *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*, the line drawing style shown in this *lianhuanhua* is deliberately "purified" and demonstrates the strong bond with various artistic and cultural traditions of China. In general, post-1949 *lianhuanhua* were essentially against the excessively unconventional visual expressions inspired by Western art. As pointed out by He Youzhi (1922-2016), another celebrated *lianhuanhua* painter active during the 1960s, to prevent his impulse of inserting the shade and hue into the required line drawing style of *lianhuanhua* had always been quite a challenge for him. When the shade is applied, He Youzhi stated, the presence of lines appeared to be less significant, and the intended style simultaneously became "neither Chinese nor Western."¹⁴⁰ He provided the initial and final draft depicting the same scene to demonstrate the satisfying style (fig.41). The dark color blocks indicating the light and shade within the initial draft were totally removed, leading to the paler and flatter version on the right mainly constructed by the fine lines. Zhao and Qian carried out the very similar rendering in their own work. Those lines following the ancient stylistic paradigm became the sole option within Zhao and Qian's palette to render the pictures, erasing all factors of shading or hue to achieve the formal authenticity of the traditional line drawing. Naturally, a large portion of the background space within each picture is intentionally left blank to stress the well-arranged composition composed by exquisite lines and the aesthetic blankness.

¹³⁹ "Chuantong renwu shibamiao," Digital Library of Lianhuanhua, accessed Aug.1, 2020, <http://sy.sinocomic.com/Home/Baike/info/id/64.shtml>,

¹⁴⁰ He Youzhi, "Chuangzuo lainhuanhua 'Shanxiang jubian' de yidian tihui," *Meishu* Issue 1 (1962): 46.

In addition to the line drawing, traditional woodblock printing is another visual reference chosen by Zhao and Qian. As He Youzhi proclaimed, the decorative quality is the representative characterization of the traditional Chinese woodblock printings.¹⁴¹ The landscape features such as the cloud, mountains, rocks, and crooked trees in this work all mirror the overt influence of the given stylistic paradigm. Different from the relatively close-to-life depictions shown in Zhao's Republican work, the landscape features are presented as the decorative profile rather than the natural scenery. The somersault cloud ridden by Monkey King (fig.42), for instance, closely resembles the wishful moiré, or Ruyi Yunwen, a traditional motif frequently applied on the murals, printings, porcelain and fabric throughout the Chinese history (fig.43). Two painters also applied the landscape to form the highly decorative and organic frame to enhance the aesthetic delight echoing the ancient woodblock printings (fig. 44). The similar arrangement of landscape could be seen in the illustrations of *The Romance of West Chamber* created by Chen Hongshou. In his woodblock printing titled "Report the Victory 报捷", the dense tree crowns and defoliations on the ground construct a framed, intimate space for the heroin and her maid (fig. 35).¹⁴²

Meantime, the close resemblances with the traditional line drawings and woodblock printings prompt the rather static representations of the characters in this *lianhuanhua*. Unorthodox elements, such as those "auxiliary lines" added in Zhao's Republican work to improve the pictorial dynamism, were decisively removed from the legitimate visual references of this post-1949 *lianhuanhua*. Even the fighting scene appears to be a carefully arranged, still tableau, ultimately governed by the approved stylistic paradigm (fig.40). Moreover, Zhao and Qian's efforts went beyond the sheer style and reached the format of the presentation. They deliberately applied the vertical frame instead of the horizontal one usually seen in most *lianhuanhua* produced before and after 1949.¹⁴³ The former is one of the typical formats of traditional Chinese hanging scrolls and albums, probably indicating a tighter association with the national artistic heritage.

¹⁴¹ He, "Chuangzuo lainhuanhua "Shanxiang jubian"de yidian tihui," 46.

¹⁴² Illustration made for *Zhengbei Xixiang 正北西厢*, one of popular versions of the story edited and annotated by Ming dynasty literati Zhang Shenzhi.

¹⁴³ Andrews and Shen, *The Art of Modern China*, 165.

2) Composition: Ideological Mandate

Even during the upsurge of the “National Style” boom in the early 1960s, the pursuit toward the realist composition and representations still weighed as much as the politically appropriate subject matters.¹⁴⁴ Under the strict aesthetic and ideological demands, to decide the “realist” composition of each picture based on the given script appeared to be a more difficult process than merely following the stylistic and formal paradigm.

