FROM LU XUN’S “SAVE THE CHILDREN” TO MAO’S “THE WORLD IS YOURS":  
CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CHINA, 1920s-1960s

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES  
(Asian studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Vancouver)

April 2014

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Abstract

In 1929 the leading Chinese intellectual Hu Shi said: “To understand the degree to which a particular culture is civilized, we must appraise … how it handles its children.”¹ In 1957, Chairman Mao told Chinese youth that “both the world and China’s future belonged to them.”² In both eras, cultural leaders placed children and youth in the centre of cultural and political discourse associating them with the nation’s future. This thesis compares Chinese children’s literature during the Republican period (1912-1949) and the early People’s Republic of 1949-1966, until the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and argues that children’s writers who worked in both new Chinas treated youth and children as key agents in building a nation-state.

In this thesis, I focus on the works of three prominent writers, Ye Shengtao (1894-1988), Bing Xin (1900-1999) and Zhang Tianyi (1906-1985) who wrote children’s literature and were prominent cultural figures in both eras. Their writing careers make for excellent case studies in how children’s literature changed from one political era to another. I conduct thematic and stylistic textual analysis of their works and read them against their historical and cultural backgrounds to determine how children’s writings changed and why.


As anticipated, I showed that during both eras, children’s literature and politics were closely related. Another expected finding is that the manner of writing for children changed significantly as children from victims turned into active agents of the nation’s future. Challenging the view that children’s writers of the early People’s Republic merely followed the Party line, I argue that Ye, Bing, and Zhang remained loyal to the task of “saving children.” Another unexpected finding is that the Chinese Communist Party did not invent new cultural policies toward children from scratch, but employed numerous policies and ideas, including literary ideas, of the Nationalist regime that also inherited much from the late Qing.
Preface

This research was conducted by me under the supervision of Dr. Christopher G. Rea. The project aims to analyze and compare the view of the child and children’s literature in Republican China and the early People’s Republic of China.

For this study I used works by modern Chinese writers, scholarship on China, and also official documents from both periods and microforms from 1920s China’s journals. All works are cited and included in the bibliography.
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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. Timothy Cheek from UBC Institute of Asian Research for introducing to me Dr. Christopher G. Rea who became my supervisor and whom I am greatly indebted to for all his directions and assistance in my work and for his patience, understanding and encouragement. I appreciate Dr. Rea’s kindness in giving me much of his time, setting me flexible deadlines, providing me with valuable feedback and advices and taking time to carefully look through my each work and even to correct my English. I am very grateful for his huge help throughout all these years starting with the time when I was applying to the UBC. This greatly encouraged me on the path of my academic improvement. I am also very thankful to Dr. Rea for having made my education interesting, as his instruction and reading recommendations were great and as he allowed me to learn things outside my major that I wanted to learn.

I am also grateful to my instructors at UBC, who kindly accepted me in their classes as a student from another department full of curiosity for their subject. I want to say special thanks to Jasmina Miodragovic, Graduate Secretary of Asian Studies, and Dr. Stephania Burk, who helped me get into these courses. I am very grateful as Jasmina has also been helping me since the time I was applying to UBC and was often the person I would go to see when I did not know what to do. I am thankful to the whole Asian Studies department for the wonderful friendly atmosphere.

My thanks also go to my loving and inspiring family and friends, especially Harshanvit Singh, Alexandre Barnaud, Nikolay Stroganov, Dulguun Davaanyam, Amit Kumar, and Vasiliiy Triandafilidi, for their help and support.
And I would love to sincerely thank my Committee members Dr. Catherine Swatek and Dr. Dafna Zur for taking time to read my thesis and for providing me with valuable and very helpful feedback and to Dr. Nam-lin Hur for kindly agreeing to chair my defense.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why children’s literature?

In the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals discovered that the child was psychologically and mentally different from the adult. However, as Andrew F. Jones puts it, the child had for a long time before that been an “object of ideological investment,” as courts of numerous dynasties had put efforts into the child’s ideological upbringing for millenia. Anne Behnke Kinney claims that children became objects of intellectual debates for the first time during the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 220), when historians Sima Qian (145/135 – 86 B.C.) and Ban Gu (32-92 A.D.) referred to children and childhoods of famous people in their works. The Confucian view of human maturation held that childhood was the stage at which habitually good or bad behavior was established in the individual. It advocated moral education of children to raise wise and well-behaved princes and aristocrats who would preserve dynastic power. To raise loyal citizens, Han rulers also established China’s first nationwide system of state-sponsored educational institutions for boys.


4 Kinney, Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China, 3.

5 Ibid., 9.

6 Ibid., 14.
Song dynasty (960-1279) rulers built upon Han educational achievements, as well as other innovations, such as refinements to the civil service examination system (established in 605). During the Song dynasty, the idea of education as an agent of social change lead to proposals for the establishment of a national school system. From then on, children, as adults to-be, became a target of ideological education, the importance of which increased significantly by the end of the Qing dynasty. The Opium Wars and other military and political setbacks of the 19th century prompted self-strengthening reforms (1861-1895), when Qing rulers belatedly attempted to create a system of primary and secondary education in order to “create a patriotic, loyal, and hard-working citizenry.”

Various governments of the Republic of China, including the regime led by the Nationalist Party, recognized the importance of children’s education for maintaining state authority. In addition to setting up new educational institutions, they promoted children’s literature. According to a contemporary scholar Mary Ann Farquhar, Chinese critics never questioned the educational role of literature. In the early twentieth century, children’s literature became politically polarized, with certain schools, literary forms and theories becoming aligned with


9 The Nationalist Party gained decisive control of the ROC only in 1927, but some earlier regimes promoted education too.
different political factions fighting for power.\textsuperscript{10} The Nationalist government, and their Communist successors after 1949, as scholars such as Helen Chauncey, Mariane Bastid and Anne Kinney have shown, tried to manipulate the symbolism of the child to maintain their political authority.\textsuperscript{11}

According to most historians, indigenous children’s literature “began” in China in 1923, when Ye Shengtao published “Scarecrow” [“Daocaoren”], a collection of fairytales, which was followed shortly by Bing Xin’s \textit{Letters to Young Readers} [\textit{Ji xiao duche}] (1923-1926). Both were published in the “Children’s World” section of the newspaper \textit{Beijing Morning Post}. A special attitude to the child evolved, in part, from the cultural discourses of the first two decades of the twentieth century, which culminated in the May Fourth Movement of 1919\textsuperscript{12}. Chinese

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\textsuperscript{10} Farquhar, \textit{Children’s Literature in China}, 9.

\textsuperscript{11} Evidence of this practice can also be seen in PRC official documents, such as “The Path of Socialist Literature and Art in China: A Report, Delivered To the Third Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers on July 22, 1960.”

\textsuperscript{12} The May Fourth movement of 1919 began as a demonstration against the humiliating conditions of the Treaty of Versailles. By that time many literati were coming back to China from the West, introduced to the progress and culture of other countries and hoping that in China there would appear a movement, equal to the European Renaissance of literature and culture they would take an active part in reforming their motherland. See Xiao Feng. \textit{Biography of Bing Xin (Bing Xin zhuan)} (Beijing: Shiyue Wenyi Press, 1987), 54-55.
\end{flushright}
intellectuals no longer viewed children merely as immature adults, as they had for centuries, but recognized that children were psychologically different.

Among those who argued that literature for children should be different from literature for adults were brothers Lu Xun (1881-1936) and Zhou Zuoren (1985-1967). Lu Xun’s famous short story “A Madman’s Diary” [“Kuangren riji”] (1918), the first literary work in the vernacular language (baihua), closes with a line that places hope for the nation’s future on children. In it, the protagonist, ostensibly a madman, claims that Chinese people are cannibals and suspects that everyone, especially his doctor, wants to eat him—an indictment of China’s harmful and destructive traditions. The madman’s biggest fear is that children will also try human flesh. The work ends with the exclamation “Save the children!” Children, the story implies, are to be “saved” from the old traditions that were “eating people;” to save the children is to save China.

The first to write for and about children were prominent Republican literary figures, some of whom later became Communists officials. Ye Shengtao, the pioneer of children’s fairytales, also edited both Republican era and Mao era textbooks that included his own works such as, “The Stone Statue of an Ancient Hero” [“Gudai yingxiong de shixiang”] (1931), which was published in textbooks during both time periods. After 1949, he served the PRC as a Vice-Director of General Administration of Press and Publication, the President of People’s Education Publication and the Vice-Minister of Education.

Bing Xin also wrote for “little readers” during both time periods. Her Letters to Young Readers [Ji xiao duzhe] were read by several generations. The first cycle of letters was published in 1923-
1926, and she wrote additional series in the 1940s, 1950s and 1980s. She was an important cultural figure starting from the May Fourth Movement of 1919, when she actively published articles and works in central journals such as *Beijing Morning Post (Chenbao)*, *Yanjing University Quarterly (Yanjing jikan)*, and *Short-Story Monthly (Xiaoshuo yuebao)*. During the Mao era, she was a member of The Chinese Writers’ Association, was elected the vice-president of China Federation of Literary and Art Circles in 1979 and in 1984 was elected Honorary President of the Prose Society. In 1990 the Bing Xin Literary Award was established to encourage the development of children’s literature. In 1998, she was awarded the prestigious Lu Xun Literary Prize.

Zhang Tianyi, a famous satirist, also found writing for children crucial to the national future. In his fairytales from the 1930s he adopted a style different from that of his writings for adults, but the problems he addressed were similar. In “Big Lin and Little Lin” [“Da Lin he xiao Lin”] (1932) he reveals the vulnerability of the child and the flaws and dangers of the world. Zhang continued to write didactic stories and plays for children in the PRC, but he did not continue publishing works for adults. He was also a prominent Communist cultural figure and in 1957 became editor-in-chief of the prominent magazine *People’s Literature (Renmin wenxue)*.

These prominent cultural and literary figures’ interest in the child is strong evidence of the crucial role of children’s literature in modern Chinese cultural and political discourse. The fact that they kept writing for children throughout their literary careers under two regimes suggests that they acknowledged the ongoing importance of children’s literature not only for nation-building, but also for children’s upbringing.
1.2 Study importance and outline

Existing scholarship on children’s literature in China has tended to focus on a single historical period or deal with a specific author. The most comprehensive study to date is Mary Ann Farquhar’s *Children’s Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (1999), which offers a systematic account of a few tendencies in Chinese children’s literature in its relation to the culture and politics and of authors of children’s literature in China, covering about half a century. However, it does not undertake a comparative analysis of different political periods, its central proposition being that “the Chinese, in the twentieth century, have attempted to develop a canon of children’s literature.”

I agree with Farquhar that the earlier lack of systematic Chinese studies of Chinese children’s literature is attributable to ideology. Before 1949, children’s literature was a contested field: political factions vied to shape its ideological content, while commercial editors and readers made their own demands on the form. After ‘Liberation’ the authoritarian Communist party left little space for independent research on the subject, permitting only studies that served to strengthen and refine its own policies. Farquhar wrote in the late 1990s that the only serious previous study of modern Chinese children’s literature was Jean-Pierre Diény’s *Le Monde est à Vous: La Chine et les Livres pour Enfants (The World Belongs to You: China and Children’s*


14 Ibid., 2.
Books, 1971), which is dedicated to children’s literature during the Mao period. Farquhar criticizes it as being “bereft of bibliographic research into histories of Chinese children’s literature,” but nevertheless dubs it pioneering in its treatment of education, cultural policy, and political control.\(^{15}\)

This study covers a longer time frame than Diény’s work and incorporates findings from more recent studies. It also examines overlooked primary sources from two time periods. It has a comparative agenda that Farquhar’s and Diény’s studies lack. As Andrew F. Jones puts it, raising new generations as a key part of development was “central to the ideology of nation-building in Republican and post-1949 China alike.”\(^{16}\) However, Jones focuses on evolutionary discourse rather than on the relationship between the state and the child, or on the position of the child in cultural discourse. This study examines literature’s role in the ideological upbringing of new generations, their commercial use, and the lasting imperative to save the child. A key question I ask is how in both periods children were viewed by writers and by the state. What were children to learn and believe, and why? To answer this question I examine historical, political and cultural contexts, consulting scholarship in English and Chinese, as well as primary sources, such as literary texts, newspaper articles and government documents.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{16}\) Andrew F. Jones, Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), 104.
Some scholars believe that in the 1950s writers merely followed the Party line. Brunhild Staiger, for example, claims of Bing Xin that she:

totally complied with the political line of the People’s Republic. Her appraisals of the policies of the Chinese Government, her self-criticism and the fact that, beside Guo Moruo, Xie Bingxin is the only writer of the May 4th generation whose works were published in the early 1970s, give her the appearance of a fellow-traveler. Some of her works can be taken as pure propaganda for the Communist Party. Yet, according to the author [Bing Xin], this was only a façade behind which was hidden a deep moral integrity.17

Having read Bing Xin’s and her peers’ works and compared them with what was widely published on the topic in the 1950s, I disagree with Staiger’s simplistic view. As Farquhar says, children’s literature in China was from its beginning “both militant and full of care,” turning into an increasingly militant “battlefield” under the communists.18 Indeed, if one looks through publications for children from 1950s-1960s, one finds that a huge number of them exhibit militant content. One example is Zhang Wenqing’s revolutionary story “Nian Rebellion” (“Niandang qiyi,” 1953), which has many militant illustrations accompanying the text. Ye

18 Farquhar, Children’s Literature in China, 10.
Shengtao, Bing Xin, and Zhang Tianyi, however, in the 1950s and 1960s—the time when militant works were the easiest to get published—focused on peaceful themes. I believe that this means that these writers considered education of helpful members of society more important and considered encouraging in them hatred for the “class enemies” harmful. Bing Xin’s focus on “universal love,” is one powerful example. Another is Ye Shengtao’s focus on how to teach children subjects such as literature and mathematics. Yet another is Zhang Tianyi’s emphasis on hardworking, helpful classmates and family and society members. This positive style was influenced by the “gesong” or eulogistic model proclaimed by Mao in 1942, which called for praising the Party and its deeds, but it also had some precedent in their children’s writings during the Republican era.

