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EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

The Cultural Revolution in Images: Caricature Posters from Guangzhou, 1966–1977

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In April 2018, the University Library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) launched a digital collection titled “The Cultural Revolution in Images: Caricature Posters from Guangzhou, 1966–1977” that made 216 caricature posters from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution available online for research and teaching purposes.¹ As the curator of this digital exhibition, I had the opportunity to spend more than a year organizing, analyzing, and discussing with colleagues and students the content of these images. This photo essay aims to guide readers through the collection and present the preliminary results of my research about the production and purposes of these images. Besides providing readers with an overview of the material available in the digital collection, I will discuss how these artifacts enrich and challenge our knowledge of art during the Cultural Revolution, opening new questions about the production of art and grassroots politics in the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Most of the pieces showcased in this collection are satirical caricatures depicting the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and were drawn in Guangzhou at the beginning or end of the Cultural Revolution. The CUHK Library acquired this collection with the help of book dealer Wong Chi Ching 黄志清. During the Cultural Revolution, Mr. Wong gathered Chinese books and magazines, which were later acquired by prestigious universities in Hong Kong and around the world. The CUHK Library initially purchased 158 posters from Mr. Wong between 2006 and 2008. The collector kindly donated another 58 scrolls to the library in 2015.

It is quite challenging to classify these images, as they generally differ from the well-known propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution—such as those available at Stefan Landsberger’s website Chinese posters.net—in at least two ways. First, whereas most of the

propaganda posters propose positive models for the viewers, these artifacts focus instead on satirical portrayals of purged leaders and cultural personalities. Second, they stand out because they are hand-drawn instead of printed. They could be called “cartoons” (*manhua* 漫画), a term that appropriately describes the satirical content of these pieces. However, the word *manhua* is very general, and it is used mostly to define images printed in newspapers. The term “propaganda posters” (*xuanchuanhua* 宣传画) could also be used, as it correctly underlines the fact that these images appeared in public; however, “propaganda posters” does not accurately emphasize the satirical content of these artifacts. Eventually, I decided to label them as “caricature posters” (*fengci xuanchuanhua* 讽刺宣传画), a term that comprises both their content and their function. I then divided these caricature posters into two main categories based on date of production: the larger group is composed of images drawn by Red Guard groups in Guangzhou from 1966 to 1967; the second group contains caricatures of the members of the Gang of Four drawn in the same city from 1976 to 1977.

Who created these caricatures? How were they used? Were they created according to the rules established by authorities (as in the case of propaganda posters), or were they a more genuine expression of their authors’ political beliefs? Why are there no caricatures dated between 1968 and 1976? How do the images created in the 1960s differ from those of the 1970s? In this photo essay I will address some of these questions on the basis of the information provided by the posters and secondary literature. Because more research is needed to fully answer these questions, it is my intention to bring these artifacts to the attention of interested academicians and to start a discussion about their possible uses for researching the history of the Cultural Revolution.

Red Guards’ Caricature Posters in the Early Years of the Cultural Revolution, 1966–1967

Most of the caricature posters in the CUHK Library’s collection were drawn by members of various Red Guard groups in Guangzhou from 1966 to 1967. This elementary, yet necessary, information is readily available, as the authors of these images decided to sign and date their artworks and sometimes even provide information about the exhibitions in which they originally appeared. Although the reliability of this information should be questioned (an issue I will

discuss later), it still offers precious data on the production of art during the early phases of the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou.

Where could one see these satirical images? Where were they exhibited? Not much is known about the Red Guards' creation and use of satirical cartoons. Scholars focus mostly on propaganda posters, sculptures, and oil paintings—artworks that often appeared in official exhibitions in Beijing in 1967 and were later reproduced in Red Guards' publications such as *Art Storm* (*Meishu fenglei* 美术风雷) (Andrews 1994, 320–332). Similarly, academic research conducted on the satirical art of the Cultural Revolution is overwhelmingly focused on the work of Red Guards in Beijing (Wang and Yan 2000; Wang 2005). Art historian Wang Mingxian argues that caricatures were popular items in Red Guards' art exhibitions in Beijing. For instance, the “Cartoon Exhibition to Thoroughly Annihilate the Reactionaries Liu and Deng” (“Chedi zalan Liu Deng fandong luxian manhua” 彻底砸烂刘邓反动路线漫画) opened on January 5, 1967, and similar events were organized in the following months (Wang and Yan 2000, 7–10). However, contemporary articles about this exhibition indicate that most of the artifacts were eulogistic images of Mao Zedong, information that cast doubt on the satirical nature of the exhibition (see, for example, Wang and Yan 2000, 7).

