

Manhua: The Evolution of Hong Kong Cartoons and Comics

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Introduction

The Chinese term “manhua” is used commonly in Hong Kong as equivalent to “cartoons” and “comics” in English. It includes satire and caricature works, political and editorial cartoons, and all other genres usually referred to as either cartoons or comics. In Hong Kong, “manhua” shares the common meanings of cartoons and comics as employed in the West, representing

a narrative in the form of a sequence of pictures—usually, but not always, with text. In length it can be anything from a single image upwards, with some strips containing thousands . . . a publication in booklet, tabloid, magazine or book form that includes as a major feature the presence of one or more strips. (Sabin, *Adult Comics* 5)

The term manhua in Hong Kong today also includes “lianhuantu,” a traditional Chinese term usually referring to more traditional picture books featuring a sequence of Chinese line art drawings and telling stories with characters in traditional costume. As these traditional stories have evolved toward martial arts and kung-fu stories, the term “lianhuantu” has also shifted to refer to these new generic developments. Today, “manhua” is the general term for all cartoons and comics including “lianhuantu” in Hong Kong.

As is generally true in East Asian societies, manhua constitutes one of the most popular reading materials in Hong Kong (Bolton and Hutton). Although Hong Kong’s population is only about 7 million, estimated annual retail sales for manhua publications in 1990 alone were approximately HK \$17.9 million (U.S. \$2.3 million) (Choi 561). The Hong Kong manhua market is divided into two main market shares, the local manhua produced by local artists, and the sub-licensed Chinese version of Japanese manga (comics). As in other East Asian societies such as South Korea and Taiwan, Japanese manga also dominate Hong Kong’s manhua readership (Lent). However, the local manhua of Hong

Kong shares cultural values and details with their readers, elements that cannot be found in Japanese manga. Hong Kong manhua is a cultural product and one of the important forms of popular culture as are most cartoons and comics all over the world. Manhua have very rich contents to study but discussion of manhua in Hong Kong is often limited to criticism focused on controversial elements such as their extensive use of foul language (Bolton and Hutton), and the pervasiveness of sexual and violent content within them (see Hong Kong Social Workers Association). Although several scholarly articles on Hong Kong manhua examine various controversial and descriptive elements within them, as yet no scholarly work has attempted to provide a general history of Hong Kong man-hua.

The purpose of this article is to capture the development of Hong Kong manhua and thus trace the history of this important cultural product as well as to provide a general overview of the central themes and topics that have emerged in this genre of Hong Kong popular culture. By using the method of surveying the main titles from the past, it argues that Hong Kong comics have played an important role in Chinese manhua history, a role often neglected by scholars of Chinese popular cultural history and international comic history scholars (for example Hung, Liulengyel, and Sabin, *Adult Comics*). To begin this survey, it first investigates the development of the term "manhua" from its origins in China at the beginning of 20th century.

One New Art Form with Many Names

At the time when manhua started to develop in China in the 1920s, the term "manhua" had a more straightforward and limited meaning than it does today in Hong Kong. The traditional Chinese term manhua refers more to a graphic art aimed at satire and caricature which is considered a kind of new art form with foreign influences (Hung). But over time

it has been endowed with a wide range of meaning. To some, the manhua was a satirical graphic art form that used distortion and exaggeration to lay bare life's absurdities. But to others, a cartoon was a kind of "social art" whose content related closely to the life of the common people. (Hung 29)

Most cartoonists during that time recognized that the three essential ingredients the manhua must contain were an "economy of line . . . replete with powerful ideas," an "exaggerated or ludicrous representation of events or persons" and narrative expressions that "lay in the thought it embodies, not artistic adroitness" (Hung 29). However, as the term "manhua" evolved and diversified in Hong Kong throughout the

century, it now covers a wider range of definition including satirical and caricature political cartoons, as well as all other kinds of comics formats and lianhuantu that we encounter today.

Before the mid-1920s, when the Chinese term *manhua* was becoming popularly used, other terms to name this type of art were “satirical drawing” (*fengci hua*), “reporting picture” (*baodao hua*), “allegorical picture” (*yuyi hua*), “recording picture” (*jilu hua*), “political picture” (*zhengzhi hua*) (see Hung) and many more (see Lan, and Wong & Yeung, Bi). The original term “*manhua*” was first introduced by Feng Zikai (1898–1975) in 1925 as the modern Chinese loan-word form from the Japanese tradition of the “*manga*” (Harbsmeier 19), although “the art and its techniques were known as early as the late Qing era” (Hung 28). However, the creative format of *manhua* in China was inspired by cartoon and comic genres from Japan and the West (Hung 29). The varied nature and the rise of *manhua* evolved in close relation to the developments in the social and political environments of mainland China and Hong Kong at the turn of the century.

Hong Kong *manhua* before the second world war were not prominent, but simply followed along the developments on the mainland, particularly those produced in Shanghai. The period from 1867 through 1927 can be considered the first stage of development of Chinese *manhua*, and is thus important to the history of Hong Kong *manhua* (Bi). With the establishment of the Cartoon Association (*Manhua Hui*), China’s first organization in cartoon art in 1927, the development and activities of cartoon works became more organized (Hung). The Association was important in the history of Chinese *manhua* for providing a solidification effect to the so-far “loosely organized group of artists” (Hung 31). They also adopted the term “*manhua*” in their name, hoping to “sweep away the various other terms that had been used for ‘cartoons’” and to raise “the standard of the cartoon art” (Hung 31).