1.3 Children of empire: what did the republic inherit?

The imperial era, and especially the late Qing, scholars now recognize, contributed to China’s modernization. Paul Bailey, for example, notes that many developments and themes identified solely with the May Fourth Movement of 1919 can actually be traced back to the late Qing. Republican ideas about children also drew from an imperial heritage in which children, specifically boys, read Confucian classics like The Three Character Classic (Sanzi Jing), The One Hundred Family Names (Baijia Xing) and The Thousand Character Classic (Qianzi Wen).

19 Paul J. Bailey, Reform the People. Changing Attitudes Towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China (University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1990), 263.
Learning them by heart was meant to cultivate in children obedience and a respect for following established patterns. Such education was meant to inculcate loyalty to authority and, through the civil service examination system, to lead to state service. However, such schooling did not recognize the young as future political reformers, but rather maintainers of the status quo.

In the 19th and early 20th century, following China’s defeat in the Opium Wars, reform captured the minds of Chinese political and social elites. Relying on old ways, they realized, China would be unable to compete with the West. The idea that education was what would improve China even appeared in books written by foreigners for Western school children. Henri Borel (1869-1933) recalled an anecdote in his *The New China: A Traveller’s Impression* (1912) in which a ten-year-old Chinese student wrote in his composition that Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) “by its knowledge, by its education.” The boy also was sure that when “more than four hundred millions of inhabitants” of China “are instructed and know…, China will be much more powerful than little Japan or the strongest peoples in Europe.”

Thus the turn of the 20th century was a time of painful realization of the need for a big change, and with this the role of education increased and the traditional view of the children started giving way to the hopes laid on them as future reformers. Beginning in 1904, as part of a self-strengthening movement, the Qing court established a national school system that consisted of

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primary, secondary and higher level schools. Science, mathematics and physical education were added to the curriculum. Education became an important topic in cultural discourse and there appeared special journals on education, expressing new approaches to it, such as The World of Education (Jiaoyu shijie, 1901-1908) and Educational Review (Jiaoyu zazhi, est. 1909), the latter of which continued publication into the 1930s. Education was not just to create officials but to “train people to earn a livelihood,” meaning to provide knowledge and skills for employment. Educated members of the late Qing emphasized that schools contributed to the public good.²²

Foreign experiences also inspired changes in Chinese approaches towards children and their education. Japanese influence was significant, as the self-strengthening movement drew inspiration from the Meiji Restoration. Although in China few welcomed the idea of centralized control of education by the Manchu state,²³ and elite and intellectuals did not promote educational modernization “under the aegis of the monarch,”²⁴ as did their Japanese counterparts, Japan was a source of theoretical and practical borrowings in the sphere of education. Announced in 1903-1904 by a Committee on Education, a comprehensive set of Japanese-inspired Regulations for Schools remained in effect until the end of the Qing dynasty. Borrowing

²² Bastid, Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China, ix-x.


²⁴ Ibid, 89.
Japanese experience at that point seemed much less humiliating than the Western alternative; however, Germany’s model of centralized schooling, in which different types of schools focused on different subjects, with separate schools for girls, was another source of inspiration, as education there had contributed to national wealth, strength and nationalism.

Qing reforms brought important, and in some cases lasting, changes to China’s education system. Free elementary schooling was referred to as a feature of “national education” (guomin jiaoyu) as early as 1902 by a Qing governor-general Zhang Zhidong. The Chinese debate on national education, compared to the West, was “more ideologically charged [and] the consensus was to use national education to serve the cause of national salvation.” In 1904, the civil service examinations system was abolished, and a new school system was established with improved teaching methods. Qing educational achievements are recognized in a 1947 report on “Fundamental Education in China” by the Republic of China’s Ministry of Education in Nanking (Nanjing), which credits the “Qing’s Imperial Edict” of 1901 with the establishment of primary schools in China in every province and district. “A Ministry of Education was established in

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26 Bailey, *Reform the People*, 264.
28 Ibid., 56.
1905 that could make suggestions about provincial education."³⁰ Policy makers became receptive to the idea of elementary schools that taught science, mathematics, physical education and Western music in addition to classics and history.³¹

Enthusiasm among the enlightened gentry helped to propel this unprecedented step forward. However, the country was not yet ready to incorporate the changes and produce positive fruits. Historian Helen R. Chauncey says that in the late Qing and the early Republic schools were often associated with violence and demonstrations of political power. Especially hostile to new reforms were peasant communities, for whom new schools, as well as other state institutions, were symbols of political power and increased tax burdens, and thus frequent targets of attack.³²

Concurrently, a new type of education, auto-didacticism, appeared in literature, responding to the general mood of self-strengthening and related to the increasing popularity of science. In Wu Jianren’s New Story of the Stone (serialized beginning in 1905; published as a book in 1908), imaginative rewriting of Cao Xueqin’s 1754 famous novel The Story of the Stone (or The Dream of The Red Chamber, Honglou meng) the protagonist Jia Baoyu is transported to semi-colonial Shanghai after the Boxer Uprising, “a zone of mediation between the Qing Empire and Western

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³⁰ Bastid, Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China, 43.


³² Helen R. Chauncey, Schoolhouse Politicians: Locality and State During the Chinese Republic (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 118-120.
imperialism,” where he studies the world around him in order to become a future reformer. Jia is a young man, not a child, but he reinvents himself as an inquisitive “new youth” (one of his informants is known as “Old Youth,” lao shaonian), a model for young and old alike. Wu Jianren provided an imaginative framework of colonization in relation to the evolutionary theory popular in the beginning of the twentieth century. For him, colonization was natural and followed examples from the animal world. Western powers were not to be blamed for imperialism, rather Chinese unfitness itself led to its colonization. Young people thus had to be motivated to learn and even to teach themselves.

China thus needed literature for youth and children. In this respect, too, China looked to the West for lessons. The first works for children, published in periodicals, were translations of Western masterpieces. Examples include Lu Xun’s translation of Jules Verne’s From the Earth to the Moon (1903) and Journey to the Center of the Earth (1906) and Zhou Zuoren’s translation of Oscar Wilde’s The Happy Prince. Late Victorian science fiction, like Jules Verne’s Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea (France, 1870), inspired futuristic themes in works of Chinese writers, for example in Liang Qichao’s unfinished novel The Future of New China (Xin

33 Jones, Developmental Fairy Tales, 42.

34 Ibid., 30-31.

35 Ibid., 19.
The birth of children’s literature in China thus was contemporaneous with other cultural trends: the realization of the state’s need to reform and self strengthen; calls for revising and building a new-style education system; great interest in the sciences; and the publication of translations that introduced Chinese readers to international literature for children.

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CHAPTER 2: CHILDREN’S FICTION OF THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD
(1912-1949)

Instead of strengthening the power of the Qing dynasty, the self-strengthening movement, and the educational reform as a part of it, contributed to the downfall of the monarchy.\(^{37}\) As Wen-hsin Yeh claims, “the makers of the 1911 Revolution plotted their conspiracies out of the secondary and normal schools of the reformists of 1898 and 1901.”\(^{38}\) The new educational climate opened intellectuals’ eyes to the flaws of the regime and gave them ideas how to change it. The revolution was also actively planned from Japan. In 1905, when Chinese students in Japan were the most numerous, reaching eight thousand, they formed the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance in Tokyo, uniting many revolutionary groups under Sun Yat-sen.\(^{39}\)

In 1911, the Xinhai Revolution put an end to Qing rule. On New Year’s Day of 1912 the Chinese Republic was established in Nanjing with Dr. Sun Yat-sen as its President. The same year a National Educational Conference took place, at which the Ministry of Education presented many bills and created a plan for modern schooling. A commission was sent to Japan. The situation seemed encouraging for new progressive changes. However, these new developments were shortly followed by a retreat to the old order, as Yuan Shikai, a former Qing army commander, _______________________________________


\(^{38}\) Yeh, *The Alienated Academy*, 2.

\(^{39}\) Yokomatsu Takashi, *Ro Jin, minzoku no kyōshi* (Shohan, 1986), 43.
forced Sun Yat-sen to resign. As President, Yuan restored the worship of Confucius and reintroduced the Classics into elementary schools, although he did not prohibit co-education. With Yuan’s death in 1916, the central government lost authority to warlords, and rival administrations operated school systems in different provinces. Some warlords contributed much to modern schooling, such as Chen Jiongming in Guangdong and Guangxi and Yan Xishan, a fan of John Dewey, in Shanxi.40 Yan Xishan, for example, managed to get eighty per cent of school-aged children into schools, including fifty per cent of girls, during his time in power in the province, which lasted from 1911 until 1949.41

Although across China, levels and directions of development differed due to the existence of multiple competing authorities, the 1910s were marked by new cultural and educational trends and achievements. New fields of knowledge, such as biology, zoology, botany, and natural history became accessible to children. Dictionaries of natural sciences appeared42 and animals and plants populated children’s textbooks and journals (e.g. Beijing Morning Post Supplement of 1926). Leading activist Chen Duxiu identified science and democracy as the bases of


41 Cleverley, The Schooling of China, 41-44.

42 See: Jones, Developmental Fairy Tales, 71. Animals and plants appeared in children’s textbooks and journals (e.g. “Beijing Morning Post Supplement” of 1926). Dictionaries of zoology and botany appeared in bigger numbers along with the Elementary Student’s Dictionary of Natural History. (see Appendix I)
modern civilization in the Peking University-based magazine *New Youth*, a position which became famous. In 1914 a Science Society was formed in China to popularize the scientific spirit, and its printed matter targeted an audience of mostly children and youth. After 1912 the Anglo-American model of education with its focus on science had become more significant than a Japanese one. American influence increased more by the time of the May Fourth Movement, strengthened by anti-Japanese moods and John Dewey’s lecture tour to China in 1919-21. This encompassed education for youth and children.

2.1 The modern discovery of the child

New educational initiatives spurred debate: how best to teach children? How do children think, perceive, learn? Which children should be educated, and how? Children as a dedicated topic of discourse appeared late in China. Jones brings up Philippe Ariès’s study of 1960, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, which claims that discovery of childhood as a special psychological state different from that of adults is a relatively modern development coming with children’s gradual removal from adult society and their delivery into the hands of


such new institutions as public schools. Schools, in turn, appeared in conjunction with the recognition of educational and disciplinary needs, and their appearance coincided with a Romantic emphasis on the child’s innocence.\(^{47}\)

The concept of the child’s innocence fascinated intellectuals. Advocates of scientific Darwinism claimed that evolution and heredity were the main powers of history; supporters of a Lamarckian model believed that the inheritance of learned characteristics offered a hope for intentional evolution of a whole race.\(^{48}\) An explicit example of the argument can be seen in Lu Xun’s 1925 story “The Misanthrope” [“Guduzhe”]. Two characters argue about children. Lianshu says: “Children have none of the bad temper of adults. The evil … is learned from the environment. They’re … innocent… I think therein lies the only hope for China.” Shenfei argues: “No. If there was nothing wrong with children at root, how could they grow up to produce bad fruit? … those things are there in embryo from the beginning…”\(^{49}\) However, May Fourth intellectuals readily embraced the notion of childhood innocence. “Saving children” thus became crucial for the nation’s future; as Jones puts it, the project of creation of new China placed “the figure of the child and the practice of pedagogy squarely at the center of questions of national history.”\(^{50}\)

\(^{47}\) Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, 111-112.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 65.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 106.
The concept of the child’s innocence was inspired by the West and Christianity as well as the appearance of modern schools. Christian missionary schools were significant, though some scholars have belittled their influence. Yeh writes that in missionary schools teaching of practically useful English attracted the Chinese much more than Christianity.\textsuperscript{51} Bastid claims that missionary influence on the late-Qing reform of education was minimal. Missionary schools stressed the importance of the individual, contrary to Confucian emphasis on duties towards the state and society.\textsuperscript{52} However, Farquhar, like many other scholars, sees this contradiction from another side, which I find persuasive. She says that it was precisely the high value that Western culture put on the individual, along with a spirit of science and democracy, which was to substitute for mindless obedience, inculcated for centuries in children.\textsuperscript{53}

John Cleverley believes that Western missionaries introduced to China modern schools.\textsuperscript{54} Indeed, as I found, missionaries did a significant volume of work, which is attested by documents. In New York the Committee of Reference and Counsel of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America published in 1922 a study \textit{Christian Education in China}, based on the data of a commission, who conducted work in China. According to their statistics, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Yeh, \textit{The Alienated Academy}, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Bastid, \textit{Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China}, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Farquhar, \textit{Children’s Literature in China}, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Cleverley, \textit{The Schooling of China}, 29.
\end{itemize}
number of Christian elementary schools in China before 1927-28, when the Nationalist Party consolidated its control over China, was around 6500, which constituted 4.3 per cent of the elementary school enrollment in China. Percentages varied by province, from 32 per cent in Fujian (where Bing Xin was born) to 1.1 per cent in Yunnan.\(^{55}\) Christian education encompassed religious upbringing, English, and physical, applied, historical and social sciences.\(^{56}\) Christian schools, meanwhile, were training a new generation of intellectuals, like Bing Xin. While many May Fourth activists received their education abroad,\(^{57}\) Bing Xin created her first children’s works having never left her motherland. She received her education in Christian institutions in China, and her works throughout her literary career were greatly influenced by Christian themes of universal love.

Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren also contributed to the discovery of the child. Recalling their childhood education as dull, useless and leading to spiritual starvation, they advocated in the late 1910s for a modern Chinese children’s literature and translated children’s works by foreign


\(^{56}\) Ibid., v-vi; 41. The table of contents of the study includes sections on medical, agricultural and scientific education.

\(^{57}\) Lu Xun (1881-1936) studied in Japan; Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) in Japan and France; Hu Shi (1891-1962) in the U.S.
writers. In selecting the works, the criterion was “what applied to China’s circumstances and rising nationalism.”