Some of the posters from the CUHK collection were displayed in exhibitions in Guangzhou, probably together with artwork of different nature. Besides being displayed in Red Guard exhibitions, these images might have been hung together with big-character posters (*dazibao* 大字报) and small-character posters (*xiaozibao* 小字报), the most popular media for expressing political opinions during the Cultural Revolution. Whereas big-character posters were mainly textual (they contained slogans, letters, articles, and satirical poems), many of them also appeared in the form of comic strips and cartoons (Leijonhufvud 1990, 18).

Cartoons are therefore acknowledged as one form of media employed by Red Guards to persecute the enemies of the revolution, but not much is known about their content. Certainly, the most studied example of satirical Cultural Revolution art is Weng Rulan's 翁如兰 (1944–) poster “A Crowd of Clowns” (“Qunchou tu” 群丑图), arguably the most influential caricature from the period.² Weng, the daughter of an establish history professor, was a student at an elite art academy in Beijing. In creating the poster, she sketched the caricatures of thirty-nine political leaders and intellectuals who became the subjects of criticism in the early stage of the Cultural

Revolution. In February 1967, Weng's work was published in the influential Red Guards' magazine, *The East Is Red* (*Dongfanghong* 东风红). According to witnesses, copies of her caricatures could be seen everywhere in Beijing (Andrews 1994, 338). "A Crowd of Clowns" successfully established the iconographic paradigm for satirical representations of purged leaders, and, as we will see, they strongly influenced the work of the Red Guards in Guangzhou.

On this basis, what do the caricature posters in the CUHK collection add to what we already know? First, they provide us with information about Red Guard groups engaged in caricature-poster production in Guangzhou. Second, they prove that Red Guards were actively producing caricatures of leaders and art personalities before 1967, the year in which major exhibitions took place in Beijing and in which "A Crowd of Clowns" became popular. Finally, they offer us a glimpse into the political life of Red Guards in Guangzhou.

The key phases of the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou and the sociopolitical background of the major Red Guard groups have been analyzed by a number of scholars (see Vogel 1971, 271–319; Rosen 1982), and the activities of Red Guards in universities and middle schools in the city are also well researched (Bennett and Montaperto 1971). By contrast, not much is known about the production and employment of the art used in their political rallies. The caricatures in the CUHK collection allow us to partially fill this gap, as they inform us about which Red Guard groups actively participated in the creation of satirical portraits of leaders, and about their methods of displaying them.

To give an example, one of several caricatures of the director of the Central Propaganda Department, Tao Zhu 陶铸 (1908–1968)—a favorite victim of the Red Guards—contains a number of details about the identity of the artist and the poster's function (poster 1 in accompanying photo essay).³ Below the caricature of the leader, we can read the name of the group who drew the image (Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts Red Flag Cartoon Soldiers [*Guangzhou meiyuan hongqi huabing* 广州美院红旗画兵]), the occasion for which it was created (an exhibition to criticize Tao Zhu), and the date of its creation (December 30, 1966). The fact that this caricature poster, as well as several others in the collection, is attributed to Red Guards active in art academies in Guangzhou is not surprising, as most of the artworks of the Cultural Revolution were created by students who received formal training. But not all of the caricature posters are signed by youth with a clear academic background; some are signed by

Red Guard groups composed of workers or office employees. There are plenty of other Red Guard groups mentioned on the posters. The most prolific factions are Spring Thunder (*Chunlei* 春雷), The East Is Red (*Dongfanghong* 东方红), and Red Flag (*Hongqi* 红旗), the Pearl River Film Studios East Is Red (*Zhuying dongfanghong* 珠影东方红) but many other names also appear.⁴

Another interesting feature of this caricature of Tao Zhu is that it is dated December 30, 1966, probably the day in which the exhibition against him took place. Although most of the information we have about the production of caricatures during the Cultural Revolution indicates that these artifacts became popular among Red Guards in Beijing in early 1967 (as pointed out earlier), several of the images in the CUHK collection are dated November or December 1966. This time frame indicates that Red Guards in Guangzhou were actively using the caricatures as weapons in their political fight before the organization of official exhibitions in Beijing and well before the publication of Weng Rulan's "Crowd of Clowns" in the following year.

The existence of caricatures dated 1966 complicates the assumption that "A Crowd of Clowns" was the main model for Red Guards' caricatures, and it raises questions about the circulation of iconography among Red Guards in China in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. According to Bennett and Montaperto's 1971 biography of Red Guard Dai Hsiao-ai, representatives of various Red Guard groups were regularly moving between Beijing and Guangzhou, where liaison headquarters were established to guarantee the flow of information between the two cities. This movement of Red Guards certainly eased the transfer of iconography between Beijing and Guangzhou, and helped "A Crowd of Clowns" become a source of inspiration in Guangzhou in 1967. But what about the caricatures created before the publication and dissemination of this work? An analysis of the images themselves can provide some answers.