This newly evolved art, referred to as “*manhua*” by the famous artist Feng Zikai in relation to some of his own work, was then soon recognized as a powerful form which attracted the praise and involvement of other famous artists such as writer Lu Xun. Most of the contents of the early *manhua* in China focused primarily on politics and current events including the themes of educating the masses, spreading revolutionary ideas, and resistance to foreign powers. For the decades before the 1930s, the themes remained relatively stable, but the content, style, and manner of expression of Chinese *manhua* were developing and improving. By the 1930s, which are considered “the golden age of Chinese cartoons” (Hung 31), the popularity and production of cartoons had begun to spread into other outlying cities including Guangzhou, Tianjin, and

Hong Kong. Throughout these developments, Shanghai remained at the center of manhua production. The emergence of Chinese manhua and the influence of Western cartoonists were carefully investigated by Chinese popular cultural history scholar Chang-tai Hung. In his book, he provided a clear outline of the rise of Chinese manhua as an important form of popular culture that projected a strong relationship between politics and war. His study supplied detailed information on the background of the origins of Chinese manhua. This article continues his direction, and traces the relationships and origins of the history of Hong Kong cartoons and comics as a form of popular culture beyond the parameters of his book. Here, the Chinese term "manhua" is used to represent all drawing forms and styles that are found in today's cartoon, comics, and lianhuantu market in Hong Kong. In tracing the development of the generalized term "manhua," the more specific terms are used to refer to smaller subsets of manhua production. "Cartoon" refers to political satire and caricature as well as more lighthearted panels depicting everyday life themes. As defined above, "lianhuantu" refers to early traditional storytelling pictures and to later-developed violence and fighting genres of manhua. The development of Hong Kong manhua very much involves the gradual merging of various smaller forms and genres into one broad category of manhua.

*Political Changes and the Development of Chinese Cartoons Art
in Hong Kong*

The development of caricature art in China grew up in "the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people" (ACAFW, Introduction). As Hung outlines, the emergence of Chinese cartoons was closely connected to politics and war. The initial start for Hong Kong manhua was based on the inspiration and developments in politics and cartooning in mainland China. The development of Hong Kong manhua not only has a strong tie with China, but also followed China's tradition of the involvement of political themes and contents in the cartoon works. The contribution of Hong Kong manhua to the history of Chinese cartoons art has often been neglected. Thus, many historians, including Hung and Bi, regard *Shanghai Punch* (*Shanghai Poke*) published in Shanghai, September 1918 (Hung 29), to be China's first cartoon magazine. In fact, Hong Kong had already published a cartoon magazine entitled *China Punch* in 1867.

China Punch was published by a British journalist and based on the format of *Punch* (R. Bryant, 1841), "a satirical monthly magazine following the traditional of the middle-class broadsheet" (Sabin, *Comics* 14) first begun in Great Britain. Although *China Punch* was published in

Hong Kong, the target audience was primarily foreigners living in Hong Kong, and the language used was English. The contents of *China Punch* were mainly satirical jokes about the life of Chinese people in Hong Kong. It maintained the political caricature *Punch* style of humor and illustration, with contents concerning culture and events in China. This first cartoon magazine of Hong Kong was heavily coded with colonial flavor making fun of local customs and assuming the superiority of British norms and values. Nonetheless, the humor and satirical elements of cartoons were introduced in Hong Kong through this non-Chinese publication with a Western ideological view critical of Chinese culture and society.

Later on, the first cartoon drawn by a Chinese person in Hong Kong, "The Situation in the Far East" (Shiguk Tu) was produced by Tse Juan-tai and printed in Japan in 1899 (Wong 28). Tse was a patriotic man who supported the revolutionists headed by Sun Yat-sen and who co-founded the longest-lived English newspaper in Hong Kong, *South China Morning Post* in 1903. Tse was upset about the presence of foreign-ruled enclaves and treaty ports which resulted from the numerous unequal treaties and agreements signed between the Qing government and foreign countries since 1842. He used different animals and symbols to represent the aggressive interests of foreign powers over the territories of China. In his cartoons, the dog was used to represent Britain, the frog represented France, the sun for Japan, the sausage represented Germany, the bear represented Russia, and the eagle represented the United States of America. His goal was to educate Chinese people about the ambitions of these foreign powers and thus to caution people about their destructive intentions toward China. After the initial publication of this cartoon, it was reprinted and republished both in mainland China and overseas without citation of the original, as in *Russian Issues Alarming News* (*éShi Jingwen*), an anti-Russian invasion publication published in Shanghai in December 1903 (Lan 28). Because of such unattributed reprinting, Chinese cartoon historians often mistake this cartoon produced by Tse Juan-tai in Hong Kong as one of the first cartoon works by a Shanghai cartoonist at that time (Bi, and Liu-lengyel).

The role of Hong Kong in the development of Chinese manhua was always to serve as a support and backup outlet throughout the different political and historical stages of Chinese history. Dating back to the period from 1895 to the 1911 revolution, revolutionists used Hong Kong as the base to publish a newspaper to spread the idea of the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911) and to establish a new Republic of China. Political cartoons served as one of the common narrative formats to express such ideas and depict images of the weakness and corruption of

the Qing government. Such political cartoons influenced not only their readers, but also the cartoon artists of the time. Young artists were influenced by revolutionary thinking, and they turned their creative direction and attention toward progressive ideas from the political sphere. Similarly, when the Guangzhou-based anti-Qing government publication, *The Journal of Current Pictorial (Shishi Huabao)* was banned in 1905, the cartoonists moved to Hong Kong and published there for more than ten issues until the Hong Kong colonial government ceded to pressure from the Qing government and also banned publication. *Shishi Huabao* was one of the first generation of cartoon magazines in manhua history (Wong & Yeung, Liu-lengyel).

Before the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911 led by Sun Yat-sen, his revolutionary associations often used Hong Kong as a base to produce and circulate anti-Qing materials into China. They published a supplement *Condemnations from Heaven (Tiantao)* for their official gazette, *People's Journal (Wen bao)*, which was produced in Japan to avoid persecution from the Qing government and later circulated in Hong Kong in 1907 (Bi). The supplement includes a cartoon, "The true face of the nation's betrayer in the present" (Xianzai hanjian zhi zhenxiang) depicting the top officials in the Qing government with their heads chopped off or split open (Liu-lengyel). This incident triggered a strong protest from the Qing officials to the Hong Kong colonial government. It resulted in a regulation saying that if publications circulated in Hong Kong that included pictures and text were distributed in mainland China and led to a revolutionary event in mainland China, then the Hong Kong government would suppress the publication as well as those who produced it. The penalty would be a fine of HK\$500 and imprisonment of up to two years. The Hong Kong colonial government immediately used the new regulation to stop the circulation of this revolutionary cartoon publication in the territory (Wong & Yeung).