The concept of the national character is key in Lu Xun’s translations. Lu Xun, who attacked the traditional Chinese character, and other May Fourth writers hoped to transform the Chinese national character through literature. Lu Xun was introduced to theories about Chinese national character through the works of the North American missionary Arthur Smith. According to the Lamarckian model, reflected in “The Misanthrope” (discussed above) raising children with the help of literature would transform the Chinese national character. In this regard, Chinese self-criticism was seen as a helpful quality. Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a British philosopher and intellectual who travelled in China in 1920s, was pressed by a Chinese writer to point out the

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58 Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 19-34, 44-45. Farquhar provides a table of translations by Lu Xun of the 1920s-30s, in which out of the total of eight translated works, four (three fairytales and one fairytale play) are by Russian and Soviet authors, and the others are by Western writers. Two translated in 1922 belonged to Vasily Eroshenko, a blind Russian poet, who was deported from Japan in 1921 and lived for a while in China with Lu Xun and his brother, two of 1935 to L. Panteleev and Maxim Gorky, whose evolutionary and revolutionary views and themes were similar to those of Lu Xun himself. The Western writers were: Jules Verne (France, two science fiction works), Frederick van Eeden (Holland, a fairytale), Hermynia zur Muhlen (Hungary, a fairytale). “The Watch” by Panteleev was the only of the eight that was intended for children, while the others pointed the direction in which children’s literature in China was to develop.

59 “National character” is a neologism imported from Japan and was first used in China by the late Qing intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century. See: Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 48.

60 Ibid., 50-51.
main defects of the Chinese. Upon hearing his reluctant response that they included “avarice, cowardice, and callousness,” the writer admitted the justice of such criticism. Russell said that the “intellectual integrity” to admit its own shortcomings was “one of China’s great virtues,” and one that gave the Chinese hope for national transformation.

Western influence on China in the field of children’s literature was immense. China borrowed knowledge and experience from Europe (especially England), which had already undergone processes of the birth and development of children’s literature. From the “flat,” didactic literature of the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment, which featured idealized protagonists, Europe by the nineteenth century was producing fiction that approached children’s own experiences. China tried to adopt and develop in a couple of decades what had taken Europe a couple of centuries.

Western translations, which were numerous by the 1920s, played a crucial role in the birth of modern Chinese children’s literature. Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll (translated by Y. R. Chao by 1922) was among the first translations into vernacular Chinese and played a significant role in popularizing new literature. Many different versions of the “Alice” story began to appear,

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61 Liu, Translingual Practice, 45.

including the parodic novel *Alice’s Adventures in China* [Alisi Zhongguo youji] (1928) by the novelist Shen Congwen.\(^6^3\)

The child was also discovered as a special kind of reader, who needed a special mode and genre of writing, such as the fairytale. Fairytales, which were common in Europe, can be roughly defined as simple narratives that deal with supernatural beings and events in a way that amuses and morally instructs children.\(^6^4\) In China this new genre aroused a big debate in the 1920s. Some believed that fairytales harmed children, confusing them with groundless illusions and making them superstitious; some, following Zhou Zuoren, claimed that fairytales were useful for children in enriching their fantasies and encouraging their curiosity, preparing them to grow up and be receptive to rational and scientific knowledge. Whether children should be given didactic or entertaining readings was another debate, rooted in recognition that the worldview and psychology of children were different from those of adults. This argument intensified in the early 1930s.\(^6^5\)


\(^{65}\) Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, 113-114.
Many commentators, however, treated children in a similar way to women, viewing them as “weak ones.”\(^6^6\) The discourse of “saving the children” went along with one of the liberation of women. This differed from developments in Victorian England. Monica Flegel writes that the literary genre of the endangered child contributed significantly to the discourse of child protection in England.\(^6^7\) However, while in the early Victorian era children’s literature predominantly had been the genre of “boy’s adventure story,”\(^6^8\) early Chinese children’s literature addressed boys and girls equally, coinciding with new ideas about women’s liberation. These ideas were inspired by Protestant missionaries, who in 1860s started to publish essays on traditional Chinese women and were the first to connect China’s weak international position to women’s low status.\(^6^9\)

*Women’s Magazine* (*Funü zazhi*) published the most fairy tales of any early twentieth century Chinese journal. However, other influential periodicals also participated in the discourse. The literary supplement to Beijing’s *Morning Post* (*Chenbao Fujuan*) contained numerous articles on Western conceptions of childhood, childbirth, children’s feeding and development, their

\(^{66}\) Liu Zengren, *Ye Shengtao zhuan* (Jiangsu: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1995), 22.


psychology, education and other aspects related to childhood, as well as entertaining readings for children. It also had a supplement designed specifically for children. Shanghai’s *Linglong Women’s Magazine* (*Linglong funü zazhi*, 1931-1937) had numerous articles on children and their upbringing, contributing to the 1920s-1930s fetish of motherhood, wherein mothers were producers of good citizens. Many pages of *Linglong Women’s Magazine* contain photos of children promoting the beauty and innocence of children.

The figure of the child also became commercialized. The May Fourth movement not only inspired cultural discourse about childhood, but also lead to a boom in textbooks. Entrepreneurs appealed to nationalist sentiment to sell toys and other products for children, marketing them as patriotic products. In Sun Yu’s silent film *Playthings* (*Xiao wanyi*, 1933), Sister Ye (played by star Ruan Lingyu), is a child-like woman, an innocent “weak one” who must be saved. At one point, she says that if the toys that artisans like her make with their hands are not as good as machine-made foreign ones, they will starve to death. Children often appeared in newspaper advertisements. In Beijing’s *Morning Post* in the 1920s, for example, images of children were placed near advertisements of pills for coughing or paleness.

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70 Farquhar, *Children’s Literature in China*, 32.


72 Ibid., 131-138.

73 See, for example, “Beijing Morning Post” (Beijing chenbao) of 1923.
The relation of consumerism to the figure of child as a subject and object of consumption was by no means a new phenomenon, as shown in Dennis Denisoff’s book *The Nineteenth-Century Child and The Consumer Culture* (2008). As in China, in Victorian England consumer culture developed in tandem with “dominant modern concepts of the child.”

In both cases this was followed by the increasing role of education, especially scientific, and rationality, but while in Britain educating children had been related to the family prestige, in China it was related to the future of the nation.

Nevertheless, in China, education was related to cultural consumption. The Chinese “business of enlightenment” was based on sales of textbooks and other educational materials. Major publishing houses such as the Commercial Press and Chunghwa Books depended for their existence on books marketed towards children. Other presses, like Kaiming Bookstore, were also more or less financially dependent on the publishing for children. Advertisements for textbooks can be found in journals throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

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75 Ibid., 186.


77 Ibid., 119-120.
2.2 Pioneers in writing for children

It was at the time of this huge attention to the figure of the child that first modern works of Chinese literature for children were created. The earliest Chinese children’s writers were also prominent writers for adults.79 Ye Shengtao, Bing Xin and Zhang Tianyi, who also wrote for adults, have been recognized as having played the most important roles in the birth and development of children’s literature in China. They appear prominently in comprehensive studies of Chinese children’s literature. Huang Qingyun in his article “A Survey of Children’s Literature in China” focuses on Ye Shengtao, Bing Xin and Zhang Tianyi as major writers of children’s literature up to the Cultural Revolution. Wolfgang Kubin notes their important roles in introducing children to a “serious” literature after Lu Xun’s call to “save the children” in the early 1920s. Among notable features of their writing was the ability to see with children’s eyes and to speak of their past, present and future.80 Numerous Japanese researchers, for example Kazuhiro Nakanishi and Tomoko Narumi, also recognize these authors and dedicate numerous studies to them. I now examine the early literary careers of these three writers, before turning to how their writings for children changed during the Mao period.

78 e.g. “Supplement to Morning Post” (Beijing chenbao fujuan) of 1926.

79 Farquhar, Children’s Literature in China, 7.

2.2.1 Ye Shengtao

Ye Shengtao (叶圣陶, original name Ye Shaojun, 葉聖陶) was the first Chinese writer to write fairytales for children. His works were published in “The Children’s World” (“Ertong Shijie”). “The Children’s World” was the first magazine column for children in China. It appeared in 1922 and was edited by Zheng Zhenduo, who had earlier translated foreign works of children’s literature and had a great influence on later periodicals for children.\(^1\) Ye had a modern education. An outstanding student, he was the master of poetry in his class and one of few at his school who could write poems. Learning English and reading European and American newspapers inspired new thoughts and ideas.\(^2\) He later became an innovative writer and teacher who took a keen and lasting interest in educating children.

His first essay was published in 1911 in *Women’s Magazine* (*Funü shibao*) and was titled “Thoughts on Children” [“Ertong zhi guannian”].\(^3\) In 1919 in *New Trend* (*Xinchao*) he published the article “Suggestions for Teaching Primary School Compositions” [“Duiyu xiaoxue zuowen jiaoshou zhi yijian”] and the essays “Primary School Education in China Today” [“Jinri

\(^{1}\) Kazuhiro Nakanishi and Tomoko Narumi, *A Study of Modern Fairy Tales in China, Centering on “A Seed” by Ye Shaojun* (Osaka: Department of Japanese Language and Literature, Osaka Kyoiku University, 1998).

\(^{2}\) Liu, *Ye Shengtao zhuan*, 9-11.

Starting as an educator, reformer and essayist, Ye Shengtao then began to write fiction for and about children. In 1921-1922 he published nineteen fairy tales. His collection of fairytales, *Scarecrow* (1923), appeared in the library of the Literary Research Society, which Ye founded in 1921 with other prominent writers and intellectuals, including Bing Xin. In the 1920s Ye founded a middle school and wrote more works, of which some were included not only in the society’s library but also in textbooks. Ye was later anthologized extensively in textbooks. Such works as “The Stone Statue of an Ancient Hero” [“Gudai yingxiong de shixiang”] (1931) can be found both in Republican and Communist textbooks. As he gained fame, Ye Shengtao helped other prominent writers such as Ba Jin and Mao Dun get published, when in 1927 he was the editor of the influential magazine *Fiction Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao*). Ye Shengtao also edited several 1920s and 1930s school textbooks.

In June 1931 his second collection of fairytales appeared under the title *The Stone Statue of an Ancient Hero* (*Gudai yingxiong shixiang*), and he kept working on editing and writing textbooks.

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85 Ibid., 285.
86 Ibid., 288-289.
for primary school children. After the invasion of the Japanese in 1937, he was one of the initiators of the Shanghai Anti-Japanese Society and in 1938 he was appointed the vice-president of the research department of the Chinese-Soviet Cultural Association, and held posts in different organizations throughout 1930s and 1940s. All told, during the Republican period, he wrote forty-one fairy tales. In 1948, near the end of the Civil War, he was invited to join the Communist cause.87

One of Ye’s most representative children’s works of the Republican period is “Scarecrow” [“Daocao ren”] (1923). The story concerns the desperate conditions and vulnerability of children and women in China, as well as the helpless state of Chinese intellectuals who want to make a change. The story is told from the perspective of a scarecrow, who witnesses a number of tragedies in one night. An old lady’s harvest fails leaving her with no food; a poor child is severely ill and his mother is unable to help him as she needs to go fishing for them to survive; and a young woman commits suicide to avoid a forced marriage. The scarecrow’s heart is breaking, but he can neither help nor speak—a symbol of the despairing intellectual. Through this figure, Ye introduces child readers to China’s sad realities and adult readers to the problems faced by women and children. Children’s literature in China thus began with a work that called for more attention to children’s vulnerability and that used the new genre of the fairy tale to mark the direction in which Chinese children’s literature should go.

87 Liu, Ye Shengtao zhuan, 288-289.
Ye Shengtao’s fairytales from the Republican period, in my reading, can be roughly divided into two types. The first, like “Scarecrow,” is descriptive and pessimistic. Another example of this type is “The Voices of Birds and Beasts” [“Niaoyan shouyu”] (1935), which also introduces a realistic world to children readers through the eyes of empathetic non-human observers. The story is told in the third person from the point of view of a squirrel and a sparrow. They get offended, seeing from a window that a school boy writing a composition uses the phrase “bird’s songs” to mean nonsense. The two go and watch people in order to find out if humans’ words make more sense than those of birds and animals. They observe several episodes of the humans’ lives, including a suppression of a protest and a militant speech in a Japanese camp, where the Japanese are called civilized and the Chinese “barbarians.” This usage of the notions of “civilized” and “barbarian” confuse the animals, as they start thinking that civilized are those who have guns and tanks, while barbarians are those who do not. They reveal that people associate “civilization” with “force.” An unequal battle takes place in China and the fairytale ends in blood. Through animal observers Ye Shengtao reveals to children the cruelty of the world.

The second type of story is optimistic and prescriptive, and features more action. An example is “The Emperor’s New Clothes” [“Huangdi de xinyi”] (1930), Ye’s adaptation of the famous Western story. Prompted by a child, people admit that the king is naked and laugh at him. But, in Ye’s version, the king keeps persecuting people until they overcome suppression and fear and unite against him. Tickled until he laughs, the emperor can no longer persecute others for their
laughter. He is overthrown, and the story ends happily. The fairytale illustrates the importance of unity, common knowledge and bravery.\textsuperscript{88}

“The Stone Statue of an Ancient Hero” is reminiscent of “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” Also told in the third person, the story concerns a big stone a master uses to build a high monument to an ancient hero. Admired by everyone in the city, the upper stone (of which the statue itself was carved) starts looking down upon those at the bottom. The other stones remind him of their shared past, and threaten to shake him down and break him. The stone eventually apologizes and changes his tone. Then, the stones doubt if the hero is a real one or rather belongs to a made-up empty kind of idols that people like to worship. The stones collectively agree to fall down, and later a road is made of them, a thing of real use to the town and its people.

These two different types of fairytale hint at the states of mind of Chinese intellectuals and readers, as well as the challenges they were facing. Whereas the first decade after the May Fourth Movement was a time of inspiration and hope, for youth the 1930s were a time of disappointment. Yeh writes that “the student culture of the 1930s was permeated by a sense of fatigue, weariness, skepticism, and passive withdrawal, and paralyzed by an inability to believe.”\textsuperscript{89} Zhu Guangqian, a professor of literature in the 1930s observed that young graduates


\textsuperscript{89} Yeh, The Alienated Academy, 253-254.
of new schools were idealistic and moral, full of noble intentions but lacking firm beliefs. They were quick to make judgments but unable to hold firmly to their views, as they easily changed them depending on the prevailing moods.\textsuperscript{90} It was thus crucial both to warn the child reader about the dangers and cruelties of the world and to prepare them to think critically and to live in this world with firmer beliefs and stronger characters, while at the same time inspiring in them optimism and enthusiasm.