To begin with, the influence of Weng Rulan's placard on the Red Guards in Guangzhou is unquestionable. Several of the caricatures dated after February 1967 bear an uncanny resemblance to "A Crowd of Clowns" and also to "One Hundred Clowns" ("Baichoutu" 百丑图), another iconic caricature poster of the Cultural Revolution.⁵ For example, Red Guards' caricatures of Wang Guangmei 王光美 (1921–2006), President Liu Shaoqi's 刘少奇 (1898–1969) wife, are clearly modeled on Weng's work. In "A Crowd of Clowns," Wang Guangmei

appears on a bicycle wearing a *qipao* (cheongsam), necklace, and huge hat. The First Lady selected this outfit for her official trip to Southeast Asia, a choice that became a subject of criticism during the Cultural Revolution. The words on her bag read “Taoyuan Experience” (*Taoyuan jingyan* 桃园经验), the title of her much criticized report on the results of economic reforms in Taoyuan. That document became the basis of Liu Shaoqi’s declaration, “Policies and Regulations for the Socialist Education Movement in the Countryside” (Lee and Stefanowska 2003, 530). The caricatures of Wang Guangmei drawn in Guangzhou share the same iconography and mimic the style of Weng Rulan’s drawing (poster 2).



Poster 2. “Wang Guangmei’s Taoyuan Tour” (“Wang Guangmei Taoyuan xing” 王光美桃园行). Wang Guangmei 王光美, President Liu Shaoqi’s 刘少奇 wife, appears on a bicycle wearing an outfit she selected for her official trip to Southeast Asia, a choice that became a subject of criticism during the Cultural Revolution. The words on her bag read “Taoyuan Experience” (*Taoyuan jingyan* 桃园经验), the title of her much criticized report on the results of economic reforms in Taoyuan. This image of Wang Guangmei shares iconographic elements with her representation in “A Crowd of Clowns.” By the Guanya 401 Red Rebel Group in the editorial department of *To Challenge News*. Undated. Watercolor on paper, 55 x 40 cm.

In some cases, the young rebels simply copied the most famous model, without even trying to give a more personal touch to the image. For instance, the Red Guard group “Three Loyalties” (*San zhong yu* 三忠于) faithfully reproduced some of the caricatures of “One Hundred Clowns,” which displays the satirical portraits of politicians and renowned cultural personalities, such as cartoonist Hua Junwu 华君武 (1915–2010) and painter Chen Banding 陈半丁 (1877–1970) (poster 3).

These examples prove that Weng’s work deeply influenced the work of Red Guards in Guangzhou; however, this does not necessarily mean that the young rebels simply copied their colleagues in Beijing. As mentioned earlier, the collection has caricatures dated from November 1966 to January 1967, preceding the publication of these famous placards. That said, I would not go so far as to argue that these earlier images were not influenced by Red Guards’ journals, powerful groups, or caricatures published in posters. The origins of the iconography of some these images are difficult to trace and not certain.

The preferred victims of the Guangzhou Red Guards in late 1966 were the two “capitalist roaders” Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904–1997). Their political demise started in the summer of 1966, when they were criticized for their decision to deploy work teams at all universities. Furthermore, Mao Zedong was critical of their attempt to reform the rural economy through the development of the “household production contract system” (*bao chansheng dao hu* 包产生到户), according to which peasants could keep the surplus of their harvest for private consumption after fulfilling the quota to be turned over to their collective (Pantsov and Levine 2015, 217). Because of “erroneous” choices and ideas of economic reform, Liu and Deng were forced to engage in self-criticism during a meeting with students at the Great Hall of the People in July, but this act of self-reflection did not help their cause. By December, the two were publicly criticized during a rally at Tsinghua University (Pantsov and Levine 2015, 250–252). Liu was officially expelled from the party in 1968, and he died in November 1969 due to physical abuse and medical neglect; Deng disappeared from China’s political scene until 1973.

Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were the two most prominent figures depicted in “A Crowd of Clowns,” and were the subject of criticism in art exhibitions in Beijing in 1967. However, as early as November 1966, they appear in caricature posters in Guangzhou focused on their desire to take the capitalist road. Liu is often accused of justifying his capitalist economic

ideas through his writings. In more than one image, Liu tries to use his renowned book *How to Be a Good Communist* (*Lun gongchandangyuan de xiuyang* 论共产党员的修养) as a shield to protect himself and his idea of developing the household production contract system against the assaults of his critics, represented in the poster by pens labeled “Criticize the evil *How to Be a Good Communist*,” “Purge pernicious influences,” and “Eliminate poisonous weeds” (poster 4).