In 1912, the same group of cartoons artists who had published *Shishi Huabao*, such as He Jiansgi and Zheng Nuquan began a new publication called *The True Record (Zhenxiang Huabao)* in Shanghai. This illustrated magazine mainly criticized the newly established Republic of China government because of the political struggles within the Guomindang (GMD, Nationalist Party). In the following year, this magazine was banned by the Provisional President of the Republic of China at that time, Yuan Shikai. To avoid prosecution, some artists such as Zheng Nuquan fled to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, Zheng was able to continue his work through the support of the owner of the Hong Kong Leung Kwok-ying Drugstore. However, Zheng became ill and did not live to see the publication of his commissioned work *Renjian Pictorial*

(*Renjian Huabao*) in 1920 (Wong & Yeung). This book contains over 190 cartoons, which point out and criticize the dark side of mainland Chinese politics and culture at the time, thus establishing the role of Hong Kong-produced cartoons in mainland China affairs.

Throughout the 1920s, cartoons still constituted a popular medium for promoting political messages both in China and Hong Kong, particularly those of social movements such as the May 4 Movement of 1919 and the Anti-Warlord Movement in 1926. This decade played a key role for the first blooming of Chinese cartoons in the 1930s. Cartoon magazines published in Shanghai such as *Modern Cartoons* (*Shidai Manhua*, originally *Modern Sketch*) and *Independent Cartoons* (*Duli Manhua*) were well received by the public (Hung). China's first cartoon organization, The Cartoon Association (Manhua Hui) was established in Shanghai in 1927. By the 1930s the "golden age of Chinese Cartoons" (Hung 31) was underway, and there were about seventeen cartoon magazines published in Shanghai alone from September 1934 to June 1937 (Bi 64). With the potential outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the contents and themes of the cartoons during this period were mostly political.

On July 7, 1937, Japan finally launched its official attack of China at Lugouqiao (Marco Polo Bridge), a place about ten miles west of Beijing. During this period, 1937-1945, almost all cartoons were focused on events and themes related to the war. China was losing the war in the beginning, which also forced the anti-Japanese cartoon production base to move to southern China. When Shanghai was occupied by Japan, many anti-war cartoon magazines were published in Guangzhou until it was also occupied by Japan in 1939. After that, Hong Kong became the production base of the cartoons of China (Wong & Yeung, Liu-lengyel). Many of the cartoon artists originally working in Shanghai and Guangzhou thus moved to Hong Kong. The production ended when Hong Kong was also captured by the Japanese in 1941. In this period between 1939 and 1941, apart from publishing anti-war cartoon magazines, Hong Kong also held an anti-war cartoon exhibition under the title of The Modern Chinese Cartoonist Exhibition (*Xiandai Zhongguo Manhua Zhan*) organized by Ye Qianyu in 1939. The cover of the catalog of this exhibition featured a portrait of Jiang Jieshi, the President of Republic of China and leader of GMD at that time. From 1939 to 1941 was the peak of cartoon production in Hong Kong. Production of cartoons stopped from 1941-1945 during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong.

After the victory of China over Japan in 1945, cartoon publication shifted again in contents, this time toward lighthearted popular themes such as humorous everyday life vignettes. The format began to shift

toward serialized stories that continued from one week to the next. The political cartoon receded rapidly into the background, although the situation of continuing political instability in mainland China kept political cartooning alive through 1949 as it documented the struggles between the GMD and the Communist Party. The most significant work in this period was *This Is a Cartoon Era (Zheshi Yige Manhau Shidai)*, published in 1947 by the anti-nationalist cartoon artists group, Renjian Huahui, whose members include mainland cartoon artists such as Lio Bingxiong, Zhang Guangyu, and Zhang Wanyuan who had been purged by the GMD and had fled to Hong Kong (Wong & Yeung, Liu-lengyel). After the communists seized power in mainland China, and the formation of Peoples Republic of China in 1949, most of the pro-communist artists originally from the mainland returned there.

The development of political cartoons in Hong Kong did not stop after the establishment of communist China, but in fact politics in China continued to influence the creative ideas of cartoon artists in Hong Kong. For example, in the late sixties, at the height of the cultural revolution in mainland China, the editorial cartoon pages in both pro- and anti-communist newspapers published cartoons criticizing the opposing position. Those in the pro-communist newspapers expressed critical points echoing communist propaganda, with contents mainly on anti-imperialism and critiques of the colonial government in Hong Kong. Even cartoon strips for children such as *Dahua Yu Siahua* in *Wanhui bao*, a pro-communist newspaper were also full of patriotic sentiments with propagandistic fervor. Communist publication agents in Hong Kong also published a number of propagandistic cartoon books which glorified political campaigns in mainland China and critiqued the capitalist colonial British government of Hong Kong.

On the anti-communist side, Yen E-king was one of the most prominent comic artists. His early work in *Dai Jung Daily* and *Express Daily* mainly depicts the international political scene during the Cultural Revolution Period of the mid-1960s. His main focus was on the power struggles of the Chinese communists on the mainland, and he also strongly critiqued the communist activities in Hong Kong, especially the 1967 riot. Other cartoon artists in Hong Kong directed their attention similarly toward these major events and themes during this period, although political cartoons in general did not play as prominent a role as before and during the war. After the end of the Cultural Revolution Period in 1976, political cartoons in Hong Kong receded into near invisibility due to disinterest of the people in political affairs.

Not until the 1980s, with the increasing awareness of the 1997 handover issue, did people start to pay attention to the local political envi-

ronment again. With the 1997 issue looming in the near future and the inevitable coming relationship with mainland China, political cartoons became active again, drawing people's attention toward such issues. The most prominent of these were works by Zunzi and Ma Long, both of whom were editorial cartoonists in daily newspapers as well as weekly magazines. The themes and contents on which they focused were primarily related to British policies in Hong Kong, the incompetence of the Hong Kong government, and critiques of local social issues. In addition to their daily work in newspapers and magazines, they also published their collected cartoons works in book form on a regular basis. Zunzi published *Black Materials* (1989) and *Grandpa Deng* (2 volumes, 1994, 1997), and Ma Long published *Political Comics Collection* (1990) and *The Record Book of the Transition Period* (1996). This sort of political cartoon was considered as an "alternative manhua" for the new generation of Hong Kong people starting in the 1990s, since mainstream manhua were already dominated by locally produced lianhuantu mainly related to action and martial arts, and Japanese manga.