In terms of techniques, according to Zhao Hongben’s memoir, he and Qian applied a combination of the scattered-point perspective usually applied by the traditional Chinese painting and the one-point perspective often seen in the Western paintings.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, the arrangement of all visual elements on each picture most certainly should conform to the given ideological ideas. The concrete pictorial content on each page is strictly subordinate to but cannot plainly illustrate the corresponding textual script. Creatively and appropriately pictorializing the given script had always been quite a challenge for the post-1949 *lianhuanhua* painters. Correspondingly, the balance between the painters’ creativity and the ideological appropriateness was the primary focal point of the PRC art critics during the 1950s and 60s. In a review commenting on a *lianhuanhua* published in 1956, one such critic reservedly praised the painter’s creative visualization of a textual plot, while at the same time criticized the inappropriate treatment toward the villain who murdered an innocent businessman and stole his money. The overly comical delineation of the scoundrel, the critic stated, largely obscured the abominable nature of the character.¹⁴⁶ Apparently, the artistic creativity should not surpass the ideological mandate regarding the moral value and correctness.

The principle is also valid in Zhao and Qian’s work. Two painters bore the dual tasks in determining the compositions: 1. The picture must be tightly related to the textual content; 2. The content and composition of each picture must obey the designated ideology/moral of the story and the general mandates governing the entire *lianhuanhua* production. On the page depicting Monkey King seeing through the demon’s disguise, the textual content reads:

“Monkey King smells an evil odor from the girl. When he stared at the girl, her true shape appears in his piercing eyes---a bare skull and the skeleton.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Andrews and Shen, *The Art of Modern China*, 161.

¹⁴⁵ Zhao, *Zhao Hongben lianhuanhua shengya 50 nian*, 30.

¹⁴⁶ Yu Fei, “Lianhuanhua “Shi Wu Guan” shi bu hao zuopin,” *Meishu* Issue 12 (1956): 43.

¹⁴⁷ Zhao, Qian and Zhang, *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, 25.

In the corresponding picture, however, the true shape of the demon is deliberately omitted (fig.36). The village girl is still in her disguise and even appears to be quite frightened facing the vigilant Monkey King. The violent and gory scenes, such as the beheaded bandit shown in Zhao's Republican work, could be barely seen in the post-1949 *lianhuahuanhua*. A full skeleton must also be considered inappropriate to be faithfully illustrated and thus intentionally neglected. Here, the pictorial depictions own the more stringent restraint than the textual script concerning the choice of contents.

Occasionally, the painters held a certain leeway in deciding the positions of the characters not mentioned in the captions. After Monkey King killed the second incarnation of the demon, an old woman, the captions beside the picture only describe the condition of the demon:

“The old woman immediately fell down, but it is yet another trick of the demon to escape.
The demon concealed herself into a mist and flew away.”¹⁴⁸

Zhao and Qian, nevertheless, still placed Monkey King into the central and foremost position within the layout (fig.46). He alertly discerns the stealthy mist ridden by the demon and turned his head upward at the sky, meanwhile Tang Monk and other disciples confusingly glare at him in the backdrop. He is figuratively aggrandized as the only vigilant and insightful character amongst all. The similar magnificent portrayals of Monkey King are regularly presented in the pictorial section, while Tang Monk is constantly placed within the background and shown in the back view or the profile. In fact, Tang Monk only owns thirty-one frontal portrayals out of his seventy-five appearances in this *lianhuahuanhua*. The intentional marginalization of Tang Monk, along with the compositional significance of Monkey King, no doubt works in concert with the connotation of Mao Zedong's poem dedicated to the opera version of the story.

Generally speaking, the visual language of this post-1949 *lianhuahuanhua* was under the ultimate influence of two designated mandates: the national art style of China and the socialist realist doctrine of art.¹⁴⁹ *Lianhuahuanhua* painters, like their peer colleagues focusing on *guohua* or *nianhua*, were expected to create works in the traditional media with strong Western technical or compositional aspects reflecting the socialist realist qualities.¹⁵⁰ A large portion of the previously

¹⁴⁸ Zhao, Qian and Zhang, *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, 39.

¹⁴⁹ Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 134.

¹⁵⁰ Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, 127.

feasible formal features and visual characterizations seen in Republican *lianhuanhua*, such as the exaggerated and comical expressions learned from the Western cartoons, were ruled out from the approved references of visual language. At the same time, the inappropriate attempts outside the given stylistic paradigm would not be encouraged or even allowed. What could be adjusted was the proportion of the traditional and the socialist realist features contained in a *lianhuanhua* according to the subject matter and the given storyline. The standard of the good pictures within a *lianhuanhua* has been raised to the same level of that for the academic art; while at the same time, the range of the depictable contents was narrowed down considerably. Accompanying the exclusive attention placed upon the style, technique and format, the pictorial sections of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* became static, less consistent and defunctionalized. The entertaining and informative qualities used to be largely valued in the Republican *lianhuanhua* finally yielded to the formal perfection of the national style and the ideological mandates of the socialist realist art.

Conclusion

After 1949, the commercial *lianhuanhua* based on the highly profitable and self-governed industry completely vanished from China and was replaced by the new *lianhuanhua* profoundly promoted by the communist regime. These two art forms, despite their shared designation, are quite remote from each other regarding the liability of the painters, the function of the pictures, and the common standard of defining a good *lianhuanhua*.