Ye Shengtao’s stories encouraged children’s critical thinking. In his fairytales readers have access to characters’ thoughts, thus understanding the logic of their behavior. Making inanimate objects animate or animals human-like, Ye Shengtao allowed readers to follow a passive, though not indifferent, observer. They too had to face hard choices and see how complicated the world is. Together with the scarecrow, for example, the reader sees that often there is not a single truth or virtue, but two opposing ones. As a fisherwoman catches a fish to feed herself and her starving ill child, the fish, placed in a bucket under the scarecrow, begs him to save its life. Any solution would be tragic—either the fish dies, or the humans die. The child readers are saved from the moral duty of judging the scarecrow’s choice by the reality that it can do nothing. At the same time they learn more about the world and see how interests of different pitiable victims may be mutually opposed. This corresponds to the tragic view of China’s state of affairs, and the belief that they were to be changed, with the help of the new culture, by intelligent and

\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., 245.
enthusiastic youth, full of hope. This was what the author’s optimistic fairytales hoped to cultivate.

2.2.2 Bing Xin

The first woman to write in vernacular Chinese and for children was Bing Xin (冰心, original name Xie Wanying, 謝婉瑩). Even in the 1930s, a woman writer in China was still considered exotic. Bing Xin said that in 1933 she decided to publish a three-volume series of collected works because she often saw spurious books published under her name. Some changed her works and some were written by others and published under the names of non-existent publishers. The selling point was that the writer was a woman.\textsuperscript{91} As an early woman writer who chose to write for “little readers,” Bing Xin was considered by the society to be a “weak one” writing for “weak ones.” Even Bing Xin herself accepted this formulation in her works.

Bing Xin was born soon after the Boxer Rebellion, China’s defeat in war against eight countries. However, according to her biographer, her childhood was happy, thanks to a loving family atmosphere, which developed in her generosity, tenderness and consideration. It was also her family, and her maternal uncle, a literature lover, who encouraged her early interest in literature.\textsuperscript{92} Bing Xin was the first woman in her family to get a formal education. After graduating from a

\textsuperscript{91} Zhiyun Li ed., \textit{Bing Xin xiaoshuo wenji} (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1933), 1-3.

\textsuperscript{92} Xiao, \textit{Bing Xin zhuan}, 3-4, 41.
Catholic school in Beijing, she went to a college for girls and in 1919 took an active part in the May Fourth Movement.

Bing Xin started writing for children in 1919; her works included letters, novels, stories and poems. By the end of 1921, she had published forty-two articles in Beijing’s *Morning Post*. She also wrote for adults. She was extremely popular and was among the most famous writers of the time.93 In 1921 Bing Xin joined the newly established “Literary Research Society” (members included Ye Shengtao and Zhou Zuoren)94 and argued that art should be realistic.95 In 1923 Bing Xin went to the United States to attend Wellesley College, where she studied English literature for three years.96 Just before her trip she got the idea of writing a diary of her life in the US, which was serialized in “The Children’s World.”

*Letters to Young Readers* [*Ji xiao duzhe*] (1923-1926) includes twenty nine letters and started serialization in Beijing in July 1923. Most of the chapters were written in the US, and a few in Japan (where the boat stopped). Bing Xin addresses her readers directly, starting each letter with “My dear little readers”, an innovative form of address. Her letters introduce Chinese children to

93 Li, *Bing Xin xiaoshuo wenji*, 78.

94 Ibid., 76.


their Japanese and American peers, and were a big success. She finished the series upon her return to Beijing. The first cycle of Letters to Young Readers was a success, and children sent her letters and waited eagerly for every chapter.

One of the main themes in Letters to Young Readers is motherly love. Bing Xin wrote in the introduction: “The central figure in this book is my sincerely loved, kind and caring mother.”97 She exclaims: “Who, if not you [mother] are the eternal shelter of my soul!”98 As Bing Xin puts it, a mother’s love embraces not only her daughter, but everyone who loves her; thus, the mother loves all of China’s children and all of its mothers.99 She unites China with love. Bing Xin not only promotes children’s love for their mothers and families, but also for other people and for animals, as all have mothers. She writes about nestlings waiting for their mother to bring them food.100 The theme of childhood is also important, reflecting Bing Xin’s nostalgia for her own happy childhood. The soviet editor Cherkassky includes a poem cited by Bing Xin: “On the long journey of a person’s life, there is a golden age of childhood, which no one can experience twice. Childhood is truth in dream and dream in truth.”101 The journey is another significant theme. Letters from China, Japan and the US narrate events and bright descriptions of scenery and people. The general mood of Letters to Young Readers from the 1920s is lyrical and nostalgic;

97 Bing Xin, Ji xiao duzhe (Wuhan: Hubei shaonian ertong chubanshe, 2006), 3.
98 Bing Xin, Ji xiao duzhe. Guanyu nüren (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 114.
99 Bing Xin, Bing Xin jingxuan ji (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 2005), 109.
100 Bing Xin, Ji xiao duzhe. Guanyu nüren, 112-113.
Bing Xin admires childhood innocence and seeks to keep children’s minds far from the adult world’s problems and injustices. This attitude was to change in the *Letters to Young Readers* from 1950s, where Bing Xin encourages children readers to take an active part in social life and build the nation’s future.

In 1929 Bing Xin married Wu Wenzao, whom she had met on her way to the US back in 1923. At that time the two were teaching at Beijing’s Yanjing University and lived on campus. In the 1930s, the only two published children’s works by Bing Xin were the stories “Fraction” [“Fen”] (1931) and “Dong’er” [“Dong’er”] (written in 1933, published in 1934). The second half of the 1930s was a hard time for the writer. When in 1937, after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the war against Japan began, Bing Xin and Wu Wenzao were expecting a baby. While many universities’ professors were evacuated, Yanjing University was considered safe since it was founded by the Americans. However, after the birth of Wu Qing, Bing Xin left occupied Beiping with the baby and first went to Kunming and then to Chongqing.

In 1941 Bing Xin’s father passed away. Inspired by memories of him, she wrote and published in 1942 her work for children “My Childhood Years” [“Wo de tongnian”]. Her other children’s work from the 1940s is the four chapters in the second series, *More Letters to Young Readers [Zai ji xiao duzhe]* (1942-1944), published in the newspaper *L’Impartial (Dagongbao)*. Between

102 Xiao, *Bing Xin zhuang*, 129.

103 Xiao, *Bing Xin zhuang*, 264-265.
summer 1937, when Japanese troops entered Shanghai, and their defeat in 1945, many publishing houses stopped functioning. Many writers wrote stories to resist Japan. Bing Xin was one of few who still wrote children’s works. In More Letters to Young Readers Bing Xin shares with her readers her deep grief, related to her mother’s death in 1930. The author says that her mother had always been cheerful and hardworking; educated and modest\textsuperscript{104} and encouraged these qualities in children.

In 1946 Bing Xin with her three children returned to Beiping and found that while the family was absent, their rooms had been inhabited by the Japanese and, what is more, those who stayed on campus during the occupation had experienced mass arrests and interrogation.\textsuperscript{105} Despite her complicated feelings, in the same year Bing Xin, as wife of a Republican diplomat, went by airplane to post-war Japan to contribute to improving Sino-Japanese relations as a writer. This made her the first Chinese writer to visit post-war Japan. She wrote then that her feelings of a woman and a mother were stronger than her national position.\textsuperscript{106} She stayed in Japan until 1951 and when she came back to China, it had already become the PRC. In the late 1940s, she wrote mostly essays on themes related to foreign relations and foreign cultures.

\\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{104} Bing Xin. Ji xiao duzhe. Guanyu nüren, 125.}\]

\\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{105} Xiao, Bing Xin zhuo, 189.}\]

\\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{106} Binggen Wang, ed. Bing Xin wenxuan. Yiwen juan (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 120.}\]
This behavior underscores that love and peace were enduring themes in Bing Xin’s writing. Her works attempted to cultivate kind-heartedness in children. *Letters to Young Readers* contains useful knowledge about life and culture in other countries, inspiring curiosity about and love for natural beauty. The letters also tackle difficult issues. In the story “Fraction” (Fen, 1932) the world is seen through the eyes of a newborn baby, especially his relationship with his mother, family and other babies. The baby understands everyone, but adults do not understand the baby. Only other babies understand each other’s crying language, calling each other “little friend.” The protagonist makes friends with another baby, and through everyday conversations they find out that their families belong to different social groups, and that the two are treated very differently. In the end, the babies are changed from identical white clothes into very unlike garments, one comfortable and handsome, the other poor. Then, the protagonist leaves in a vehicle, while his baby friend has to make his way home through the snow on his father’s shoulders. The story contrasts equality at birth with social inequality. Typical of Bing Xin’s works, the story gives an admiring portrait of children’s innocence.

Bing Xin’s works for children from the Republican period concentrate on admiration of love and the concept of a “childlike heart,” a concept derived from the 16th century philosopher Li Zhi’s (1527-1602) essay “On the Childlike Heart” [“Tongxin shuo”]. The concept also fascinated Feng Zikai (1898-1975, a writer and painter), who dedicated much of his early writings and paintings

to describing childhood, which he viewed as the “golden age” of human life. Geremie Barmé links Feng Zikai’s interest in childhood to his nostalgia for his own youth, after which “innocence, simplicity and courage of youth” were lost. 108 Like Bing Xin, Feng Zikai in the 1920s declared that he was not interested in politics and preferred escaping into the world of childhood. Criticized for his “frivolous escapism” by politically-minded writers, he insisted that his depictions of children were a direct response to the political environment. Barmé quotes Feng Zikai: “To me it seemed as if adults had lost their original nature, while children were still innocent romantics, complete people, indeed the only real “people”. That’s how I became a worshipper of children…”109 Bing Xin thus was not alone in the idealization of childhood.

### 2.2.3 Zhang Tianyi

Zhang Tianyi (张天翼, original name Zhang Yuanding, 張元鼎) was another prominent figure in Chinese children’s literature. Scholar Huang Qingyun says that while Ye Shengtao and Bing Xin’s works are full of sentiment, those by Zhang Tianyi are “optimistic, full of joy and hope and thus more appealing to young hearts.”110


109 Ibid., 129-131.

Zhang’s journey to becoming a children’s writer started after he departed from a conservative background and stepped on the path of cultural reforms. He later made it his goal to free children from traditional dogmas. Zhang went to a traditional primary school, and in 1920 entered a conservative middle school, where textbooks were only in classical wenyan and students were prohibited from reading in baihua. In his free time he read foreign detective stories in wenyan translation by Lin Shu. While at middle school, Zhang Tianyi himself tried writing detective stories, using both wenyan and baihua, but he was opposed to many reforms of the May Fourth Movement and even published some satirical poems about sexual equality. He later claimed that he did not quite understand what he was opposed to or why.\textsuperscript{111}

Zhang Tianyi wrote that his change in attitude towards the May Fourth Movement and Chinese culture in general came when he read Lu Xun’s “The True Story of Ah Q” [“Ah Q zhengzhuan”] (1921). The story shook him up, and afterward he could not help associating himself with Ah Q to some degree. He realized the importance of the character, its symbolism and resemblance to his countrymen. In September 1927 Zhang expressed his willingness to leave behind the old literature and create a new, realistic one. That year he joined the Communist Party, and in 1931, the affiliated Left-Wing Writers Association.\textsuperscript{112} The start of his literary career was boosted by

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{111} Houxing Huang, Zhang Tianyi de wenxue daolu (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 5-6.

\end{flushright}
the endorsement of Lu Xun, who edited one of his stories. Lu Xun’s personal support meant a lot to young Zhang Tianyi, and he became one of the most prolific writers of the 1930s. Scholars often call the 1930s Zhang’s golden age.

However, according to Yap Sook-lan, as Zhang Tianyi’s literary goal from the beginning was to show the flaws of the system and society, his works were often censored. Such was the case with his first fairy tale “Big Lin and Little Lin” [“Da Lin he Xiao Lin”] (1932), which was re-published under the various titles “Good Brothers” [“Hao Xiongdi”] in 1936 and 1939, “The Story of Two Lins” [“Liang Lin de gushi”] in 1937, and “Rich Man Island” [“Fuweng dao”] in 1940.

Zhang Tianyi became famous for his satirical works for adults, as well as for his stories for children, some of which are satirical. The title characters in “Big Lin and Little Lin” are two poor orphan brothers who encounter many dangers and villains and get separated. Big Lin with the help of a lie gets into the palace of a rich wicked man as if he was his son, while the honest and hardworking Little Lin experiences hardships. The ending is happy and justice is restored. The brothers get together and the villains are punished. Zhang’s satire involves exaggeration. Big


Lin is so fat and lazy that he cannot smile without help from numerous servants. This exaggeration lets satirized characters make a stronger ridiculous impression on juvenile readers, which then encourages them to make sure that they never behave in similar ways as the lazy, selfish and arrogant character.

Zhang recognized differences in adult’s and children’s perception and accordingly conveyed his messages to them differently. While using satire for adult readers, he does not use it as a main tool in his writings for children. David Worcester explains that satire is not very appropriate for children because it is indirect, which leads to comprehension difficulties. Children, he writes, need clear expression, but “satire is the engine of anger, rather than the direct expression of anger.”\footnote{David Worcester, \textit{The Art of Satire} (New York, Russel&Russel, 1960), 18.} While the reader’s creative and active participation is necessary for the author’s plan to be realized, “children find in \textit{Gulliver’s Travels} a story of funny little men and funny big men. They lack all knowledge of the true objects so curiously reflected in the satiric mirror.”\footnote{Ibid., 45-46.} Thus what is satirized becomes just comic for them, the main point being lost.