Emergence of Hong Kong-Style Manhua (Cartoons)

The development of mainstream Hong Kong manhua (cartoons) after the war was in the direction of leisure and entertainment reading rather than serious critique of current events and political situations. Character cartoons with a protagonist and everyday life narrative gained prominence at this time. The first rise in popularity of this manhua genre was between the 1950s and 1960s. The origin of this type of genre can be found in Shanghai as far back as the 1920s in miniseries cartoons published in periodical magazines and newspapers.

Between 1928 and 1929, the miniseries manhua in China were influenced by Western comics such as *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday* (Gilbert Dalziel, 1884) and *The Yellow Kid* (Richard Outcault, 1896). In China, the first manhua regularly starring a character, Mr. Wang (Wang Xiansheng), was created by Yeh Qianyu and published in *Shanghai Sketch* in 1928. Other examples include Dr. Reform (Gaizao Boshi), by Lu Shaofei in Shanghai, Big Brother He (He Laoda) and Mr. Taishi (Taishi Xiansheng), created by Yeh Yinquan, who also published a Guangzhou-based cartoon magazine, *The Sketch (Banjiao Manhua)* in 1929. These cartoons featuring characters provided reference points for the future development of cartoon characters in Hong Kong. Under the influence of the Shanghai and Guangzhou works, particularly of the characters Wang Xiansheng by Yeh Qianyu and He Laoda by Li Fanfu, the cartoon strip format began to gain popularity in Hong Kong. Newspapers also started to have manhua sections in 1934 and included

this format of cartoon arts. Among the rising local cartoon artists in Hong Kong in the 1930s were Huang Fenzhou, Chen Ziduo, Si Tuzhi and Yuan Buyun. Some Guangzhou cartoon artists included Li Fanfu, Lin Qin and Zheng Jiazhen also later moved to Hong Kong to pursue their work (Wong and Yeung).

After World War II, virtually everything was damaged and awaiting redevelopment in Hong Kong. Cartoon strips in newspapers were one of the quickest things to re-appear as a sign of the post-war return to normalcy. These four-panel strips also set the main cartoon format in Hong Kong for the next 30 years. The target audience for this format and venue was the general mass of Hong Kong people, and the contents therefore focused on aspects of daily life that would be familiar to most average Hong Kong people, seldom touching on politics. Similarly, dialogue was colloquial Cantonese rather than refined or literary Chinese. The dominant genre of this period is best represented by Cantonese styled cartoons such as Yeh Qianyu's *He Laoda* and Li Fanfu's *Daguan*. The works of Yuan Buyun such as *Kiddy Cheung (Xi Luxiang)*, *Miss Liu (Liujie)* and *Little Wong (Wangzi)* were also popular and representative of lower class life at that time. *Xi Luxiang* was even made into a movie featuring child star Bruce Lee in 1950 (Yeung and Kwong). These low-cost manhua were originally created for the newspapers and later collected into books of cartoon strips by a single author which became the best sellers of all time during that period. Although a new style was emerging, the production of manhua in Hong Kong between 1945 and 1949 was minimal due in part to the lack of an active market during the civil war in mainland China between nationalists and communists. Apart from the newspaper examples, the major production of Hong Kong manhua was in the re-circulation of materials produced before the war in Shanghai and Guangzhou.

In the 1950s, with the change of government in mainland China and the influx of money and people to Hong Kong from the mainland, the Hong Kong economy and industrial development began to flourish. With these changes, demands for cultural products increased, and the variety of publications available improved steadily. Before the liberation of China, mainland China was the main source of publications for Chinese readers in Hong Kong and other Southeast Asian countries and in overseas Chinese communities. However, after the liberation, manhua with non-Marxist and non-communist contents were considered "evil" under the new regime of the communist government, and production ceased. Under such circumstances, Hong Kong, as a capitalist society on Chinese soil, became the only region in China which had the experience, creativity, and production talents to continue the development of modern

cartoons and comics. After experiencing a few years mainly relying on the reprinting the pre-war materials, Hong Kong gradually replaced China as the primary production source of new Chinese reading materials for the region and beyond. Thus, Hong Kong became the center of production for Chinese-language manhua catering to Chinese readers all over the world starting from the 1950s. With the end of the mainland civil war and the revitalization of the mainland market as well as the increasing demands from local and overseas markets, manhua production in Hong Kong took up the opportunity, and rapidly expanded and enjoyed consistent success.

With the growth of post-war baby boomers, most of the manhua for children and story books produced during this time were in high demand and sold very well. The longest-lived manhua periodical reading for children was *Children's Paradise (Ertong Yueyuen)*, first published in 1953, founded and edited by Luo Guanjiao, a Guangzhou based artist who came to Hong Kong shortly after the war. This publication was popular among the Chinese community outside Hong Kong as well, particularly in other countries in Southeast Asia. Publication did not cease until 1995, after 1006 issues over four decades of publication. In addition to such long-lived publication for children, adult-oriented manhua also enjoyed wide popularity. The most significant and influential manhua magazine was *Cartoons World (Manhua Shijie)*, first published in 1956 and published through 1964. This periodical magazine not only published work by major artists at that time such as Zheng Jiazhen, Chen Ziduo, Li Fanfu, Li Linghan, Ding Gang, and Huang Mengtian but also nurtured a new generation of cartoons and comic artists in Hong Kong. By doing so, it provided the talent for the first production boom of manhua periodicals in the 1960s.