The commercial *lianhuanhua* painters based in Republican Shanghai, especially those celebrated ones like Zhao Hongben, were the undisputed central figure to create the *lianhuanhua* in their own studios. In order to enhance the productivity, some preoccupied *lianhuanhua* painters chose to take advantages of the apprenticeship system and assigned those insignificant components within the pictures to their pupils and other assistants. Only the most important segments, namely the interactions amongst the characters that propelled the plot development, were left to be conducted by the masters. This principal responsibility of the Republican *lianhuanhua* painters, in fact, was closely connected with the primary function of the pictorial sections in a Republican *lianhuanhua*, which was to consistently and comprehensibly tell a story with the serial pictures. The texts, along with those ancillary features in the pictures including the background and composition, are merely the affiliated parts of the visualized plots. The

exhilarating stories offering the immersive and thrilling reading experiences, more than anything else, were the core factor to ensure the market share of the publishers.

During the 1950s, the *lianhuanhua* production, just like every other visual art field, was unavoidably integrated into the larger mapping of the socialist art, of which style and content were ultimately regulated by the cultural-political authorities rather than chosen by the ordinary readers and the boarder market as in the Republican Shanghai. When Zhao Hongben and Qian Xiaodai received the commission of drawing pictures for the *lianhuanhua* adaptation of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon* in 1961, the protocol of producing the pictorial sections in *lianhuanhua* had been largely fixed. Contrary to their Republican counterparts, the entire process of post-1949 *lianhuanhua* artists producing pictures should exclusively be based on the given scripts. While the scriptwriter took the responsibility to provide the complete and intelligible plot development, the painters were expected to illustrate the textual contents using the aesthetically and ideologically appropriate visual language. Making pictures to narrate the story, once the central focus of the Republican *lianhuanhua*, was largely removed from the liabilities of the PRC *lianhuanhua* painters. Instead, the *lianhuanhua* painters were obliged to work in the shared manner of the socialist art practitioners and destined to assure the stylistic and ideological legitimacy of every visual element within the pictures. Due to the decisive separation between the textual and pictorial sections, a good PRC *lianhuanhua* bears the dual criteria: the politically correct scripts and the aesthetically appropriate pictures. Even the national competition of *lianhuanhua* held in 1963 contained two segregated units, respectively focusing on the drawing and the scriptwriting.¹⁵¹ The drawings created by the most capable post-1949 *lianhuanhua* painters could indeed hold the similar pictorial quality as those single-framed artworks in the alternative media. The original function of the pictures in *lianhuanhua*, at the same time, was ultimately disregarded.

As such, it would be difficult to verify a unanimous standard simultaneously valid for the Republican *lianhuanhua* and the post-1949 ones, which could easily oversimplify their fundamental differentiations regarding the stylistic inspirations, the core functions of the pictures and the expectations cast by the intended readers. If the superiority of the post-1949 *lianhuanhua* is claimed, the primary issue awaiting the clarification is the actual genre of its pictorial sections.

¹⁵¹ “1963 nian quanguo diyijie lianhuanhua chuanguozuopingjiang huojiangzuopin,” *Meiri Toutiao*, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://kknews.cc/culture/gmlee9y.html>.

Republican *lianhuanhua* were the pictorial narrative of popular stories governed by market rules. It was the narrative aspect, rather than aesthetic value, of the pictures that determined the quality of one's work. The pictures within *lianhuanhua* made after 1949, on the contrary, were aesthetically and ideologically institutionalized and governed by the standard applicable for all genres of socialist-realist visual art, which focused on the artistic quality and ideological relevance to the didactic theme. The pictorial quality repeatedly mentioned in previous discourses, therefore, should be one of the dimensions, rather than the sole factor, of the public understanding toward *lianhuanhua* made in the different historical periods. In fact, this ultimate concentration on the pictorial, instead of narrative aspect of *lianhuanhua* pictures, largely erased the storytelling tradition of Chinese *lianhuanhua* that emerged in the late 1910s and early 20s and replaced it with a more rigid, illustrational narrative. It enormously affected the development of *lianhuanhua* in mainland China and led to the final decline of the genre in the late 1980s when foreign popular arts with advanced storytelling capacity, such as Japanese manga, entered Chinese market. Therefore, a diverse and panoramic review involving more painters and works made in different historical stages should be conducted henceforth to further unveil the truth and aftermath of the PRC *lianhuanhua* reformation.

Meanwhile, the lack of the systematic research toward the Republican *lianhuanhua* leads to the general incomprehension concerning the diversity and inner differentiations of the subject matters. As my research mainly examines the visual aspects of *lianhuanhua* made by the same author and has not touched upon the narrative content, the further study will be required to evidently clarify/debunk the accusation of the prevailing vulgar and pornographic contents in the Republican *lianhuanhua*.