That may be why “Big Lin and Little Lin” has two main lines of narration involving good and bad moral examples. The former conveys messages directly, the latter satirically. The morals for child readers are thus reinforced via two narrative modes. They teach children not only to be...
hardworking, honest and diligent in learning, but also to accept and understand satire as something that teaches behaviors to avoid.

All this is done with the help of the fairytale genre. Good is presented as natural and evil as artificial. Big Lin and Little Lin are originally good loving brothers. Then characters from a magic world arrive and seduce Big Lin into becoming a lazy, selfish liar. All negative characters in the story are magical creatures or associated with magic (and hence amenable to satire — a speaking dog and fox, a monster, a villain who could turn children into chicken eggs with a spell, etc.), while common people are naturally good. Zhang thus limits his sarcasm to the world of magic, a world of laziness, lies and evil.

“King Tutu” [“Tutu dawang”] (1933) is in many ways similar to “Big Lin and Little Lin,” as the king resembles the wicked man from the former. In both, fox are servants of evil characters, and a villain eats people. Little children have to rely on themselves. Like Ye Shengtao, Zhang Tianyi also depicts cruelty, the main difference being that Ye uses representations of life realities, while Zhang uses symbolic behaviors, such as eating people, drinking wine made of their blood, and so on. In his fairytales animals interact with people and speak and act like them. Characters are intended to shock children: many who initially seem good and helpful often turn out to be enemies, setting traps for their victims. The lesson for children is to be wise and to think critically.

Zhang’s stories lead the reader from feelings of hope and joy through to disappointment, anger and tragedy. Zhang encourages children not to take things at their face value, but to learn from
the characters who get smarter through their experiences. Negative characters are also naïve, but less so than positive ones, and they are much sneakier. Yet they too are predictable. They usually seek profit and power and their actions are shown as starting with their intentions. For example, the villain Sisige loves beating children and when he is not satisfied with their work for him the reader can already tell what will happen. Besides, he shares his intentions with his animals servants. Thus the negative character stays transparent from the beginning. At the same time, Zhang Tianyi does not always make it easy for children readers to judge, as liars may also turn out to be real benefactors and it is often hard to guess who is who. In some instances, Zhang justifies lying. For example, in “King Tutu” a girl, Xiaoming, says to her little kittens that their mother cat will come home, when she actually does not know where the cat is and is scared herself. Zhang’s narrator explains that she does it to keep the little kittens from worrying too much. Thus, he encourages children readers not to be hasty in drawing conclusions, but to observe and analyze.

Apart from critical thinking and moral judgment, Zhang Tianyi’s fairy tales also include lessons in school subjects, such as arithmetic. For example “Big Lin and Little Lin” includes phrases like “And who cares that five times seven is thirty-five” (“Bu guan wu qi san shi wu,”—a variation of a common expression which means “anyway”, “anyhow”) and a character named Two Times Seven is Fourteen (Er-qi-shisi). In “King Tutu” Zhang’s narrator often advises children readers

to ask their teachers about many things that he mentions in the story and says that the villain King Tutu is very bad at Math. If he were in a class with the little readers, he would definitely have failed.\textsuperscript{119}

Zhang’s fairy tales of this period employ methods of combining fiction with schoolwork that were to become common in the PRC. In “King Tutu” Zhang’s narrator often advises children readers to ask their teachers about many things that he mentions in the fairytale. Bing Xin also often does the same in her \textit{Letters to Young Readers}. What is also important is that the main characters in “King Tutu” Dong Ge and Xiao Ming can read and write, though they are from very poor families. This element could not have changed from edition to edition, as their letter is a crucial part of the narrative and thus belongs without any doubt to the fairytale from its Republican very beginning.

Another similarity between Zhang’s Republican period works and his PRC ones, as we will see, are themes of fighting and revenge, which appear in both “Big Lin and Little Lin” and “King Tutu.” Little children cooperate to win, and in the end defeat all the negative characters. Child readers got more than optimism, but also fighting spirit and moral lessons did children readers get from Zhang Tianyi’s fairytales. Meifang Zhang in his article “The Changing Role of Imagination in Chinese Children's Books” says that Zhang Tianyi’s stories promoted children’s imagination and initiative by his works. Newly-born children’s literature in China in the 1920s-

\textsuperscript{119} Zheng Hong ed. \textit{Zhang Tianyi tonghua xuan}, 46, 89.
1930s not only introduced new themes and genres but also made a big step towards understanding the child’s moral and educational needs, tastes and perception.

2.3 Children of the republic: what did the PRC inherit?

The preceding sections have analyzed the birth of Chinese children’s literature and its pioneers’ chosen works throughout the Republican period. The Republic left a legacy in the PRC. First of all, the May Fourth period, as Jones says, “witnessed an unprecedented explosion of discourse for and about children”\(^{120}\) accompanied with the establishment of new disciplines, like child psychology, and the wide circulation of knowledge about children.\(^{121}\) The ruling Nationalist Party inaugurated a national “Children’s Day” in 1932 and dubbed 1934 “The Year of the Child.”\(^{122}\) During the Republican period numerous works for children were written; not only fairytales and other stories but also children’s operas by Li Jinhui and cartoons (for example, Zhang Leping’s *Adventures of San Mao*). There also appeared child film stars (e.g. Hu

\(^{120}\) Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, 103.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 23.
In the 1920s literature by children, mainly in the form of nursery rhymes and folk songs, also became important for spreading a new national vernacular language.\footnote{Ibid., 104.}

Furthermore, starting in the late 1920s, newspapers like \textit{The Young Companion (Liangyou huabao)} regularly featured the activities of a “Children’s Army” (tongzi jun), a competition encouraging parents to send in pictures of their children, who were judged on their vitality and vigor. One of its slogans was “If you want to strengthen the nation, you must first strengthen the children.”\footnote{Ibid., 117.} A children’s army appears in Zhang Tianyi’s “Big Lin and Little Lin”, when Little Lin together with other children fights a villain. The themes of army, peasants and workers, so popular after “Liberation,” were also popular during the Republican period. The literary magazine \textit{Les Contemporains (Xiandai)}, for example, once advertised a one-year membership in a children’s book club in following words:

\begin{quote}
The Spirit of \textit{Modern Child} [xiandai ertong, another journal] is the most youthful. \textit{Modern Child} wants to turn the youth of the entire nation into little soldiers, little
\end{quote}
workers, and little peasants. So here you will find no … degraded tales full of princes and princesses… [my emphasis]¹²⁶

Winners of another health competition can be seen in Linglong Women’s Magazine, where along with articles on modern women there are also numerous illustrated articles on children’s health, sleep, and general wellbeing. The attention to children’s physical condition is another development of the Republic that expanded in the PRC.

An important factor that should not be ignored is that the Republican era consisted of several periods. In 1912 Yuan Shikai tried to reestablish a monarchy. After his death in 1916, China entered a period of warlord rule until the Nationalist unification in 1927-1928.¹²⁷ However, the Second World War and the conflict of the Nationalist government with the Communist Party, established in 1921, “created chaotic conditions during the period 1930-49; there was a distinct lack of any well-articulated policy regarding the role of education in society.”¹²⁸ Obviously, the Nationalist government was the pioneer in maintaining the radically new political system and in facing new social and cultural trends and challenges, who during its entire rule had to experience serious confrontation of different forces and never had all of China under its full control.

¹²⁶ From Les Contemporains (Xiandai) 4, no. 3 (January 1934). Cited in Ibid., 120.

¹²⁷ Kwok, Scientism in Chinese Thought, 7-8.

However, we have observed the development made by Chinese intellectuals in literature and culture throughout these complicated times.

Republican achievements are even more notable when one takes these obstacles into consideration. There is also much in common between the Nationalist Party and later the Communist Party in how they treated education and intellectuals. When the Nationalist Party established its government in Nanjing in 1928, it immediately made efforts to get schools under its control. Many progressive educators of the early 1920s lost their posts,\textsuperscript{129} accused of lowering educational standards and encouraging ill discipline. In its aims of education and national purpose, the KMT stressed work skills, scientific education, training of body and mind and military training.\textsuperscript{130} While in the Republic children’s literature was not closely related to educational policies of the state, it did become a part of educational policy in the PRC.

The Republican government inaugurated policies that aimed at universal education and literacy. They identified the high level of illiteracy as a particular obstacle to political and economical development. In 1930 the Nationalist Party announced the plan for compulsory education by 1940, and in five years up to 1937 school enrollment tripled.\textsuperscript{131} However, the Japanese invasion

\textsuperscript{129} For example, Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), the First Minister of Education, who encouraged study of theoretical subjects.

\textsuperscript{130} Cleverley, \textit{The Schooling of China}, 55.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 69.
of 1937, and the subsequent civil war, foiled these ambitions. As John Cleverley states, during the war against Japan more than 80 per cent of schools and educational institutions were located in zones of Japanese occupation. Many of them were moved, evacuated and relocated in Sichuan, and those that stayed suffered heavily, as Japanese education was imposed, and uncooperative Chinese members of schools were beaten, imprisoned or shot.\textsuperscript{132}

The Constitution of 1947 guaranteed educational rights to children from six to twelve years and illiterate adults. The Nationalist government also sponsored education generously in post-war years, but many schools soon fell under CCP influence.\textsuperscript{133} While fighting a war, the Nationalists couldn’t satisfy the growing needs for education. According to Cleverley, in 1949 only one-quarter of elementary school-aged children and 3 per cent of middle school-aged children were at school, and many teachers were untrained.\textsuperscript{134}

Both the Nationalists and Communists politicized education, making it more militant. This was noted as early as 1933 in Tsang Chiu-Sam’s study *Nationalism in School Education in China*. He claimed that the Nationalists promoted patriotism and militancy in their textbooks, including stories of wartime patriotism, both Chinese and foreign. Patriotism was a dedicated classroom

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 66-67.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 68.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 69.
Courses in party doctrine became mandatory, starting from elementary schools; children were taught the Three People’s Principles; and a portrait of Sun Yat-sen hung in memorial corners of schools. Pressure on mission schools increased. The ideologization of education was thus not an innovation of the PRC, as its importance for maintaining the authority was appreciated by the Nationalist Party.

With that, all textbooks needed to be reviewed and approved by the state. During the Qing the school system had the need to be universal, and thus the Ministry of Instruction, while preparing their own materials, made it necessary for textbooks written by private individuals to first be approved for use in the schools. The Republican Ministry of Education in its 1912 Regulations had it that textbooks could be written and published by anyone, but were to be approved by the Ministry. Thus, the first steps to the centralization of the control of education had been made early. During the Qing rule textbooks were guarded “against the possible dissemination of the ideas of liberty, equality, and racial differences.” During the Republican era before 1928 the ideology in them was republican, but the portraits of Sun Yat-sen were taken out; under the Nationalist government textbooks were to follow the party’s principles. Besides, in 1928 the Nationalist Party prohibited textbooks in classical language, popularizing vernacular baihua. Apart from this, the influence of publishing houses was significant, the most influential one

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135 The name of the subject in 1912-1922 was Citizenship, in 1922-1927 – Morals, and since 1927 – “Three Principles of the People.” See Tsang, Chiu-sam, Nationalism in School Education in China Since the Opening of the Twentieth Century (The South China Morning Post, Ltd., Hong Kong, 1933), 93.
being the Commercial Press, its circulations reaching beyond the territory of China to the overseas Chinese.\textsuperscript{136} Among features of children’s textbooks Tsang brings the reader’s attention to that of familiarizing children from all parts of China with the outlook of the country’s North, with little stress on local educational needs.\textsuperscript{137}

The range of themes of children’s literature were expanding. In early 1912, Cai Yuanpei wrote that in Sun Yat-sen’s Republic children’s education would focus on morality, and on practical, military and aesthetic aspects. When Yuan Shikai usurped power in the same year, he emphasized the classics, patriotism, and military and practical knowledge. When Chiang Kai-shek established Nationalist Government in Nanjing, the new regulations on education had it that “the education of the Republic of China has as its goals on the basis of the “Three People’s Principles” enriching people’s lives, maintaining the society’s functioning, developing the nation’s sources of existence and the long life of the nation; to serve the independence of the nation, people’s universal rights and development of people’s lives for the purpose of encouraging the world’s harmony.”\textsuperscript{138}

In the 1936 draft of the Constitution the goals of education were said to be “developing the national spirit, cultivating national morality, training the ability of self-governing and increasing

\textsuperscript{136} Chiu-sam Tsang, \textit{Nationalism in School Education in China}, 85-87.

\textsuperscript{137} Tsang, \textit{Nationalism in School Education in China}, 87.

\textsuperscript{138} Guohua He, \textit{Minguo shiqi de jiaoyu} (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1996), 16-17.
life skills for the creation of a healthy nation.” In 1938, after the war against Japan started, the government had nine demands of education, which were: 1. Moral, mental and physical development; 2. Teaching both civil and military aspects; 3. Paying attention to the needs of the village and industry; 4. The unity of the educational and political goals; 5. Close connection between home and school education; 6. Emphasis on the country’s culture, literature, philosophy and science in order to increase the nation’s confidence; 7. Being up-to-date with the developments of natural sciences, in order to provide for the country’s defense and industrial needs; 8. Social sciences should also be taught appropriately for the country’s current situation; 9. Setting clear standards for school education.

In his study of textbooks published by the Commercial Press and Chungwa Press between 1905 and 1929, Cyrus Peake notes that among the aims of the first textbook for the mass education movement was “to promote the spirit of cooperation necessary in a Republican country.” In a 1927 textbook, in a lesson devoted to citizenship it is said that “citizens love to serve their country. Their duty is to serve their country first and then later attend to their private affairs.

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139 Ibid., 17.
140 He, Minguo shiqi de jiaoyu, 17-18.
142 Cyrus H. Peake, Nationalism and Education in Modern China (New York, Howard Fertig, 1970), 159.
They fight for public rights and not alone for private ends.”¹⁴³ Love is praised as the most beautiful among all virtues, and it should extend to everyone. Christianity has its place in national textbooks. In them, “Jesus is portrayed as a man of love, who favored peace and equality.”¹⁴⁴

The Republican education achievements were recognized internationally. In September 1947 the first Regional Conference on Education of Eastern lands took place in Nanjing under the joint auspices of UNESCO and the Chinese Government. The director-general of UNESCO, Julian Huxley, called it “a landmark in the history of UNESCO.”¹⁴⁵ Fifteen countries-representatives were invited.¹⁴⁶ At the conference the goals, methods and financing of education for adults and children were discussed. So was peace, as it was agreed that only fundamental education “can foster mutual understanding between nations, thereby ensuring peace and goodwill among men and paving the way towards the world commonwealth.”¹⁴⁷ China’s important place in the sphere of education in Asia was recognized.¹⁴⁸ In his closing speech, the Chinese Minister of Education

¹⁴³ Ibid., 161.