In 1961, the creative team of *Manhua Shijie* produced another periodical on a weekly basis called *Caricature Weekly (Manhua Zhoubao)*, which immediately became a market success. This new publication utilized a tabloid newspaper format, with only two sheets of eight unbound pages, selling at 10 Hong Kong cents. This format and idea can be traced to the "penny paper" and "half penny paper" found in American comics history (Sabin, *Comics*). This new publication was so popular that it soon shifted from weekly to daily publication. Of course, the immense popularity of the paper also prompted many imitators hoping to gain quick profits. Some notable examples of penny papers published between 1961 and 1965 are: *Entertainment News (Meiri Manhua)*, *New Comics (Xin Manhua)*, *Epoch Comics Weekly (Shidai Manhua)*, *Daily Comics (Tiantian Manhua)*, *The Cartoon and Comic Gardens (Manhua Yueyuen)*, *Rador Pictorial (Leida Huabao)*, and *Companion Comics*

(*Liangyou Manhua*). The main attractions of these tabloid format manhua papers were cartoon strips and short stories created by local cartoons and comics artists, but sometimes works reprinted from the American cartoons and comics were taken without the authorization of copyright. For the large quantity of followers of the tabloid format, quality was seldom the focus, and most of them were of poor quality, as Sabin observed in the halfpenny papers in the history of American comics (*Comics* 19). The quick growth of this phenomenon of tabloid penny papers also helped the rapid expansion of the manhua industry in Hong Kong, creating a surge of growth which peaked in the early to mid 1960s. The format began to die out by the late 1960s.

Other publication formats such as the serial manhua and children's pictorials also flourished in order to accommodate the needs of baby boomers in the 1950s and the resulting demand for children's reading materials. From the mid-1950s to mid-1960s, the best-selling serial manhua were *Master-Q (Lao Fuzi)* by Wang Ze in 1964, *Dumb Detective (Sha Zhentan)* by Song Sanlang in 1965, and *13-Dot Cartoons (Shisam Dian)* by Lee Wai-chun in 1966. This handful of cartoon characters represented different social stereotypes and ideological directions, and each had its own market niche of readers. Of these, *Lao Fuzi* is the only one still published and sold today. Its circulation is not only to Hong Kong Chinese, but also to Chinese readers throughout Southeast Asia and among overseas Chinese communities. *Lao Fuzi* is the longest-running Chinese series manhua publication in history. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, contents of manhua were based on small things related to the everyday life of the people, with only occasional critiques of social problems such as housing, inflation, education, and crime. They seldom directed their attention to the political sphere. This phenomenon on the one hand was a result of the weakness of political concern on the part of the general mass of people in Hong Kong, and on the other hand reflected the desire of publishers and artists to avoid controversial subjects that might detract from the popularity of their work.

With the advent of television in Hong Kong in 1967, manhua would never regain their peak of popularity. Television culture rapidly gained popularity and created keen competition for the entertainment and leisure time and attention of the people. The content, style, themes, and characters of Hong Kong manhua were also influenced by television culture. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the attraction of television was very powerful in part because of the influences of other cultures such as Japan and the United States. Because of these pressures, Hong Kong manhua were essentially forced to make changes in order to compete with television. Under this pressure, Hong Kong manhua developed in a

new direction which consisted mainly of Kung Fu and gangster themes and characters influenced by Bruce Lee's movies. Apart from this new direction, the most representative cartoon artist and character was *Ngau-chai* created by Wang Sima in the early 1970s. This manhua projected a very healthy image of a little boy living in a happy family with an understanding father and caring mother. This four-panel cartoon strip was first published in *Ming Pao* and later *Ming Pao Weekly* which was targeted toward middle-class families and children. *Ngau-chai* was loved by both adults and children with its lighthearted story line and humorous approach to everyday household life with children. Unfortunately, this outstanding work ceased in 1983 when the artist, Wang Sima succumbed to cancer. The departure of Wang was a great loss for Hong Kong manhua, but his works continue to influence other young cartoon and comics artist. His works, such as *Father • Ngau-chai • Ms. Gorgeous Susan (Jingnu Sushan)*, and *Desbussy (Dibaoshi)* were reprinted in a series of collections published throughout the 1980s.

In response to the competition of television, other Hong Kong cartoons began to explore new directions and styles. *Experimental Cartoons (Shiyan Manhua)* and *Cartoons News (Manhua Tongxun)* were published in 1975 by a group of young artists and edited by Yuan Yimu, Mok Hua and Yeung Wai-pong. These two magazines were considered experimental and non-mainstream, and they were the first to introduce criticism of manhua in Hong Kong. They also encouraged serious work and introduced new concepts in cartoon and comic arts from overseas. However, their views and objectives were never far-reaching enough, and these two magazines only managed to publish three issues each before their meager budgets were depleted. Despite these failures, this same group of cartoon artists did not give up on promoting and organizing non-mainstream manhua projects. In 1981, they co-organized an exhibition with the Hong Kong Arts Center entitled "The Cartoon Exhibition of Hong Kong." The exhibition pulled together cartoon artists working in Hong Kong at the time and promoted the artistic elements of manhua rather than the commercial elements and mainstream themes of violence, sex, and vulgarity. After the exhibition, participants came together to publish two more magazines, *Funny World (Guima Shijie)* in 1981, and *News Cartoons (Xinwen Manhua)* in 1982, hoping to promote cartoons and critique. Again, these two magazines were short-lived and the effect of this effort was minimal. The mainstream were already dominated by kung fu fighting genre *lianhuantu* which gradually became the major Hong Kong manhua style which had been developing and gaining popularity since the early 1970s (Wong and Yeung).

Lianhuan tu Becoming Manhua and Hong Kong Contemporary Culture

Hong Kong was facing dramatic change in the 1970s, not only from rapid economic expansion, but also from the reverberations of the 1967 riots, which had changed the administrative policies of the colonial government. Beginning in the early 1970s, Hong Kong was situated between the old and the new. The mass of baby boomers was growing up at the same time that the transition between old and new was accelerating. Some elements of unfairness under the colonial rule as well as some underlying instability were tangible evidences of the transitional phase. At this time, kung fu fever fueled by Bruce Lee's films provided an outlet for the masses to escape the unpleasant aspects of their daily life. Taking part in the popularity and success of the Bruce Lee phenomenon, kung fu and martial arts became one of the mainstream and most distinguish genres of Hong Kong's manhua scene in the 1970s and 1980s.