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Appendix I



Fig. 1 Liu Boliang, Zhu Zhixuan. Illustration of the *lianhuanhua Limao Huan Taizi*. Drawing. 1918.



Fig. 2 Zhu Runzhai. Illustration of the *lianhuanhua Three Kingdoms*. Drawing. 1930. As reproduced in Zhu, 9.

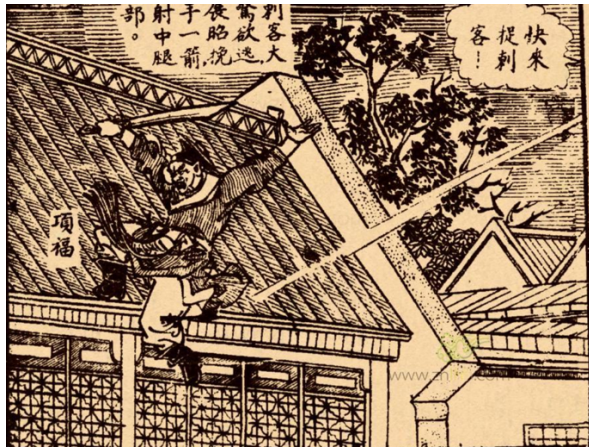


Fig. 3 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 1, 91.



Fig. 4 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 5, 657.

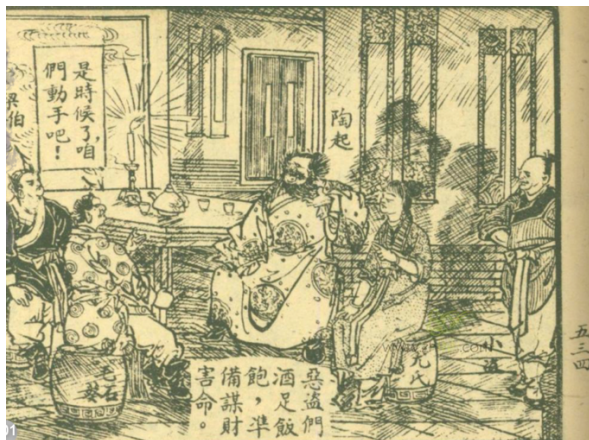


Fig. 5 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 534.



Fig. 6 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 606.



Fig. 7 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 3, 395

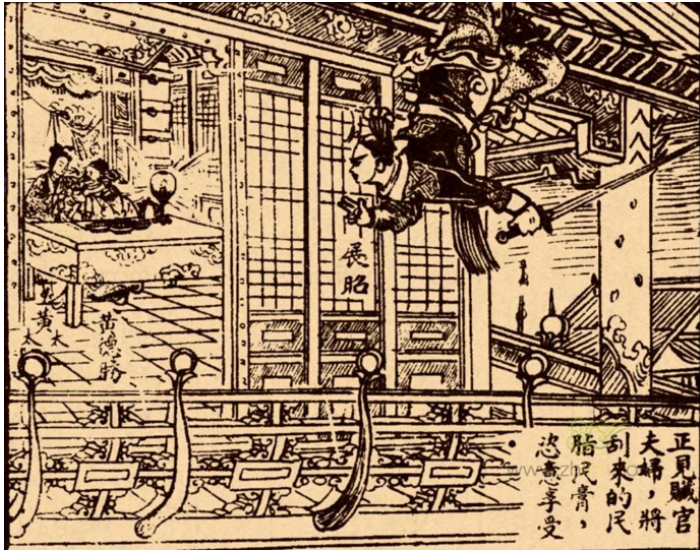


Fig. 8 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol.1, 20.

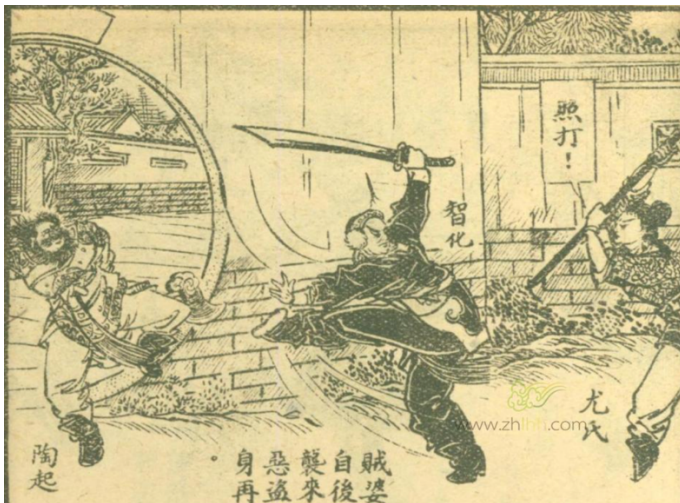


Fig. 9 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 545.