¹⁴⁴ Peake, Nationalism and Education in Modern China, 164-165.

¹⁴⁵ Proceedings of the Nanking Regional Study Conference on Fundamental Education (Published by the Ministry of Education, Nanking, China, 1947), 7.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.

said: “Fundamental Education is not merely a problem of literacy; it should also consider the
difficulties of how to educate people to live adequately and how to meet the social, economic and
cultural needs of their life.” He also mentioned that the UNESCO-initiated Pilot Project was
soon to be put into practice in China. This happened in 1949-1950 in Sichuan, but the project
ended when the People’s Liberation Army entered the region.

This term is not the only one that existed before the Communist rule. In the Conference “world
citizenship” was discussed. This idea was related to universal principles of education, of
which the main points were that everyone had right to be provided with a certain minimum of
education and that there should be co-education and free primary education. In discussing
different problems of children’s education, the Committee agreed that children’s textbooks must
be produced in such a way that they arouse children’s interest; special attention should be paid to

149 Ibid., 14.
150 http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/50y/brochure/unintwo/90.htm. Notably, the
adjective “People’s” was widely used by both camps, as at the Nationalists’ Conference Chinese
school system is called “The People’s School”. See: Proceedings of the Nanking Regional Study
Conference on Fundamental Education, 5.
152 Ibid., 25.
153 Ibid., 48-50.
printing and illustrations, to selecting subject matter and presentation.\textsuperscript{154} Besides, the Committee came to an agreement that moral education should be taught in all schools.\textsuperscript{155}

Another notion shared by both regimes, and a practice later developed in the PRC, was education through activities outside of the classroom. It was agreed at the Conference that children’s education should include classroom teaching, where apart from knowledge imparted, the spirit of community service was to be developed and extra-mural activities as well. Among the latter were practical social services like gardening, sewing, cooking, first-aid, etc., which were to cultivate citizenship, and develop special talents such as music, drawing and such like, and healthful recreation.\textsuperscript{156} In short, ample evidence exists to support Chauncey’s statement that in the field of education “the Chinese Communist Party was the unintended beneficiary of prewar developments.”\textsuperscript{157}

At the Conference the members discussed literature briefly in relation to education under the notion of “printed matter” as one instrument for achieving the goals of education.\textsuperscript{158} The importance of this connection was internationally recognized, as there was a suggestion that “in

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 72-73.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 52.

\textsuperscript{156} Proceedings of the Nanking Regional Study Conference on Fundamental Education, 63.

\textsuperscript{157} Chauncey, Schoolhouse Politicians, 209.

\textsuperscript{158} Proceedings of the Nanking Regional Study Conference on Fundamental Education, 65.
cooperation with the Educational Departments of various countries, UNESCO could undertake to publish or encourage the publication of regular bibliographies of children’s literature, summaries of the best books published in each country and suggestive analyses of significant features of children’s literature in different lands.”

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\[159\] Ibid., 71.

In the PRC, literature, especially children’s literature, immediately became a tool of ideological upbringing. “Education,” indeed, had always been a core theme in the history of the Communist Party and its constant struggle for influence—it sought to “teach” others to accept its worldview. The Communist Party in China was founded in Shanghai in 1921 inspired by the “Great Proletarian Revolution” in Russia of 1917, and the members of the CCP were educated with the help of, or often in, Soviet Russia. In 1927 the Party apparatus was destroyed, and during the Jiangxi Soviet Period (1927-1934) much effort was put into reconstruction. At the Jiangxi Conference on Education of 1933 a socialist education with the Soviet Union model as the example, its core being a unified labor school, the first attempt to introduce was not successful\textsuperscript{160}, as the Republic was following Western patterns. However, Soviet educational ideas and principles were then widely practiced in the “Liberated” territories during the Civil War. In 1949 the PRC was established, though fighting continued through 1951. The Communist Party thus felt on urgent need to politicize its education and literature in order to consolidate power.

\textsuperscript{160} The core of this model was a unified labor school, in which students and teachers would be required to do productive work, and the attendance would be compulsory; tuition would be free, See Cleverley, \textit{The Schooling of China}, 95.
When the Nationalist Party fought with warlords in the 1920s, the ideological potential of literature was relatively unappreciated, the literacy rate was low, and children’s literature was in its infancy. The Communist Party had the advantage of knowledge and previous experience, higher literacy rate, and an established indigenous children’s literature.

The Party approved all publications and modified their content when it saw fit. Readers were to accept the message without much thinking. This was noticed by US observers. In 1950 in New York, the Institute of Pacific Relations published *Notes on Educational Problems in Communist China*.\(^\text{161}\) The author Michael Lindsay had collected materials in China before 1945 about the Communists’ educational policies in their “liberated” areas. In August 1949 the author visited North China and came to the conclusion that general principles of Communist education in rural areas had not changed significantly. Lindsay’s impression of Communist education was mixed. As he says, “on the one hand the Communists want people to think; on the other, they are, in certain respects afraid of the possible results of thinking.”\(^\text{162}\)

The PRC regime needed not thinkers, but loyal producers. During the anti-Japanese war in the Communist areas the reorganization of primary school went along with the strengthening of

\(^{161}\) Michael Lindsay, *Notes on Educational Problems in Communist China, 1941-1947* (International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, March 1950), 195. Five out of ten mimeographed studies it published in 1949-1950 were on China (two more were on the region in general).

\(^{162}\) Ibid., i-ii.
production education, with the focus also made on political aspects. Those trained to become primary school teachers had eighteen hours per week of political training and only fourteen of professional study.\textsuperscript{163} Lindsay cites an excerpt from the “Common Program” of the CCP, adopted at the first plenary session of the People’s Political Consultative Conference in Beijing in October 1949. Under Article 45 of Chapter 5, literature and arts were to be “promoted to serve the people, to enlighten the political consciousness of the people and to encourage the labor enthusiasm of the people,” and under Article 46, the method of education in the PRC was “the unity of theory and practice.”\textsuperscript{164}

3.1 Starting from scratch: reimagining the child to rejuvenate China

Despite this history, the Communist Party of the newborn PRC tried to give readers the impression that all positive developments in the field of education had been achieved solely by the Communist Party. This message was common in literary works of the 1950s. This illusion of starting from scratch went hand-in-hand with rejuvenating China. Rejuvenating meant “making young again” and “restoring to an original or new condition,”\textsuperscript{165} but it also meant the process of

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 84, 98.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 193.

transferring cultural authority from intellectuals, who had the memory and knowledge of the past, to children and youth who were to be raised from scratch by the Party.

“Rejuvenation,” indeed, was a leitmotif of the early PRC. Children and youth became symbols of the young new China. “Zhongguo shaonian” (中國少年, Chinese youth) and “Shao-nian Zhongguo” (少年中國, Young China) were terms often used together and interchangeably. Thus, New China created Chinese youth, but also it was Chinese youth who were to create the new China. Children and youth figures appeared often in books and on screen. In the early 1950s works about and for them were produced en masse.

The term “rejuvenation” appears in different works and articles on China and is always associated with strengthening economic, industrial or cultural progress and ideological unity. This unity suggests an “us” versus “them” distinction, which brings “us” closer together. This theme remains current: a recent article in The New York Times from October 31, 2012, “National Rejuvenation? Or Chinese Fascism?” goes so far as to link national rejuvenation to fascism. The argument is that “the concept of national rejuvenation was rooted in extreme nationalism and fascist thinking in the last century.” The authors bring up the examples of Hitler and Mussolini, who stressed citizens’ duty “to recover ancient strength and glory,” and of the Chinese
Nationalist Party having had a “China Revival Society” (1932-1937) that was led by Blue Shirts, presumably modeled after Mussolini’s Black Shirts.\(^{166}\)

However, the Communist Party of the PRC placed internationalism (and international communism as an ultimate goal) above the nationalism that was the political and cultural line of the Nationalist Party. Thus, fascism in the sense of extreme nationalism does not describe the Chinese reality of the 1950s-1960s. However, the close relation between “rejuvenation” and political control is undeniable, and the distinction between “us” and “them” existed clearly in the early PRC, not related to nationalism, but built on the class struggle and “anti” campaigns. For such “rejuvenating,” education and children’s literature as a part of it were supposed to both increase children’s scientific knowledge and to have a hold on their ideological mindsets. The CCP immediately took steps to build such an education.

\(^{166}\) Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “National Rejuvenation? Or Chinese Fascism?” in *New York Times*, Oct.31, 2012. Original the “China Revival Society” (華興會, Huaxinghui) was established by Sun Yatsen in 1894 in Honolulu; it aimed to overthrow the Qing and existed in China until 1905. What Tatlow refers to here is “Blue Shirts Society” (藍衣社, Lanyishe) also referred to by the name of the above-mentioned “China Revival Society.” It started appearing in China among Whampoa Military Academy circles who had sworn to be personally loyal to Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yatsen’s “Three Principles” in the 1920s and functioned as a society in 1932-37, initially agitating to proclaim Chiang Kai-shek a fascist dictator. See W.F.Elkins, “Fascism” in China: The Blue Shirts Society 1932-37” in *Science and Society*, vol.33 no4, 1969 (Guilford Press), 426.
In the official 1952 policy document “Regulations of Principles of Education in the People’s Republic of China” [“Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jiaoyu zhidu faling”] nation-building was placed in direct relation with education. Kindergartens were to prepare children from three to seven years of age for primary schools, where children were to study for five years, after which they needed to take examinations to enter middle school.\textsuperscript{167} All students were exempted from paying tuition. The country entered the process of active school building and reforming. In the early 1950s, schools were reorganized along Soviet patterns, and curricula were translated from Russian.\textsuperscript{168} Theories and practices were borrowed from the Soviet Union, and Soviet experts were invited to China because of an acute lack of specialists, fresh graduates often became teachers; in rural areas primary school graduates sometimes were trained to become teachers in elementary schools.\textsuperscript{169} Under the Constitution of 1954 citizens had the right to education.\textsuperscript{170} Unlike the KMT, the CCP had twenty years of experience in educational administration by the time of their coming to power in 1949. According to Cleverley, the schools of the old liberated

\textsuperscript{167} “Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jiaoyu zhidu faling” (The Central People’s Government of the PRC, Legislative Committee, 1952), 2-3.

\textsuperscript{168} Hawkings, \textit{Education and Social Change in the People’s Republic of China}, 15.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 204-206.

\textsuperscript{170} Cleverley, \textit{The Schooling of China}, 121.
areas “were the products of the exigencies of war, and they drew heavily on People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and cadre training institutions for inspiration.”

As Marxism-Leninism was taken as the key philosophy, its opponents needed to be discredited. The big influence Dewey had on the Republican educational discourse led to Mao to attack Dewey’s democratic educational views as of a piece with U.S. imperialism’s tool of cultivating “spiritual aggression.” In 1949, Mao associated Dewey’s students in China with the U.S., who supported Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists. They were thenceforth condemned to marginal status in China’s new literary arena. This did not, however, mean that none of the approaches that were suspiciously similar to Dewey’s were used, as Xu Di notes in his comparative study of Dewey’s and Mao’s ideas and practices. Among striking similarities was that between Dewey’s slogan of “Learning by Doing” and Mao’s “Learning by Practicing.” This again illustrates the significant role of evolution and inheritance in “revolution,” the two main differences between the periods being the model chosen to follow and the goal in relation to

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172 Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China*, 3. The term was used by Mao.

173 Ibid., 3-4.

174 though the similarities were silenced

power. To a considerable degree, this latter goal can be explained by the PRC’s experiences of a struggle for power and its witnessing the failure of the Nationalist Party and success of the USSR in preserving power.

Work-study education had appeared after World War I as a result of many poor young people and, sometimes, children looking for education; in 1919-1920 many were sent to work and study in France. Xu Di, like Bastid, also refers to the late Qing’s vocational schools, where children and youths were learning practical skills.\textsuperscript{176} Thus, the idea of work-study was not new or invented by Mao. However, his approach differed from Dewey’s in that Dewey argued that the school is the society and should transcend class limitations, whereas Mao claimed that society is the school, and it is exactly the class line that is “the ultimate issue in schooling.”\textsuperscript{177}

Another threat to the regime, apart from rival theories, was religion and philosophy. Owing to the new belief that “religion is the opiate of the people,” in July 1951 all missionary work in China was suspended.\textsuperscript{178} As for Confucian institutions and temples, during the civil war they were used as barracks, dormitories and even rubbish dumps. Ironically, 1949 was the 2500\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Confucius’s birth, but a UNESCO conference scheduled to be held in Nanjing

\textsuperscript{176} Xu, \textit{A Comparison of the Educational Ideas and Practices of John Dewey and Mao Zedong in China}, 11-12.

\textsuperscript{177} Xu, \textit{A Comparison of the Educational Ideas and Practices of John Dewey and Mao Zedong in China}, 3.

\textsuperscript{178} Cleverley, \textit{The Schooling of China}, 118.
was cancelled. However, as the result of the 1950s debate on Confucius, he was still given credit by intellectuals and officials for his teachings and some of the classics were taught at school.  

The Party was very concerned about the commitment of intellectuals and educators, especially primary school teachers, who had been mistreated by rural communist cadres. In 1954 intellectuals received a warning when Hu Feng, a poet and literary theorist who had spoken of a free debate in literature, was imprisoned for counter-revolutionary activities. The movement of the “Three Anti’s” (early 1950s) further restricted freedom of literary expression. As Cleverley notes, the CCP used harsh measures towards those who, as the Party thought, were threatening its leadership, and then found explanations to justify such treatment. However, another important factor leading to the popular pro-Party enthusiasm in writings of this period was that, as Cleverley claims, the early 1950s was a period of enthusiasm and faith in the CCP, who after 1911 managed finally to unite the country and raise hopes for stable rule, peace, and an improved life working for the Party.