Representations attacking Liu and his book were already popular in propaganda posters signed by Red Guard groups, so this particular caricature is not groundbreaking; however, some other images in the collection show a more original take on Liu’s political sins.⁶ For instance, in one poster, Liu appears as a deranged man possessively holding an armful of books and papers labeled “History” (*lishi* 历史), “Literature” (*wenxue* 文学), and “Technology” (*jishu* 技术). In opposition to the mainstream criticism against Liu’s attempt to reestablish capitalism in China, this image accuses Liu of pursuing full control over key cultural areas of the country, probably pointing at his attempt to challenge Mao as the ideologue of Chinese Communism (poster 5).

Deng Xiaoping was also the subject of some original caricatures. In Weng Rulan’s placard, for example, Deng is playing bridge (one of his favorite pastimes) while being transported around in a sedan chair.⁷ Deng’s passion for bridge appeared only occasionally in the caricatures of the Guangzhou Red Guards. Instead, they had a predilection for Deng’s saying, “It doesn’t matter if the cat is black or white; if it catches mice, it is a good cat!” He used this proverb for the first time in June 1962. In one humorous poster, Deng and the proverbial cat are sitting on a sofa (poster 6). The animal confirms the politician’s famous catchphrase: “Clever! Clever! Very correct!!” (*Miao! Miao! Duijile!!* 妙! 妙! 对极了!!). Besides the silly idea of Deng Xiaoping speaking to a cat, the scene is particularly funny because the pronunciation of the character for “clever” (*miao* 妙) is similar to the sound of a cat’s meow (*miao* 喵). The fact that the collection has two different versions of this caricature suggests that this image must have been quite popular in Guangzhou, but it is difficult to trace a hypothetical published version. This poster is signed by the *Red Guards News* (*Hongwei bao* 红卫报), as the Guangzhou daily *Yangcheng Evening News* (*Yangcheng wanbao* 羊城晚报) was renamed between September and December 1966, when it was closed. This image, however, was not published in the *Red Guards News*, though it might have appeared in a pictorial supplement of the newspaper as indicated in

the poster. A later version of this image dated May 1967 is signed by the *Rebel Bulletin* (*Zaofan zhanbao* 造反战报). Certainly, for now, the origins of this caricature remain unknown.



Poster 6. Deng Xiaoping declares, “It doesn’t matter if the cat is black or white; if it catches mice, it is a good cat!” to which the cat answers, “Clever! Clever! Very correct!!” (*Miao! Miao! Duijile!!* 妙! 妙! 对极了!!). By the *Red Guards News Pictorial to Criticize Deng Xiaoping’s “Black (Evil) Cat Speech.”* November 1966. Watercolor on paper, 40 x 55 cm.

Caricatures of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were ubiquitous in propaganda posters and were popular throughout the country. The CUHK collection also contains images showing the Red Guards’ strong ties with the political and cultural life of Guangdong Province. For instance, a popular victim of criticism was Tao Zhu, introduced earlier in this essay. A party member with a long-lasting political base in Guangzhou, Tao Zhu was appointed secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Committee and commander of the Guangzhou Military Region in 1955. In 1961, he assumed the position of first secretary of the Central-South Region, and just a year later he became the political commissar of the Guangzhou Military Region. In 1965, he became the vice premier of the PRC, and, in 1966, he replaced Lu Dingyi 陆定一 (1906–1996) as the director of the Central Propaganda Department. Tao Zhu’s career in Beijing ended in early 1967.

Tao Zhu was attacked in caricatures created by Red Guards across the country, and his ties to Guangzhou made him one of the most popular victims of satirical posters. In their caricatures, the Red Guards accuse Tao of being a traitor, a spy from the Nationalist Party, or a

flunky at the service of powerful individuals (see figure 1). Furthermore, these drawings often refer to Tao's personal connection to Guangdong. In Guangzhou, criticism against Tao started in November 1966, when rebel Red Guard groups became vocal about his role in the establishment of the *Red Guards News*, which ceased publication on December 13, 1966. Tao did not oppose the closure, but the Red Guards could not forget that he had originally supported the opening of the newspaper (Rosen 1982, 128–129). Criticism of Tao Zhu's prominent position and power in Guangdong is expressed in caricatures that portray him as the “Emperor of Guangdong” (*Nanyue wang* 南粤王) (poster 7).

Other influential personalities of Guangzhou's cultural scene that appear in the collection include the painter Guan Shanyue 关山月 (1912–2000) and the Cantonese opera performer Hongxiannü 红线女, the pseudonym of Kuang Jianlian 邝健康 (1924–2013). Guan was one of the founders of the Lingnan school of painting and one of the most active professors in the fine art academies of Guangdong Province. He became a member of the CCP in 1956, but this association did not protect him from criticism during the Cultural Revolution. In a caricature poster against him, the painter is holding a sketch “painted by Guan Shanyue, corrected by Tao Zhu,” a phrase that emphasizes Guan's connection to the purged leader Tao Zhu (poster 8).