Fig. 10 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 546.



Fig.11 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 547.



Fig.12 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 548.



Fig. 13 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 552.



Fig. 14 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 553.

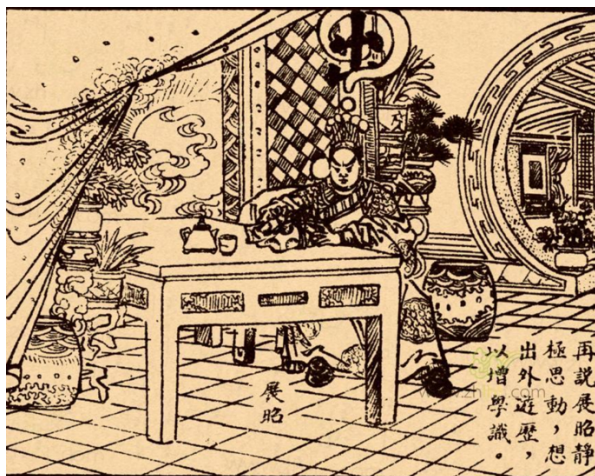


Fig. 15 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol.1, 28.



Fig. 16 Edgar Burroughs. Illustration of cartoon *Tarzan*. Painting. 1933. As produced in Burroughs.

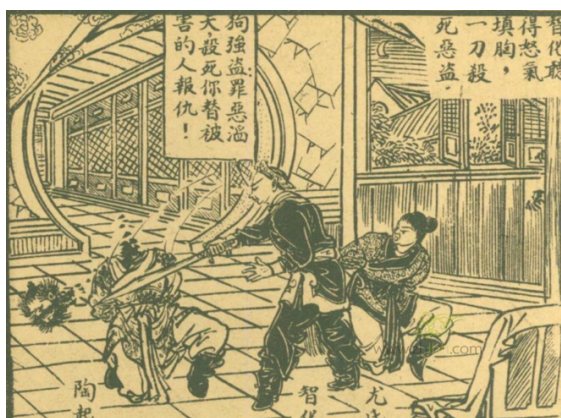


Fig. 17 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 555.



Fig. 18 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 5, 658.

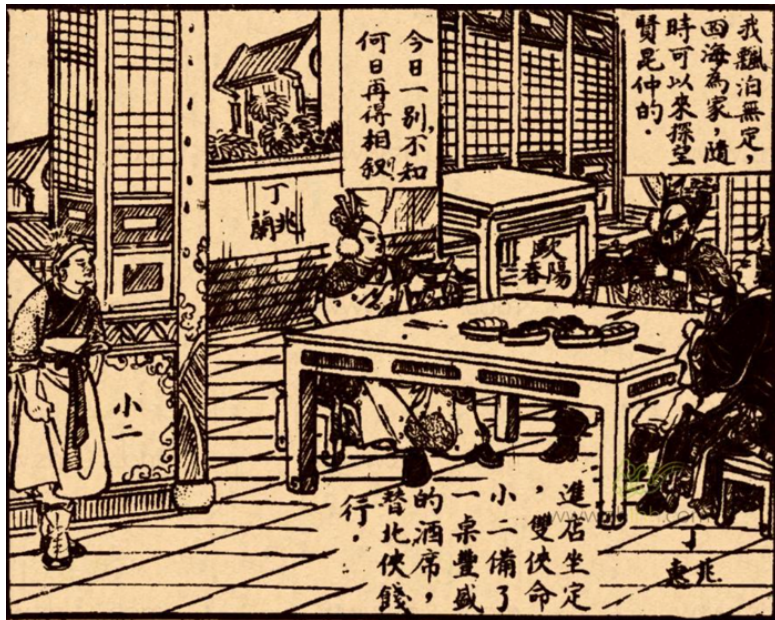


Fig. 19 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 3, 328.



Fig. 20 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 4, 628.