The visual style and drawing techniques of this newly evolved Kung-Fu and fighting genre were very much influenced by the American action comics and Japanese manga. This new genre is a combination of content, pictures, and story-telling actually in line with the traditional ancient Chinese picture-book format known as *lianhuan tu*. This traditional format entailed a series of pictures with some script over-written on top of the visuals. The purpose was to tell a story in a way that was accessible to readers with marginal literacy, and this type of story-telling picture book was available in China for centuries. The term "*lianhuan tu*" used to represent those traditional picture books started to become popular around 1900 and eventually became a standardized term around 1925 (Wong and Yeung 95). The 1920s also saw the commercialization and popularization of *lianhuan tu* all over China. During this period in Shanghai, this format developed in the direction of horror stories and other narratives that were not designed to promulgate the higher virtues. The original genres of *lianhuan tu* mainly depicted traditional Chinese stories in costumes from different dynasties of China, and war stories are commonly found from around the war period. Traditionally, *lianhuan tu* was considered a low-brow leisure reading material for the mass audience with little education and aesthetic sophistication, and it was not considered as one of the forms of manhua before the war. Because of their explicit subject matter, *lianhuan tu* were always under criticism for indecent content and imagery. *Lianhuan tu* materials available in Hong Kong from the 1920s up to the war were mainly from Shanghai and were found primarily at street kiosks, where they were loaned out to readers for a nominal fee. Street lending kiosks could still commonly be found even during the Japanese occupation, and did not completely die out until the 1970s.

With the establishment of communist China, the old style lianhuantu with traditional costume and feudalist stories from the mainland was forbidden, so the merchants who had been loaning them from their street kiosks were forced to find a new supply of comics for their customers. In this environment, lianhuantu artists in Hong Kong or those who had just arrived from the mainland had a chance to develop. Because of its close linkage with the traditional Chinese lianhuantu, the Hong Kong manhua still maintained some traditional elements such as the use of the apprenticeship system as in Shanghai. However, although the production system remained similar to the Shanghai tradition, the contents and style of the Hong Kong versions began to change and gradually reflected influences from Japanese and American cartoons and comics styles, gradually becoming a hybrid of eastern and western styles that was unique to Hong Kong.

American cartoon and comic books could be obtained by Hong Kong people before the war. However, because of the cultural difference and the price barrier, they did not become very popular at that time. With new immigrants from mainland China and the accompanying increase in population, the demand for all sorts of leisure reading material was increased. By the early 1950s, translations of American cartoon books were available to Hong Kong readers, and characters such as Pinocchio, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Elmer Fudd became more popular. Bilingual or Chinese versions were available of these American cartoons and comics with American characters. In addition, there were locally made series that carried obvious influences of American comics. For example, *Little Angeli*, first produced in 1954 by the three Bao brothers, featured a title and small round-faced characters modeled after American examples such as *Little Abner* and *Popeye*, with the addition of exaggerated features, Chinese elements such as clothing and story themes, and more panels per page than the American originals. The popularity of American cartoons and comics not only provided an inspiration for the cartoons artists in Hong Kong, but also attracted a large number of cross-over readers from lianhuantu genres. Thus, some lianhuantu artists also created manhua in order to earn a living. Among those, Hui Gwanwan is one of the lianhuantu artists who was able to produce both cartoons and lianhuantu successfully. He adopted the American comics elements into lianhuantu and integrated traditional Chinese line-art drawing style with more panels per page, better story, character design, and so on. The stimulation of the American comics definitely helped in the establishment of Hong Kong's own particular hybridized style. Hui's big hit *Uncle Choi*, first started in 1958 as a comedy outlining a story of a simple-minded man in the army. The story soon turned into a more

serious war-time story of a hero, Uncle Choi. Unlike most lianhuantu at that time, *Uncle Choi* had its own original story, and included modern dress.

Because of the success of *Uncle Choi*, which had also contributed to changing the lianhuantu to the larger size, now 5 x 7 inches (landscape format) instead of the previous 3.6 x 5 inches, other artists copied the format, such that after *Uncle Choi* most newly emerging lianhuantu were published in the new larger size. However, starting in the 1960s, the Hong Kong manhua industry including lianhuantu faced the challenge of the widespread production of pirate copies, printed without copyright permission or payment of royalties. Pirated Japanese manga and Taiwanese comics were a better bargain than the Hong Kong manhua since the same 10 cents bought more pages in pirated versions. In response, the Hong Kong manhua shifted format again, changing the 5 x 7-inch landscape format into a 5 x 7-inch vertical format that had more pages and sold for 20 cents. Some Hong Kong manhua were even published in sizes as large as 7 x 10 inches. This size eventually became the most common size, and is still the most common size of locally-produced manhua today. Apart from changing the format to keep up with the competition, the drawing style of lianhuantu was also becoming more exaggerated and the panels were beginning to be more sophisticated by suggesting the use of camera angles. Drawing techniques became more detailed, and the themes and contents were no longer related to costume drama, but more related to modern city martial arts stories. With these improvements, finally in the early 1970s the locally made lianhuantu were able to stabilize and survive, and evolved a unique visual style which gradually being recognized as the mainstream form of manhua in Hong Kong in the 1980s.

Among the most successful artists in the 1960s to make adjustments toward the successful new fighting genre inspired by Bruce Lee was Tony Wong (Wong Yuk-long), who produced a hybrid of Japanese style with techniques and characters together with what he had learned as an apprentice with the old-style lianhuantu artists. His first lianhuantu series that attracted popular attention were *Little Vagabond* (1968), *The Son of Ultra-Man* (1969), and *Solar Lord* (1969). His biggest hit was *Siulauman* (1970), a serial lianhuantu about the lives of a group of young people living in a public housing project in Hong Kong. These protagonists represented good, and they encountered a number of gangsters and other bad elements. The story emphasized justice and triumph over evil, but achieved through violence. This lianhuantu thus echoed Bruce Lee movies, which also presented their protagonist as a defender of right who used violent means to attain justice. This series became

immediately popular upon its publication in 1970, and it attracted many imitators. Amongst the many imitators of *Siulauman* that were very popular as well as long-lived was one specifically named *Lee Siu-long* (*Bruce Lee*). Created by Shangguan Xiaobao (Kwong Namlun) in 1971, *Lee Siu-long*, whose Chinese name was taken directly from the legendary movie star Bruce Lee, is still published today. However, the violence and explicitness of physical destruction in *Siulauman* and *Lee Siu-long* have been strongly criticized since they were first published.