These are just a few examples out of hundreds of images archived in the CUHK Library. However, they do allow us to draw some initial conclusions. First, these posters prove that Red Guards were active in producing caricatures of leaders before Weng Rulan's “A Crowd of Clowns” was established as a model work and disseminated throughout the country. Second, they open questions about the circulation of iconography among Red Guards within the country. According to historian of Chinese cartoon art Gan Xianfeng, Weng Rulan, as the daughter of a renowned professor, had preferential access to information about the private lives of leaders such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, knowledge that made her caricatures more genuine and successful (Gan 2008, 350). It is nevertheless possible that Weng Rulan's work encapsulated the work and inspiration of Red Guards throughout China. This subject deserves further research.

I conclude this section with a note about the necessity of checking the reliability of the Red Guards' caricatures. At least two of these posters present some incongruities that make me question their authenticity. The most evident example is an image by the Propaganda Corps of Mao Zedong's Thought Spring Thunder Red Guards (*Mao Zedong sixiang xuanchuandui chunlei*

hongweibing 毛泽东思想宣传对春雷红卫兵), dated December 1, 1966. This cartoon presents the effects of Red Guard factionalism on families during the Cultural Revolution. Four members of a nuclear family are shown sleeping in the same room; however, their sleep is not peaceful, as the mother supports hypothetical faction B (*yi pai* 乙派) while the father supports faction A (*jia pai* 甲派). One child clearly sides with the mother and the other with the father. This picture implies that Red Guard factionalism is destroying relationships between couples as well as relations among siblings, causing long-lasting feuds even in the youngest generations (poster 9).



Poster 9. This family of Red Guards is divided. The parents support two different factions of Red Guards (generically called A and B). Their offspring are involved in the fight, as one child clearly sides with the mother — “Pledge your life to defend mother!” (*Shisi hanwei mama* 誓死捍卫妈妈)—and the other with the father— “Determined to defend father!” (*Jianjue yonghu baba* 坚决拥护爸爸). Inspired by Fang Cheng’s 方成 cartoon “Family” (“*Jiating*” 家庭) published in the 1970s, this poster is likely counterfeited. By the Propaganda Corps of Mao Zedong’s Thought Spring Thunder Red Guards. December 1, 1966. Watercolor on paper, 55 x 79 cm.

Criticism of Red Guard factionalism and support for domestic harmony were not popular subjects among the Red Guards. How could the Spring Thunder Red Guards touch upon these arguments in 1966? The answer is that they did not. Despite the information displayed in the poster, this image is not an original work; rather, it was inspired by Fang Cheng’s 方成 (1918–) cartoon “Family” (“*Jiating*” 家庭), published in 1979 (Gan 2008, 369). Although the collection clearly shows that the Red Guards often duplicated the content of famous posters or cartoons, it is certain that the Spring Thunder Red Guards did not draw this piece in December 1966. The

poster is therefore counterfeited: either it was drawn in the late 1970s and the date was added later, or someone drew this image from scratch after 1979.

The uncertain nature of this poster does not mean that it is not an interesting historical source. In fact, it gives scholars the opportunity to ask new questions. Was this poster created for financial gain? How many counterfeited posters like this one are in circulation? Who were the “artists” involved in the production of this piece? Unfortunately, these questions are not easy to answer.⁸ The fact that we do not know how Wong Chi Ching, the dealer who gave the posters to the CUHK Library, acquired these caricatures contributes to the difficulty of reconstructing the counterfeited poster’s story. Certainly, this case will remind scholars about the problem of authenticity when working with this sort of historical material.

Caricature Posters against the Gang of Four, 1976–1977

The second of the two categories of posters in the collection are those dated 1976 and 1977. These works are caricatures of the members of Gang of Four (*Sirenbang* 四人帮), a name coined by Mao Zedong in July 1974 to admonish four members of the radical political faction of the CCP for their alliance against other members of the party (Li 1995, 430). The Gang of Four included Mao’s wife Jiang Qing 江青 (1914–1991) as well as Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥 (1917–2005), Yao Wenyan 姚文元 (1931–2005), and Wang Hongwen 王洪文 (1935–1992). What do these images share with those produced by the Red Guards at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and in what ways do they differ? Whose ideas do they represent?