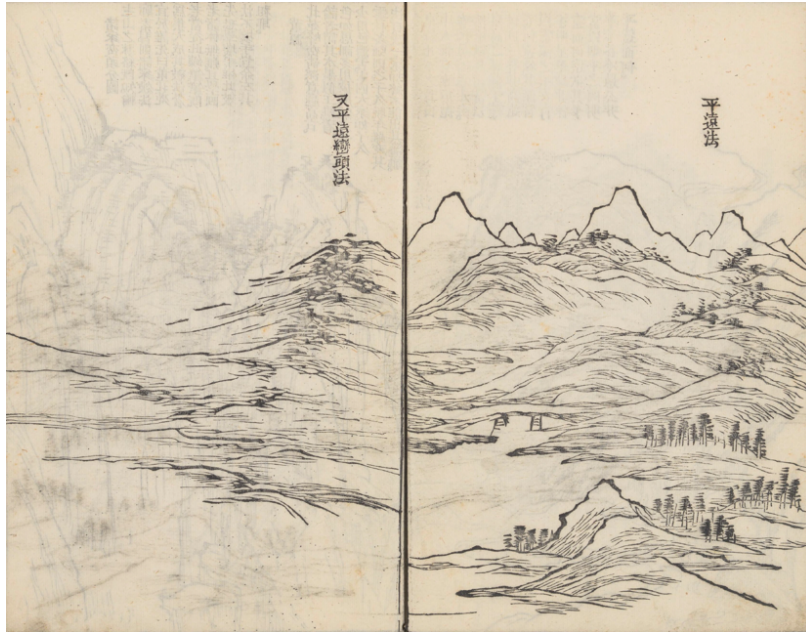


Fig. 21 Wang, Gai, Nie Wang and Shi Wang. Illustration of *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden*. Ink painting. Late 17th Century. As reproduced in Wang, vol. 3, 18.

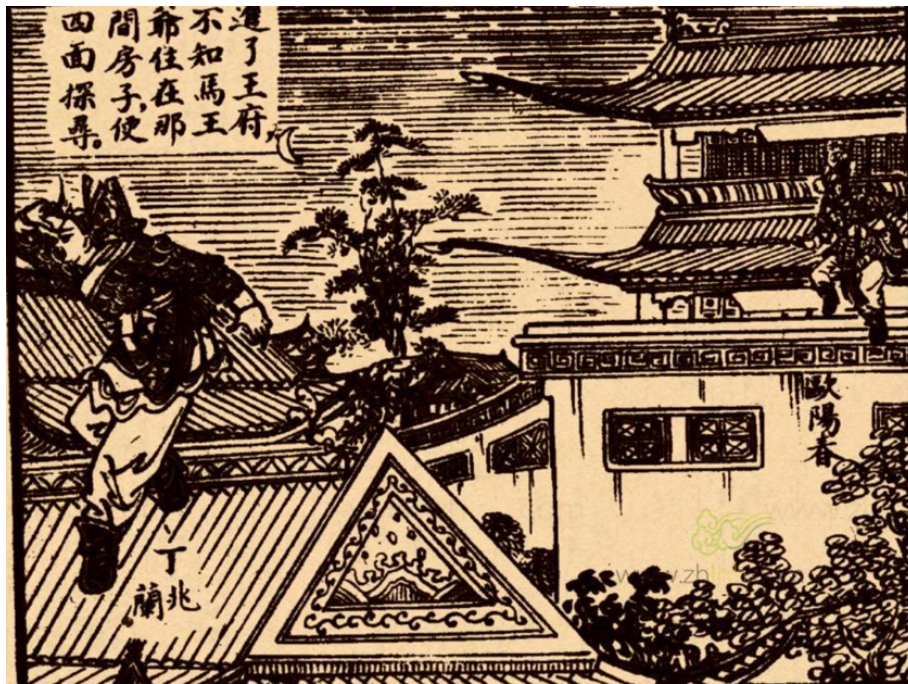


Fig. 22 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 2, 231.



Fig. 23 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 6, 789.



Fig. 24 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing. 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 1, 97



Fig. 25 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Heaven and Hell*. Drawing, 1941. As reproduced in Zhao, 58.



Fig. 26 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Haishang Fengbao*. Drawing, 1950. As reproduced in Zhao, 110.

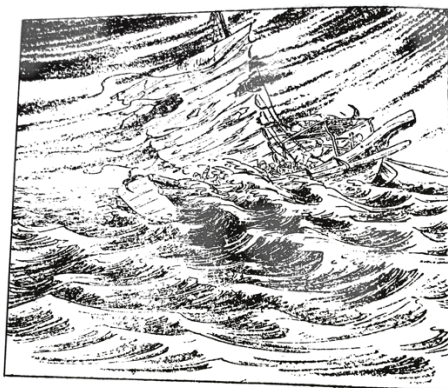


Fig. 27 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Haishang Fengbao*. Drawing, 1950. As reproduced in Zhao, 106.

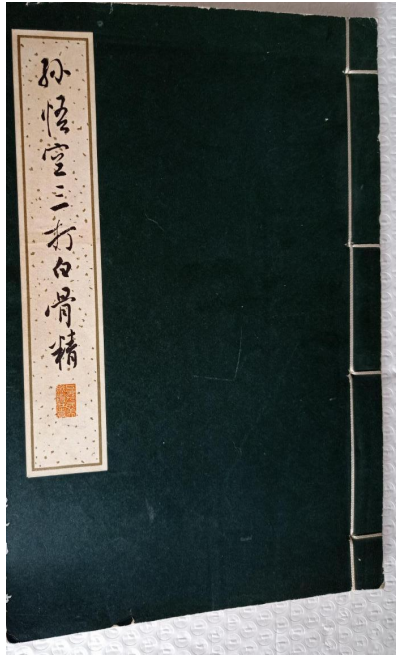


Fig. 28 The cover of *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*, 1st edition. Photo: book.kongfz.com.