Many scholars, including Frazer and Kierman, believe that intellectuals were willing to take the side of the Communists because they were exhausted by the control, and reign of terror that they suffered under the Nationalist Party. They wanted the civil war to end, and to help China, and the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{179}} \text{Ibid.}, 123-124.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{180}} \text{Ibid.}, 125.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{181}} \text{Ibid.}, 126.\]
CCP needed their help, and because the Communists played upon their vulnerabilities, which included their inability to make a career outside of government, they went along with the new politics. Large scale education building also could not fail to inspire enthusiasm in intellectuals, especially at first, when they hoped they could contribute.

However, there was not much flexibility in education and writing for children. The goal of education was to assign each graduate their specific role in the ongoing national construction, and from primary school on children were taught to become a useful element of the new society. So long as it coincided with the CCP’s interests, the Soviet Union was called “older brother” and invited to help the PRC in educational and other fields. In December 1949 Mao went to Moscow and signed the Thirty Year Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance. The Chinese were to learn from the “older brother”, and the Preamble to the Constitution of 1954 declared the friendship between the countries ‘indestructible.’ The USSR seemed even more attractive because the KMT had looked to the West.

The saying “The Soviet Union’s today will be our tomorrow” (Sulian de jintian jiu shi women de mingtian) was popular in the 1950s. In 1957 during his second visit to Moscow, Chairman Mao

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183 Ibid., 131.

declared addressing thousands of Chinese students studying there: “The world is yours.”

According to Nicolai Volland, it was not even Soviet socialist classics like Nikolay Ostrovsky’s “How the Steel Was Tempered” (1934) that had the highest print runs in the PRC in the first half of the 1950s, but Soviet works for children and youth. Volland cites a paragraph on the notion of new Chinese children’s literature from the Dictionary of New Nouns (Xin mingci cidian, Shanghai, 1954), which says that children’s literature in new China is “a powerful literary tool of educating that uses the spirit of communism.” Children’s literature uses different literary methods to show children the correct attitude towards life’s realities. If a literary work is good enough, it can accomplish the task of teaching things that would take much longer to teach at school. And in creating literature for children, one should be familiar with children’s life and take into consideration differences between the child and the adult in their views and perceptions. This is the case because, according to the Russian writer Gorky, the things to write for adults and for children need to be the same, while the methods of writing must be different.

185 Lanjun Xu and Andrew F. Jones, Er Tong de Fa Xian. Xian Dai Zhong Guo Wen Xue Ji Wen Hua Zhong De Er Tong Wen Ti (The Discovery of Childhood. Children in Modern Chinese Literature and Culture). (Beijing, Beijing University Press, 2011), 251.

186 Ibid., 253.

187 Xu and Jones, Er Tong de Fa Xian. Xian Dai Zhong Guo Wen Xue Ji Wen Hua Zhong De Er Tong Wen Ti, 253.

188 Ibid., 253-254.
As in the Republican era, in Communist Marxist-Leninist literature for children, human character was viewed as something changeable and improvable.\textsuperscript{189} The new child in the PRC was to be loyal to the state and heroic; heroism was to be learned from the characters of Soviet works like “How The Steel Was Tempered” (1934) and “The Story of Zoya and Shura” (1953), twins who grow up during the rule of Stalin and who died during World War II,\textsuperscript{190} officially claimed to have sacrificed themselves heroically. Their mother’s voice in the story adds to the reader’s emotional attachment to the characters, but does not interfere with the twins’ views and behavior, since she chooses to let her children find their own way in life – with the help of the Party of course. The characters’ bravery, strong will, sense of responsibility and loyalty to their communist motherland are the qualities that readers admired in them and tried to emulate.\textsuperscript{191} The story of their childhood was printed in periodicals for children and youth.

School teachers told Chinese children that their USSR counterparts were the world’s happiest and luckiest, and that the Soviet Union cared for its workers. Students read Soviet newspapers; the Western capitalist press, it was said, was filled with crime, sex and racial prejudice. In 1955 Chinese children were encouraged to behave like Soviet children, e.g. to stand up when

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 254.

\textsuperscript{190} See Ibid., 257-259.

\textsuperscript{191} See Ibid, 261-262.
answering a teacher, and do homework on time,\textsuperscript{192} to be clean, exercise regularly, follow public rules and protect public property, and not to smoke, drink, curse or lie. Besides, they were to carry school identity cards. Numerous Soviet teaching materials were brought to China, Soviet children’s literature entered school libraries, and Chinese publishers copied the Soviet practice of popularizing science through the press and books. The title of the Communist youth group Young Pioneers, designed for children from nine to fifteen years of age, was also borrowed from the USSR. ‘Five loves’ were to be inculcated through the movement’s study and work activities: love of motherland, people, labor, scientific knowledge and public property.\textsuperscript{193}

Relations between China and the USSR started getting worse in 1956 and deteriorated, until by 1966 Soviet specialists and students were recalled to the USSR and Chinese students studying there were repatriated. One cause of the divergence was the USSR’s criticism of the cult of personality, which started appearing after Stalin’s death in 1953 and was officially proclaimed in 1956. This was something Mao could not abide (this approach is seen in Chinese periodicals from 1953). This shift away from the USSR found reflection in education, as the whole program was revised and changes were made.\textsuperscript{194} Now the Party could use all the achievements, practices and ideas to go in a direction it wanted and to strengthen its authority.

\textsuperscript{192} The amount of homework also increased following the Soviet pattern.

\textsuperscript{193} Cleverley, \textit{The Schooling of China}, 133-134.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 135-137.
An educational report from 1956 said that socialism needed talents developed in a comprehensive manner. A student, starting from primary school, must be good in study, physique and work, have both talent and a good character and be physically healthy. Contemporary scholar Anita Chan conducted surveys on children’s upbringing under Mao, and her interviewees underlined the influence on them of “political socialization at school,” which “promoted competitive aspirations to prove personal devotion [to the party], instilled exaggerated needs to conform to political orthodoxy, and encouraged strong prejudices against outcaste groups.” The notion of a political activist suggested believing in party teaching totally, without any doubt. It also meant cultivating the enthusiasm in masses. Of all kinds of activists, which the author names “conforming”, “rebellious”, “purist” and “pragmatic”, rebellious and pragmatic were appreciated much less. Thus, critical thinking, which was much encouraged in children through education and literature as demonstrated in the first part of this study, came to be discouraged during the PRC. From a young age children were prepared for social roles. Starting from primary school, those most politically active and academically successful were chosen to join Young Pioneers, and then the Communist Youth League, from

195 Fraser, *Chinese Communist Education*, 264.
196 Anita Chan, *Children of Mao* (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1985), 2.
197 Ibid., 6.
198 Ibid., 8-9.
which candidates suitable for full Party membership were selected. Thus, even little children were involved in a single pyramid of political activity and competition.

### 3.2 Writing the child and writing for the child in the 1950s

In the early 1950s enormous quantities of new reading materials were published to replace Republican literature. Cleverley estimates that over ninety per cent of books published by the Commercial Press of Shanghai were burned, dumped or pulped. Millions of books for children were published annually by the new Children’s Publishing House (Zhongguo shaonian ertong chubanshe), as well as children’s newspapers and magazines. According to statistics published by the *People’s Daily* (*Renmin ribao*, est. 1946) on June 1, 1955, Chinese writers from all over the country had published in total more than two thousand eight hundred works for children since October 1949. A *People’s Daily* report from October 1955 stated that writers worked according to preliminary plans to create stories, songs, plays and fairytales for children. Among these, “pocket sized picture books of black and white drawings based on a minimum vocabulary with titles like *The Liberation of Hainan Island, Land Reform*, and *Thirty Years of

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199 Fraser, *Chinese Communist Education*, 266.


the Chinese Communist Party sold in spectacular numbers to young and old.”

A system of simplified characters was introduced in 1956 to promote literacy. Cleverely also states that the content of civics and history courses was rewritten to focus on Marxism and communism. School textbooks were filled with accounts of bands and peasants, like the Yellow Turbans and the Red Eyebrows, who heroically rebelled against the despotism of officialdom.

In the “Report to the Third Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers of 1960” literature and art are said to be “a form of ideology belonging to the superstructure; they are a reflection of the economic basis and are the nerve centre of the class struggle.” As such, “revolutionary literature and art are subordinate to revolutionary politics.” They were to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers since Mao’s 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature.” Chou Yang brings as examples of revolutionary works several dozens of novels and stories.

202 Cleverley, The Schooling of China, 123.
203 Ibid., 123.
204 The First Congress was held in 1949, and the Second Congress – in 1953.
206 Ibid., 6.
207 Ibid., 7.
celebrating heroic revolutionary fighters. If earlier people were to learn from their educators, now educators and literary and art workers needed to learn from the masses of people through the process of working with them, and to praise their fine qualities, fighting spirit and enthusiasm for labor. Humanism and its morality was called an “ideological weapon of the revisionists.” Institutions were reorganized and brought under the central control of the Party.

Diény cites Mao’s 1926 statement that to make a revolution, it’s important to distinguish between your friends and enemies and necessary to prepare young ones to do the same. Children were to love the masses, as they were told to have power and truth and nothing is impossible when they are united. Traditional hierarchies were reversed: the young, not the old, now represented truth and power. Girls became popular characters in children’s books, where they often were brave warriors. Children were to love the Party and Chairman Mao, whose merits were praised in children’s books. (“If not for the Party, you would not exist!” was a common phrase.) They were to be grateful to the Party and the Chairman, emphasizing “moral

208 Ibid., 12-13.
209 Ibid., 18-19.
210 Ibid., 50.
211 Jean-Pierre Diény, Le monde est à vous (The World is Yours)(Gallimard, 1971), 59-61.
212 Ibid., 62.
indebtedness” (*bao’en*), a concept whose governance applications Liang Qichao had emphasized as early as 1912.\(^{213}\)

Children were also to love the People’s Liberation Army and to respect heroes. Diény notes that after Liberation the Party sought to supplant the influence of the family.\(^{214}\) Starting in 1963, Lei Feng’s diary was published as a part of a big campaign, in which this soldier of the PLA, who died in 1962 at the age of 21, was presented as an ideal citizen.\(^{215}\) The use of the diary was part of a larger effort undertaken to improve Mao’s image after the Great Leap Forward.\(^{216}\) This was undoubtedly a way for the Party to increase its own influence on children’s minds. The culmination came during the Cultural Revolution, when children were encouraged to rebel against their parents.

Speaking about writing styles of works for children, Diény distinguishes six schemes of plot, formed by different relations between an exemplary character (“model”), a positive character (“friend”), an event, or problem, and an enemy.\(^{217}\) Ye Shengtao, Bing Xin and Zhang Tianyi’s


\(^{214}\) Diény, *Le monde est à vous*, 73.

\(^{215}\) Ibid., 72-83.

\(^{216}\) Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 566.

\(^{217}\) Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 89-93.
works for children included all of these elements except enemies. Diény says that the propaganda for children can be static or dynamic. As children love stories, the latter prevail over descriptions; however, illustrations also have an important role in children’s books. In the narrative, instead of political theory there are principles put into action. There appeared episodes from school life, and the key genre was realism.\footnote{Ibid., 87.} School stories occupy a big place in the works of Bing Xin (for example “Tao Qi Summer Diary” [“Tao Qi de shuqi riji,”] (1956) and Zhang Tianyi (for example “The Story of Luo Wenying” [“Luo Wenying de gushi] (1952) discussed below. Chinese polemists encouraged writers to combine revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism.\footnote{Chou, \textit{The Path of Socialist Literature and Art in China}, 35.} Thus, exaggerations and pathos, if found appropriate and conducive to the Party’s tasks, were to be referred to as revolutionary romanticism. This was convenient, as it allowed a certain degree of double-dealing: while fairy tales were largely prohibited as poisonous lies, manipulation of facts was taking place when needed.

Revolutionary realism and romanticism brought with them militarization of literature and songs for children. Articles and stories were full of heroes and enemies, child characters were all willing to become warriors of the revolution, and popular songs were also militant and devoted to the revolution and the Party.
However, there were realistic works that encouraged in children truly useful and positive features. In 1956-1958 “Five Goods” were propagandized to help with the First National Five Year Economic Plan: “maintaining harmony in the family and neighborhood and giving mutual assistance, organizing a good domestic life, giving children a good education, encouraging their dear ones to good work and study well, and pushing themselves to obtain good results in their studies.” These were mainly directions for women\textsuperscript{220} and also for children, as exemplified in works from Zhang Tianyi’s “Young Pioneers,” discussed below. Children were encouraged to do the same and to help their mothers with realizing these goals.

In 1957 Mao inaugurated a policy of “Let one hundred flowers blossom, let one hundred schools of thought contend.” In literature, art and science alike the new was to be created from old, following the Party’s guideline of serving workers, peasants and soldiers. Creativity and honest criticism were encouraged.\textsuperscript{221} The policy brought new forms, styles and themes, as intellectuals felt more freedom. However, this liberalization ended in late 1957 as the Anti-Rightist Movement began, and many who had spoken out were persecuted.


\textsuperscript{221} Chou, \textit{The Path of Socialist Literature and Art in China}, 21.
3.3. The pioneers of children’s literature reimage the child

All the three writers continued creating their works for children in the PRC. However, their writing styles and the content of their 1950s works differ notably from those they had written in the Republican period. The general mood of their works changed from the dramatic (in the cases of Ye and Zhang) and the melancholically nostalgic (in the case of Bing Xin) to the optimistic. The mode of writing for all three writers also became markedly more prescriptive. They now treated children as active agents of society rather than its victims.