Before analyzing the production and iconography of these caricatures, it is necessary to discuss the nine-year hiatus between these posters and the earlier set of images. There are a few possible explanations for the lack of poster production between these two periods. The straightforward reason is that the number of images produced in these timeframes—which mark the beginning and end of the Cultural Revolution—was higher, making it easier for collectors like Mr. Wong to acquire material. A second explanation is based on historical events: as the Red Guard groups were disbanded and “sent down” to the countryside, the impromptu production of political images drastically diminished. Finally, the authorities’ determination to put a stop to the creation of these images should be taken into consideration. In November 1967, an essay criticizing the “bad tendencies” (*buliang qingxiang* 不良倾向) of big-character posters and

cartoons appeared in the bulletin *Art Revolution* (*Meishu geming* 美术革命). The article implied that these art forms were being used by Red Guards and others not only to attack purged political leaders but also to vent their dissatisfaction on topics outside the purview of the Cultural Revolution. This editorial attracted the attention of the CCP's Central Cultural Revolution Group, which started looking for a solution to the problem, causing a slowdown in the production of these images (Wang 2005, 38).

Ironically, this venting process resurfaced in 1976 to criticize those who stopped it in 1967. The Central Cultural Revolution Group lost its power in 1969, but in the following years some of its members, namely Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan managed to solidify their political power, eventually establishing the Gang of Four together with Wang Hongwen. After Mao's death on September 9, 1976, the premier of the State Council, Hua Guofeng 华国锋 (1921–2008), and the Gang of Four vied for the leadership of the CCP. The intra-party struggle ended with the arrest of Jiang Qing and the other members of the Gang of Four on October 6 (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 443–449).

The caricature poster was one of the key methods of disseminating allegations against the Gang of Four after their arrest. According to an article published in January 1977 in the journal *Fine Arts* (*Meishu* 美术), caricatures of the Gang of Four could be seen in Shanghai's "alleys, factories, shops, schools, and in the countryside villages" (Shanghai shi 1977, 35). Photographs taken in China in the months following the arrest show that caricature posters against the group were ubiquitous in the public spaces of major cities. For instance, pictures shot in October 1976 portray demonstrators carrying large caricatures of the Gang of Four during a rally in Guangzhou and other cities (Terrill 1999, 104–105; Witke 1977, picture section; Cook 2016, 38–45). The *Fine Arts* article and photographic evidence demonstrate the popularity of these visual weapons against the new political enemy. But who created these images? What are the origins of their iconography? Were they original products of popular dissatisfaction with Jiang Qing and her group, or were they the result of official policies against the Gang of Four? Once again, an analysis of the caricatures can provide us with some answers to these questions.

The 1970s caricatures held at the CUHK Library touch on several topics, including the Gang of Four's thirst for political power (poster 14), its collaboration with Lin Biao 林彪 (1907–1971) in organizing the failed 571 project (posters 12 and 13), and its role in weakening the

economy in the PRC (poster 14). Some caricatures represent the four political figures together whereas others focus on only one or two characters, usually Jiang Qing (posters 10, 11, and 15) or Lin Biao and Zhang Chunqiao (posters 12 and 13). Although these posters share the same themes, they present a great variety of styles and drawing techniques. Notably, some of the images are quite amateurish in style (poster 13), but others stand out for their composition, execution, and originality.

Who created these images? The answer is quite complex. Several of the posters are signed by the Guangzhou branch of the Communist Youth League (*Guangzhou gongqingtuan* 广州共青团), some display the names of shops (such as the Zhongshan Fifth Road Department Store), and others are signed by groups of “Sent Down to the Countryside Educated Youth.” We know that caricatures were displayed in cultural centers throughout the city from late 1976 to early 1977. It would seem, then, that these images were created by amateurs venting their grudges against the Gang of Four. However, this explanation is too simplistic, as evidenced by a close look at two portraits of Jiang Qing signed by the “Zhongshan Fifth Road Department Store” and the Xiangqun Road “Up to the Mountains Down to the Countryside Educated Youth” (posters 10 and 11). These two caricatures are essentially identical, differing only in minor details (the title, the colors, and the slightly different words on her scarf). The caricatures are, in fact, exact copies of “A Skillful Liar” (“Qiao weiren” 巧伪人), a very popular image by cartoonist and animator Ha Da 阿达 (1934–1984), which appears in collections such as *Smash the Gang of Four Caricature Selection* (Shanghai renmin chubanshe 1977, 41). Seemingly, the creators of these two caricatures used Ha Da’s work as a template.

These caricatures of Jiang Qing are just two examples of the many reproductions of established cartoonists’ work contained in the collection. For instance, a caricature that represents Zhang Chunqiao and Lin Biao holding a sword labeled “According to the established guidelines, 571” (*An jiding fangzhen ban 571* 按既定方针办 571) is attributed to a certain Fan Lifu 范立夫, but in fact it is a copy of “Sword and Scabbard” (“Dao dui qiao” 刀对鞘) by renowned cartoonist Wang Letian 王乐天 (1917–1996) (poster 12). There are many other examples; my point is that most of the caricatures of the 1970s are not the products of creative artists in Guangzhou, but copies of the works of professional cartoonists.