Fig. 29 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing, 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 2.



Fig. 30 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing, 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 60.

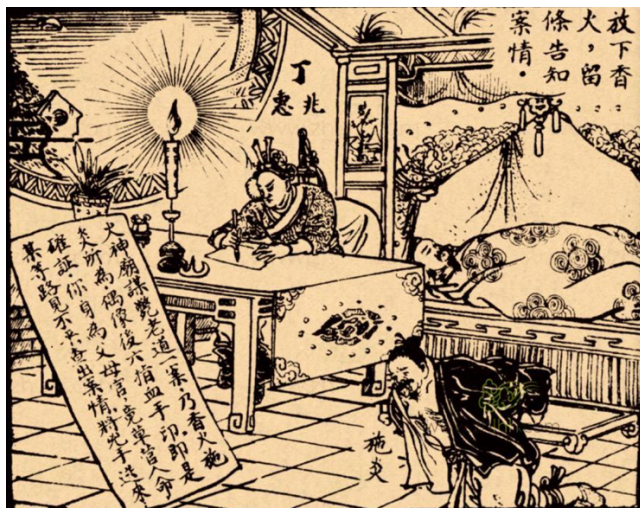


Fig.31 Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Drawing, 1939. As produced in Zhao, vol. 3, 403.

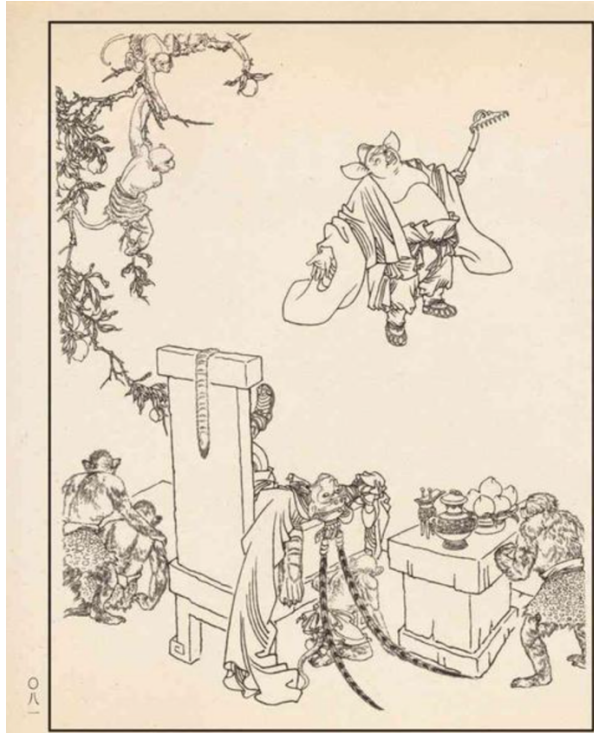


Fig. 32 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing. 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 81.

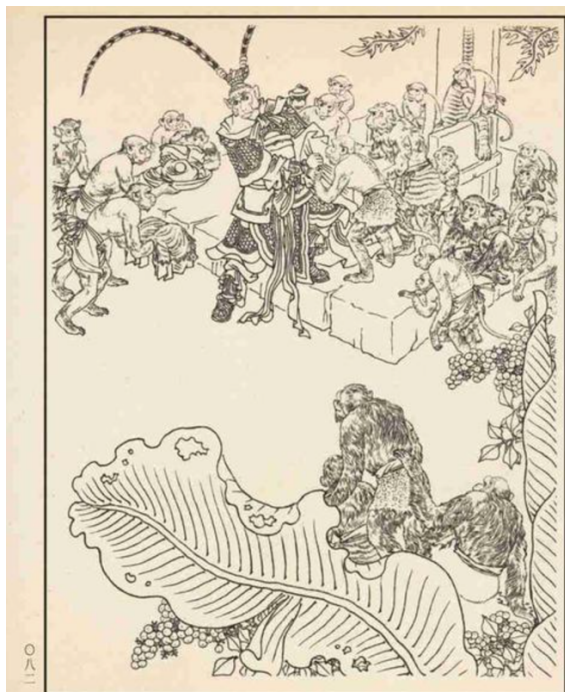


Fig. 33 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing. 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 82.



Fig. 34 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* *Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing, 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 89.



Fig. 35 Chen Hongshou. Illustration of *Zhengbei Xixiang*. 1640. Woodblock print, 20.6x13.5cm. As reproduced in Zhang, ill.5.