Starting from the 1960s, the thematic content of many lianhuantu had degenerated toward sex and violence, provoking a great deal of social critique (see HKSWA). This created a negative image for the lianhuantu industry in general, and their works were widely considered indecent and inappropriate for teenagers and children. Because the industry image was so poor, lianhuantu artists, to avoid condemnation, were increasingly unwilling to label themselves as lianhuantu artists, and they began to refer to themselves as manhua artists. The critique of violent content has been more focused on *Siulauman*, which in 1975 was renamed as *Lungfu Mun (Oriental Heroes)* under the pressure of social critique as well as the effect of the Indecent Publication Law which took effect that year. The old name, *Siulauman*, literally translated as "Little Rascal," carried connotations of evil and anti-social activities. The new name, "Oriental Heroes" brought with it more positive connotations suggesting strength and fortitude. Along with the new name, the story background was also altered such that the protagonists were no longer from public housing projects, but were now said to be from Japan. The story lines were less realistic and more clearly fictional, thus avoiding critiques that they were providing negative role models for young readers or reflecting negative images of Hong Kong society. The change in law toward the Indecent Publication Law of 1975 required the inspection and approval of manhua contents but applied only to magazines and not daily newspapers. Thus, Tony Wong and Shangguan Xiaobao switched their lianhuantu format from magazines to the tabloid size newspaper and began to publish their manhua daily in order to avoid inspection entirely. With these changes as well as a shift toward less graphic violence, their lianhuantu did survive. Their newly formatted daily manhua newspapers lasted for two years, fading out after their contents became less violent so that they could safely return to the original format.

After their attempts to limit their content, the success of Tony Wong and Shangguan Xiaobao allowed them to dominate the Hong Kong manhua market, and their story lines and drawing techniques remained fairly constant over many years. A breakthrough in drawing style was

eventually created by Ma Wing-shing with *The Chinese Hero (Zhonghua Yingxiong)* in 1982 which first was published as a supplement of Wong's other major kung fu title, *Drunken Fist* (1982). Ma Wing-shing was one of the star artists of Tony Wong's company Jademan (Holdings) Limited. *Zhonghua Yingxiong* was detached from *Drunken Fist* and first published as an independent series in late 1983 under the flagship of Jademan Comics. It achieved sales figures of 40,000 copies and proved very profitable to the company. Ma's new drawing style was very realistic, with bold colors and detailed faces resembling real people. His style was heavily influenced and inspired by Ryoichi Ikegami, the Japanese manga artist of *Crying Freeman*. *Zhonghua Yingxiong* was an immediate success in Hong Kong, creating a rags-to-riches story for Ma, who had received little formal education and had not even completed high school. His success changed the perception of Hong Kong people, who had formerly considered that manhua drawing was not real art nor a real profession. His work was representational in style and meticulously detailed, and thus could more easily be seen as artistic production.

At this time the manhua industry of Hong Kong was increasingly dominated by Jademan (Holdings) Limited owned by Tony Wong. Shangguan Xiaobao, its biggest competitor until the 1980s, was also bought out by Tony Wong. In 1986, Jademan Comics was listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. By this time, Jademan was very dominant in the Hong Kong manhua market, responsible for 80% of Hong Kong local manhua sales (Jademan Comics). Finally a split between Ma and Wong came in 1988, and Shangguan followed, ending their long-time professional collaboration. After Ma left Jademan Comics, he created a new manhua series called *Tin Ha Pictorials*, under the auspices of a new company, Tin Ha Publishing in 1989. Later, *Tin Ha Pictorials* were the basis for a mainstream motion picture in 1997, *The Storm Rider*. By 1990, the market was no longer dominated by Jademan, but was now competing with other newly established manhua publishing companies such as Ziyou Ren (established in 1988) Tin Ha (established in 1989) and Kwong Si (established in 1989). Both Ziyou Ren and Kwong Si were established by staff and artists who had previously worked for Jademan. Because of the increased competition, the violent fighting genre was diversifying and began to touch the taboo areas which Tony Wong and Shangguan tried to avoid in the mid 1970s.

Gangster stories were introduced in manhua such as *Teddy Boy* (1992), *Portland Street* (1992), and *Red Light District* (1992) published by a newly established company, King's Fountain Limited. The story settings for these new manhua were all in Hong Kong, whereas the pre-

vious generation of fighting lianhuantu (*Lungfu Mun* and *Lee Siu-long*) avoided the Hong Kong setting for their violent scenarios. The new stories glorified gangsters and the use of violence in a way that had not been seen before, with realistic settings and scenarios that suggested a relation to actual Hong Kong life. Under an improved law governing the distribution of indecent publications, some of these new triad genre manhua were restricted from sale to minors under 18 years of age and carried a sealed wrapper with a warning message attached.

In the first half of the 1990s, the genre of violent movies was also diversifying, and the Hong Kong manhua market was clearly divided into Japanese manga and local manhua, with only a few alternative manhua artists working in areas other than violent fighting genres. The trend at this time was toward diversification, with more types of manhua emerging, and it was difficult for new manhua to fit squarely within previously existing genres. This diversification was changing the Hong Kong manhua market into a more complex postmodern mixture of audience tastes and available materials. The evolution of Hong Kong manhua did not stop here, but continued to diversify away from the domination of fighting genres and Japanese-produced manga. During this diversification phase, some young manhua artists could be seen experimenting with new drawing techniques and story lines almost entirely outside the fighting genres.