Professional cartoonists' work deeply influenced the popular campaign against the Gang of Four. Cartoonists such as Wang Letian had been popular long before the establishment of the PRC and remained active in the 1950s, but they were not allowed to publish their works during the Cultural Revolution. When they came back to work in 1976, they became the main producers of images against the Gang of Four (Gan 2008, 363–372). Old-guard cartoonists thus created an iconography for the representation of the members of the Gang of Four, which made a huge impact on the public.

Works by cartoonists were published in newspapers and later collected in dedicated volumes, but how did they become so popular, and why did people decide to copy them? The January 1977 *Fine Arts* article provides us with a glimpse into the production process of caricatures of the Gang of Four in Shanghai. It reveals that professional cartoonists and commoners were equally engaged in drawing caricatures, and “elders and young pioneers” were busy copying caricatures by established artists. The copying mechanism was used to expand the dissemination of these critical images, and also as a teaching device. Cartoons were then exhibited in cultural centers around the city (also in the rural areas), in factories, schools, and streets (Shanghai shi 1977).

This process of copying and reproducing successful cartoons explains the large number of un-original images among the posters in the CUHK collection. It also shows that these caricatures against the Gang of Four were hardly products of a grassroots movement; rather, their creation and dissemination were supported and monitored by the authorities. The top-down nature of the movement is also proven by the amount of data collected about the caricatures: the article in *Fine Arts* contains detailed information about the number of caricatures produced by work units, the exhibitions organized, and the work of publishing houses (Shanghai shi 1977).

Was there, then, some freedom in creating caricatures of the Gang of Four? The CUHK collection includes some posters for which I was not able to find an exact match among the official collections published in the late 1970s. This is the case of one poster by the Guangzhou branch of the Youth Communist League in which Jiang Qing is taking a picture of Lin Biao while he is pretending to read the *Quotations of Chairman Mao* (poster 13). On his knees, however, lies a sword called “571 project” (571 *gongcheng* 571 工程), indicating that in 1971 the two collaborated to prepare a coup d'état. The fact that I was not able to trace an identical

cartoon in the collections of caricatures I consulted neither proves the full originality of this artifact nor confirms its grassroots nature. Even if this poster was not copied and was the result of the creative mind of a member of the Youth Communist League, it still shares iconographical elements with images by popular cartoonists. For instance, Jiang Qing’s balding head is covered with a scarf as in Ha Da’s “Skillful Liar” caricature and the “571” sword appears in Wang Letian’s work (see posters 10, 11, and 12).



Poster 13. Jiang Qing says to Lin Biao, “You put up pretenses, and I take a picture.” The poster explains, “In 1971, Jiang Qing takes a picture of Lin Biao pretending to study the *Quotations of Chairman Mao*.” However, the sword on Lin Biao’s lap indicates that they are organizing the “571 project” (571 gongcheng 571 工程) to eliminate Mao. By the Guangzhou branch of the Communist Youth League. December 1, 1976. Watercolor on paper, 38 x 54 cm.

The fact that the images in the CUHK collection are mostly copies of works by more famous cartoonists does not diminish the cathartic function they must have served for those drawing them, especially the professional cartoonists who created them. A quick Internet search gives one an idea of the vast number and diversity of caricatures the Gang of Four inspired in 1976 and 1977. Clearly, old-school cartoonists made good use of their artistic skills to vent their personal grievances against those who had suppressed their creativity for years.

Some of the caricatures in the collections prove that the creative tide that swept the artistic community in China reached Guangzhou. Besides copies of popular cartoonists, the CUHK Library also holds seventeen plates, all by the same artist, that stand out for originality

and aesthetics. Although these sketches are not signed, their artistic quality indicates that the creator must have been a professional cartoonist. These plates merge poetry with images, a well-established practice among Chinese cartoonists such as Feng Zikai 丰子凯 (1898–1975) and Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄 (1915–2006). We do not know if the artist both wrote the poems and drew the caricatures, but this information gap does not lessen the originality of these plates.

The themes of this set of posters are not always original, but their delivery certainly is. For instance, in a plate titled “Turtle Philosophy” (“Wugui zhexue” 乌龟哲学), the Gang of Four is depicted riding a turtle holding a tattered flag called “Socialism.” The turtle is a metaphor for the Gang’s alleged attempt to slow down the socialist economy, as exemplified also by the slogan, “A low-speed socialism is preferable” (“Ningyao shehui zhuyi de di sudu” 宁要社会主义的低速度) visible on their seat and by the sign “Slow” (“Man” 慢) that Jiang Qing holds in her hands. The cartoon is followed by a poem that elaborates on the content of the image (poster 14). Attacks against the negative results of the Gang of Four’s policies on China’s economy were extremely popular among cartoonists. The author of this plate elaborates on this theme by accusing the Gang of purposefully obstructing growth and hiding its plans with empty slogans and excuses. The image of the reluctant fast turtle is certainly memorable.