Fig. 36 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing, 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 25.



Fig. 37 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing, 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 1.

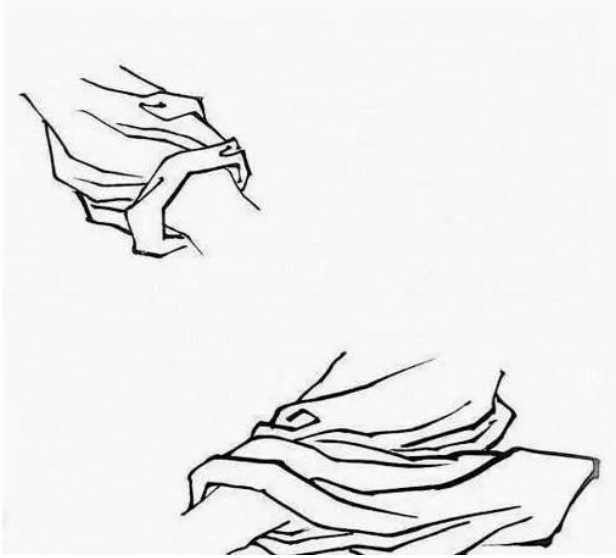


Fig. 38 Illustration of traditional line drawings. Ink drawing. As reproduced in China Shuhua website.

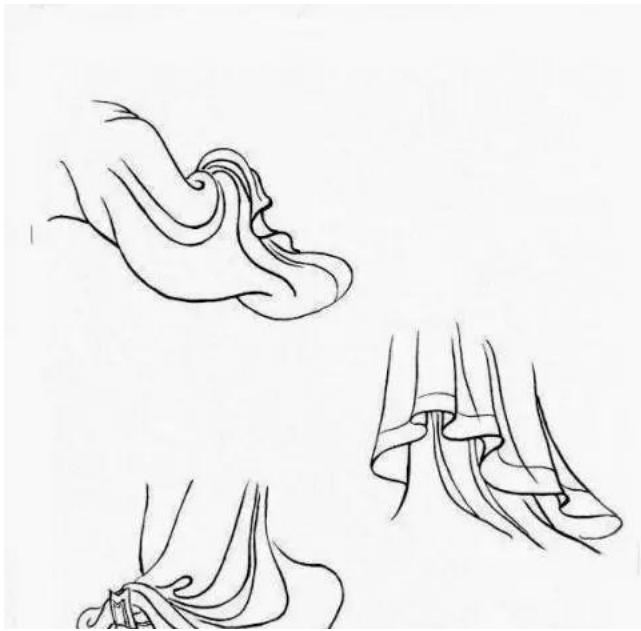


Fig. 39 Illustration of traditional line drawings. Ink drawing. As reproduced in China Shuhua website.



Fig. 40 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing, 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 54.



Fig. 41 He Youzhi. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Shanxiang Jubian*. Drawing, 1960.



Fig. 42 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua* Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon. Drawing. 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 84.



Fig. 43 Plate decorated with the motif of dragon and cloud. Blue and white porcelain, height: 3.2 cm, diameter: 14.4 cm. Early Ming dynasty. Palace Museum, Beijing. Photo: Palace Museum.



Fig. 44 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing, 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 28.

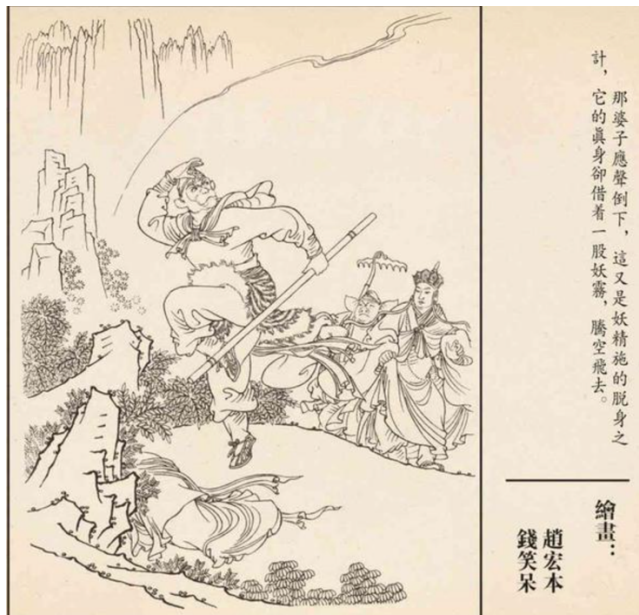


Fig. 45 Qian Xiaodai and Zhao Hongben. Illustration of *lianhuanhua Monkey King Thrice Defeats the Skeleton Demon*. Drawing, 1963. As reproduced in Qian and Zhao, 39.