The End of the Century and Future Developments

Hong Kong in the last decade of the transition period towards the handover of sovereignty to China experienced new diversity in many arenas including manhua creation. The mainstream locally produced manhua genres and themes were mainly proliferating into stories about triads, gambling, romance, ghosts, and sword epics. From time to time specific trends would emerge in one of these directions, and between trends some manhua artists consistently continued to work on political cartoons, children's reading materials, and alternative comics. In children's reading materials, the most popular magazine was *Yellow Bus*, first published in 1996. The main attraction is the story, which follows the pig-protagonist *McMug*, drawn by Mak Ga-bik and written by Tse Lap-man. *McMug* has become the most popular locally produced manhua character in the 1990s, in part because of his cute appearance and in part because of the appeal of the visuals and story line to both adults and children. Like most modern comics in the United States and Japan, this Hong Kong produced manhua character also has many product tie-ins that can be purchased by fans. Such products include stationery, stuffed toys, calendars, greeting cards, pens and pencils, and so on.

The development of recent trends in alternative manhua for young adults began in the late 1980s. Artists such as Li Chi-dat have begun to create highly detailed non-mainstream manhua heavily influenced by Japanese style. He and others work independently rather than for manhua companies. Other prominent artists working on non-mainstream manhua include Craig Au-Yeung and Lai Dat-wing. With a bachelor's degree in design, Craig Au-Yeung approaches manhua as a combination of illustration and art, with story lines that are at times fragmented. His work has received attention from audiences looking for stylistic sophistication. Lai Dat-wing also has a distinctive drawing style, sometimes experimenting with different composition, camera angles, and use of dialogue, at times even creating a whole work without dialogue. The successes of Li Chi-dat, Craig Au-Yeung and Lai Dat-wing illustrate the possibilities for self-expression and artistic exploration within the medium of manhua in Hong Kong, providing models and encouragement for younger artists.

One of these younger generation artists, Lily Lau, the first self-proclaimed feminist manhua artist in Hong Kong, published her first book, entitled *Mom's Drawer is at the Bottom*, in 1998. The book is heavily infused with feminist themes and messages including a critique of gender inequalities and heterosexual relationships. Although her work seems radical for the general public, its initial publication met with a positive reception. The drawing style she employs is graphic, and she does not hesitate to depict women's and men's bodies in a sexually explicit ways compared to other non-mainstream comic artists in Hong Kong. Lily Lau's initial success with her first book probably means that she will continue to pursue comic art as her main profession. Lily Lau and Mak Ga-bik are two of a very few successful female manhua artists in Hong Kong. In the earlier decades, Lee Wai-chun, the creator of *13-Dot Cartoons* (1966-1976, 1996-1999), was almost the only prominent female manhua artist with long-lasting success. The dearth of female artists over several decades is a reflection of the fact that the local manhua scene has always been very much dominated by male artists in Hong Kong, as in most of the world.

As the economy and society of Hong Kong has progressed, the education level and demand for higher quality manhua on the part of the audience has also increased. Unfortunately, apart from those examining the production of images within manhua, there are very few critical and analytical magazines or venues for critical commentaries on local manhua. There were some very short-lived manhua review magazines consisting mainly of text without much reproduction of imagery. For example the 1990, *Monthly Comic Magazine (Manhua Tumu)* was the

first manhua critique magazine in Hong Kong, but only five issues of it were published. When it was started again in 1993, again only three issues were published. The magazine was published by Sub-culture Publications, a mid-sized book company specializing in publications on Hong Kong popular culture. The magazine suffered losses from low circulation and finally was forced to cease publication. Another magazine published by Ma Wing-shing's company, Tin Ha Publishing, called *Tin Ha Magazine*, was published in 1991. The contents were more focused toward reporting news of the Tin Ha Publishing. However, even with this more commercial purpose and with the financial backing of a large company behind it, only twenty issues of this magazine were produced. Again the revenues generated were not enough to support continued publication. However, despite the failure of independent manhua review magazines, there are some newspapers and other periodicals that carry reports on developments in the Hong Kong manhua industry on a regular basis. These commercial venues are really the only place where a printed record of the manhua industry has been consistently kept since the mid-1990s, and no consistent general record of developments exists for earlier decades.

The attitude of the general public towards locally produced manhua is still critical of the sexual and violent content even though recent work by young alternative manhua artists has brought new vigor and enthusiasm to the industry. Support for local manhua is still minimal, especially in preserving and understanding the history and cultural importance of manhua from an analytical and developmental perspective. Occasionally, prominent artists such as Craig Au-Yeung and Lily Lau have received public funding from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), but the HKADC focus is more on the production of comics rather than on critical analysis of them. In 1998, though, the HKADC did sponsor two issues of a manhua critique magazine project known as *Cartoonet*. The project was designed to provide a venue for the development of a critical understanding of Hong Kong manhua as an important element of local popular culture. However, funding for the project was not renewed after the initial two issues were produced.

The development of Hong Kong manhua did finally lead to the establishment of a unique local style and flourishing industry by the 1990s. Having begun as an attachment or satellite of production for the mainland manhua industry, it eventually split off and became an independent system that was able to withstand the successive shocks of influence from foreign comics and cultures. The local manhua industry has been through many economic phases as well, developing from an unstable collection of publications sold at temporary street kiosks to a

highly profitable and stratified system including a company large enough to be listed on the stock market and many smaller competitors. Now that Hong Kong has resumed its place as a part of China, it may face increasing competitive pressures in the areas of creativity and production costs. On the other hand, China may represent a chance to distribute Hong Kong manhua to a vast audience financially ready to participate in the pleasures of popular culture. It is uncertain how Hong Kong's reunification with China will affect the local manhua market, but judging from previous historical evidence, it seems most likely that new innovations and developments will be able to sustain the Hong Kong manhua industry in ever-changing forms. For example, the newly evolved medium of the internet provides artists with a new venue to publish their works relatively inexpensively, and it also provides a very good venue to attract young artists to experiment with their work. This direction most likely will continue to be explored as manhua arts in Hong Kong have changed throughout the decades in accordance with economic, political, and cultural shifts. Hopefully this important cultural form will not continue to be ignored by scholars of Hong Kong culture.

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