Another plate notable for its style and content is “Jiang Qing and the Toilet” (“Jiang Qing yu cesuo” 江青与厕所). Jiang Qing’s relationship with Mao Zedong, her fast political career, and her power over cultural production during the Cultural Revolution earned her the epithets of “empress,” “careerist,” and “white-boned demon”; she was the most popular victim of the caricatures. Her past as a starlet in Shanghai film industry of the 1930s also generated a lot of gossip about her sexuality and unstable character (Terrill 1999). “Jiang Qing and the Toilet” adds a new twist to the “empress” idea: Mao’s wife is sitting not on a throne, but on an inventive toilet with wheels. The image explicitly shows her taking pictures and playing cards, pastimes that were often mentioned as proof of her pretentious and lazy character, while taking care of her bodily needs. References to toilet functions are not the most original tools an artist can employ to attack a public person; however, the idea of a mobile toilet-throne is quite unique. I could not find any similar image among the hundreds of caricatures of Jiang Qing published in the 1970s. The cartoon is matched by an equally original poem that strengthens the accusation implied by the image (poster 15):

Comrades!
 Don't laugh,
 I am coming.
 I am equal to poor peasants!
 I cannot do light work because I am clumsy,
 And I am also unable to endure heavy labor.
 I sit on the toilet,
 I cannot bare squatting for too long.
 With my capabilities, I can only take pictures
 Hundred points, rake up your opponents' cards, I want to be an Empress!
 I absolutely have my own ways/tricks!



Poster 15. “Jiang Qing and the Toilet” (“Jiang Qing yu cesuo” 江青与厕所). Rather than sitting on a throne, Mao’s wife is on an inventive toilet with wheels that allow her to move around while taking care of her bodily needs. From the picture, we see that her main functions are taking pictures and playing cards, pastimes that were often brought up as proof of her pretentiousness and laziness. Note: In the poem below the image, “hundred points” (*da bai fen* 打百分) is the name of a popular card game played in China, and “rake up your opponents’ cards” (*ba di* 扒底) is a term used in the game. Author and date unknown. Watercolor on paper, 60 x 40 cm.

Unfortunately, in addition to the anonymity of the author of these plates, we face the difficulties of pinning down their function: Were they hung in exhibitions like the other posters in the collection? Have they been published somewhere? I did not find a published version of these images, but I noticed that the same format—caricature plus satirical poem—became very

popular during the 1970s. Several of the volumes of caricatures against the Gang of Four published in 1977 contain series of images followed by poems—for instance, the *Smash the Gang of Four Caricature Collection* (*Fensui sirenbang manhuaji* 粉碎四人帮漫画集) (Liaoning renmin chubanshe 1977). Therefore, there is a possibility that these plates were being prepared for publication in one of these collections.

Conclusion

The main aim of this photo essay is to introduce the content of the digital collection “The Cultural Revolution in Images: Caricature posters from Guangzhou, 1966–1977” to a broader academic community and to share the knowledge I gained while curating the project. Much work is still needed to fully comprehend the functions of these images, how their iconography was disseminated, and the history of their preservation. To understand whether these caricatures represented the genuine thoughts of their authors or just reflected the ideas of higher authorities would be an even more challenging endeavor. Certainly, these caricature posters are important sources, which open new questions and offer new possibilities for historians and art historians of the PRC.

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Notes

- 1 The digital collection appears at <http://repository.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/en/collection/crposter>.
- 2 For those not familiar with the iconic image “A Crowd of Clowns,” please consult Chineseposter.net at <https://chinese posters.net/posters/e39-563.php>.
- 3 The complete, open-access photo essay is available online at <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-27/pozzi/photo1>.
- 4 For a list of the main Red Guard groups in Guangzhou and a description of their political agenda, see Vogel (1971, 330–331).

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- 5 For those not familiar with the iconic image “One Hundred Clowns,” please consult Chineseposter.net at <https://chinese posters.net/posters/c32-476.php>. Other versions of this placard are available online.
 - 6 Posters showing Red Guards attacking Liu Shaoqi and his book may be seen at Chineseposter.net at <https://chinese posters.net/themes/liushaoqi.php>.
 - 7 For those not familiar with this iconic image, please consult Chineseposter.net at <https://chinese posters.net/posters/e39-563.php>. Other versions of this placard are available online.
 - 8 As mentioned in Evans (2016), forgeries of propaganda posters are quite widespread. Although the caricatures in the CUHK collection are not exactly propaganda posters, forgery can still be an issue. More information can be found in a Chinese-language post on Baidu at <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/3c8d7a03eff9aef8941e06ba.html>.

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