Ye, Bing Xin, and Zhang all held important posts in the PRC, as will be discussed below, and were renowned literary critics, whose opinions on writing for children were published in the state’s flagship newspaper People’s Daily. In an October 6, 1953 People’s Daily article, “On Improving Work in the Aspect of Literary Writings for Children” (“Guanyu gaijin ertong wenyi duwu fangmian gongzuo de yijian”), all three authors appear as advisers on how to write for children. All of them say that there are too many bad works for children and not enough good ones and stress the importance of literature for children. 222

3.2.1 Ye Shengtao

Even before the official founding of the PRC, Ye joined the Communist political organization. In September 1949 Ye was elected as a member of the National People’s Political Consultative Committee. He went on to hold high-ranking positions in the cultural bureaucracy. In October, the same month the PRC was founded, he was elected to the committee for reforming Chinese characters. He later became the head of its editorial and publishing department. In 1949 he was also appointed as the head of the textbooks editorial and censorship committee of Huabei people’s government, vice-president of the national publishing department, and head of the editorial and censorship department. All of these appointments indicate the new regime’s high regard for Ye. In 1954 Ye was appointed the vice-chairman of the Ministry of Education, the head of the People’s Education Publishing House (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe) and the vice-chairman of the editorial committee of the periodical People’s Education (Renmin jiaoyu).

After 1949 Ye Shengtao did not write fairytales. Indeed, he wrote much less fiction than he had during the Republican period. He was busy with his high administrative positions, and he was also getting old. He kept writing textbook drafts and essays on education, and became a crucial figure in setting the rules for writing textbooks and works for children. His encouragement of authors to write in the same manner as to speak was cited in People’s Daily as early as on September 28, 1949 and was widely followed and cited by authors. His name is mentioned in People’s Daily 259 times between 1949 and 1965 in articles on meetings of education officials, in essays on literary criticism, and in his own essays devoted to children’s education. In “On Improving Work in the Aspect of Literary Writings for Children,” Ye writes of his hopes for
children’s literature in China. He hopes that writers will interact with children more and write about their real lives, that they will write literary works in the same style as textbooks, and that they will pay more attention to language.  

His maxim that one should write as one speaks (xie wenzhang gen shuohua) was widely cited and became an anthem of new China’s literary style as early as 1949.

Ye’s new genre for children during this era was song lyrics. In 1955 he wrote “Little Boat” [“Xiaoxiaode chuan”], and in 1958 there appeared seven other songs, including “Ant” [“Mayi”], “Goldfish” [“Jinyu”], and “Frog” [“Qingwa”]. He also wrote official greetings on public holidays for children from the Ministry of Education. “Little Boat,” which contains only four lines, describes a child sitting in a small boat made of a crescent moon, looking at the blue sky and stars. The theme is reminiscent of Bing Xin’s romantic admiration of nature and childhood from the 1920s-1930s; in this Ye also repeats his sentiments from the May Fourth Movement, when, like Bing Xin, love and beauty were his ideals. However, most of Ye’s songs concern social and political topics. One song from 1958, “The Motherland All in Green is So Lovely”

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223 Ye, “Guanyu gaijin ertong wenyi duwu fangmian gongzuo de yijian.” 3.

224 For example: Ye Shengtao, “Zhongguo Ertong jijiang chuban” (Chinese Children [periodical] will soon be published) People’s Daily (September 21, 1949), 4.

225 For example, On May 24, 1958 he published “A Present to Children – Greetings on the Children’s Day from the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Education Ye Shengtao” (see Liu, Ye Shengtao yanjiu, 1012).

226 Liu, Ye Shengtao zhujuan, 55.
“Zuguo quan lù tai ke’ai” combines the theme of verdent summer with that of study and labor. Ye Shengtao writes: “Beside the house under the green tree study well,” “in the village under trees it is cool, take a good rest after work” [emphasis added] and in the end invites everyone to compete in efforts to plant trees. 227 The latter theme has separate lyrics dedicated to it and called “Planting Trees” [“Zaishu”] (1958). “We Too Came to Repair the Reservoir” [“Women ye lai xiu shuiku”] (1958) extols the labor of reconstruction. Thus, Ye Shengtao encouraged in little readers love and pride for the motherland and love of work.

The labor extolled in these songs is related precisely to the construction and improvement of the motherland, to nation-building. The lyrics promote collectivism, but with a distinct element of competition that exceeds that described by Anita Chen: the author invites listeners to compete in efforts to plant trees, and in the name “We Too Came to Repair the Reservoir.” Patriotism, the national construction and collective labor being main themes, the writer takes his lyrics into a positive direction, avoiding the themes of enmity and opposition between “us” and “them,” revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, which were typical of this period. He instead focuses on positive things that children can do for their country.

For Ye Shengtao, children’s education and literature had always been closely interrelated. This expressed itself most during the Communist period; the writer concentrated on both how to

write and how to teach most positively and efficiently. Ye Shengtao opposed blind borrowing of Soviet educational practices. In his 1958 response to a letter from a pedagogical university graduate he said that what the latter had learned were Soviet theories, however, his application of these theories needed to be in relation with Chinese realities.\(^{228}\)

Between 1949 and 1966, over thirty works by Ye, including new editions of his Republican-era fairytales and new essays, were published. In the 1950s, Ye’s fairytales from the 1920s were republished with commentary explaining that they illustrated how bad the Republican regime was. A 1956 edition of *Selected Fairytales by Ye Shengtao (Ye Shengtao tonghua xuan)* contains a short summary of the book, which explains that all of the fairytales, including “Scarecrow” and “The Stone Statue of an Ancient Hero” were written by the author before “Liberation” and, as outstanding works of literature after the May Fourth period, reflect the people’s sufferings and hardship under the Nationalist regime and their fight for freedom.\(^{229}\) On the cover of the book is Huang Yongyu’s painting of a happy scarecrow, jumping in the air and smiling, as if it had also been liberated, like people were claimed to be. On the opening page this laughing scarecrow holds above its head an open book that faces back, as if inviting us to read about its past.

\(^{228}\) Ye Shengtao da jaioshi de 100 feng xin. (Ye Shengtao Responds to 100 Letters from Teachers) (Kaiming chubanshe, 1989), 1.

\(^{229}\) Ye Shengtao, *Ye Shengtao tonghua xuan* (Selected Fairy Tales by Ye Shengtao) (Beijing, Zhongguo shaonian ertong chubanshe, 1956), 2.
3.2.2 Bing Xin

During the Mao era, Bing Xin became more prominent than ever before. She is published or mentioned in *People’s Daily* in cultural, literary and political contexts 244 times between 1951 and 1965. Letters in her third cycle of *More Letters to Young Readers* (*Zai ji xiao duzhe*, 1958-1960) were published in *People’s Daily* as soon as she finished them. Bing Xin’s decision to resume writing, she said, was inspired by a call from the *People’s Daily* for writers to create works during the “Hundred Flowers” movement.\(^{230}\) Her first work to be published in *People’s Daily*, a short story, appeared on June 2, 1956. In “Suggestions of a Mother” [“Yige muqin de jianyi”], a woman complains of how hard it is to buy matching clothes for children and makes recommendations about what kind of clothing should be produced by a country that takes better care of its children. She asks if the protagonist has a sewing machine to lend her, because many mothers decide to make clothes themselves to have their children look great for International Children’s Day on June 1.\(^{231}\) In this story the author focuses on practical aspects of life and does not go into politics.

“Tao Qi’s Summer Diary” [“Tao Qi de shuqi riji”] (1956), another short story, appeared the same year. It is similar to her *Letters to Young Readers* in that it was written in the form of a first-person diary. The narrator is a school girl Tao Qi (a pun on “mischievous,” *taoqi*) who starts

\(^{231}\) This holiday was officially established internationally in 1954. For the story see Bing Xin, “Yige muqin de jianyi” (“Suggestions of a Mother”), *Renmin Ribao* (June 2, 1956), 3.
writing her diary on July 14, 1953 on the recommendation of a teacher who is not satisfied with her writing skills. The teacher, repeating Ye Shengtao’s slogan, instructs her student to write as she speaks. The story, in short, simulates a learning environment that young readers might emulate. We learn, for instance, that Tao Qi even reads exemplary works of Soviet literature, such as “The Story of Zoya and Shura.”

The story also promotes the Party-sponsored socio-political practice of “art workers” going to live among people to get “real experiences” through dialogue between the teacher and the student. Tao Qi’s father is a writer who has gone off to “experience life” (tiyan shenghuo), a slogan meaning the working life of the common people. The development of the social policy theme is typical of Bing Xin and Zhang Tianyi’s works from the 1950s. The teacher inspires Tao Qi not only to study well, but also to encourage and help her classmates, to not make fun of them and to take more responsibility.

An important theme of Bing Xin’s 1950s works is international unity. In 1957 and 1958 Bing Xin published in People’s Daily poems praising Moscow and Egypt. In “Moscow Sky” [“Mosikede shangtian”], published on October 21, 1957, she praises peace achieved by the united people’s forces. In “Saluting the People of Egypt” [“Xiang Aiji renmin jinggao”],

\[232\] Ru Zhuo ed., Bing Xin he ertong wenxue, 693-694.

\[233\] Ibid., 694-695.

published on January 29, 1958, she says that Chinese people should unite with people of Asia and Africa to eliminate imperialism and achieve long lasting peace for future generations.\(^{235}\) Her writings for children, however, are less militant.

On May 31, 1959, for instance, *People’s Daily* published Bing Xin’s “A Kite that is looking for friendship” [“Xunqiu youyi de fengzhen”]. The short story, said to have been inspired by International Children’s Day, adapts the story of the Chinese-French movie *Kite* [*Fengzheng*, 1958].\(^{236}\) In Bing Xin’s adaptation of the movie (which, according to Bing Xin, had contributed to international friendship) a Chinese boy Song Xiaoqing flies a kite in the shape of the Monkey King Sun Wukong with a friendly message over India, Greece, and Central Europe. It flies all the way to Paris, where it is found by a French boy, Pierrot, and his younger sister. They then send the Sun Wukong kite back to Song Xiaoqing and Chinese children with a friendly response and a French poem. Bing Xin concludes by telling her little readers that friendship and peace are very important for building a happy future and wishes them a happy holiday.\(^{237}\)

\(^{235}\) In Egypt there was a revolution in July 1952, the monarchy came to the end and the republic was proclaimed, becoming an ally of the USSR. For the poem see Bing Xin, “Xiang Aiji Renmin Jinggao” (“Saluting the People of Egypt,” *Renmin ribao* (January 29, 1957), 8.

\(^{236}\) According to *China Daily*, “France is the first foreign country that co-produced films with China. The first Sino-French film, *The Kite*, was directed by Chinese director Wang Jiayi and his French colleague Roger Pigaut and was screened in 1958.” (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/entertainment/2013-05/24/content_16527564.htm)

\(^{237}\) Bing Xin, “Xunzhao youyide fengzheng” (“A Kite that is looking for friendship,” *People’s Daily*, (May 31, 1959), 8.
Needless to say, Soviet children also figure prominently in Bing Xin’s works of the 1950s. In 1959 her work “Children by the Moscow River” [“Mosike hepande haizi”] was published in *Guangming Daily (Guangming ribao)*. This story, too, was inspired by an occasion: the fortieth anniversary of Russia’s October Revolution. Bing Xin claims that this anniversary reminded her of the Soviet children she saw during her trip to the USSR in 1958. They ran towards the Chinese delegation and exchanged with them colorful badges. By looking into the eyes of these smiling children, she said, she could see their pure souls. These children had not seen war or oppression and were being raised in a friendly society that treated every guest regardless of their race or language as a friend. In capitalist countries, she claims, one cannot meet such children because they had lost trust in others and are scared of strangers. Where there is oppression, she concludes, one is not willing to have an open heart.\(^{238}\)

Bing Xin’s return to children’s literature was associated with *More Letters to Young Readers*. On March 18, 1958, *People’s Daily* announced that Bing was resuming writing for children, and that she was about to go visit other countries. The editor wished her a good trip and hoped that she would keep writing for children. It was then the time of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), and the editor predicted a boom in literature.\(^{239}\) Bing Xin wrote seven out of twenty

\(^{238}\) Zhuo, *Bing Xin he ertong wenxue*, 504-505.

chapters of the new *Letters* abroad, as she visited Europe and the USSR as a representative member of the Chinese delegation of the Union of the Writers of Asia and Africa.

The same day as the announcement, March 18, 1958, the first letter appeared; the seventh and last appeared on May 29, 1958. In her first letter Bing Xin thanks *People’s Daily* and the Great Leap Forward. She asks children to keep waiting for her new letters about her travel experiences. In the same letter she says to her “little friends” that in these years between her first two cycles of the *Letters to Young Readers* and this one China had gone a long way “from hell to paradise” and would still get better and better, which makes her very happy.\(^{240}\)

In subsequent letters, Bing Xin tells of different countries. Writing about Egypt, she expresses her joy that the monarchy has turned into a republic. She describes Egyptian scenery. She describes Switzerland and especially Italy, concentrating on history, geography, and the beauty of Rome and Venice. She praises Italian workers and reemphasizes the theme of unity between all the workers of the world. She concludes by enjoining her little readers, the workers of the future, to work hard. She mentions in one letter that she is about to go to England too, but she does not criticize this capitalist country, concentrating instead on praising the recently-

\(^{240}\) Ibid., 8.
established (1946) Italian republic.\textsuperscript{241} Bing Xin thus repeatedly praises socialism, but she avoids criticizing existing capitalist countries.

As I have argued above, Bing Xin’s tendency was to adopt ideas and slogans that would benefit her child readers providing them with practical knowledge and teaching them sympathy for others. Notably, she did not incite hatred towards “class enemies,” as was popular in the literature of the Maoist period. Her refrain is to be hardworking, to learn about the world’s geography, history and beauty. She creates a positive image of the world as place of love and not hate. While in 1920s and 1930s writers tried to inspire children to think critically for their own good, in 1950s such works most probably could not be published. The meaning of protecting the child thus shifted from educating a free thinker to raising an obedient citizen and a respectful and sympathetic member of society, about the future.

While the themes of voyage, nature and people had been present in Bing Xin’s earlier letter cycles, and the theme of international friendship between children was also present in Bing Xin’s \textit{Letters to Young Readers} from 1923-1926, in the 1950s cycle she represents the motherland and socio-political issues in radically different ways. In the \textit{Letters} of 1923-1926 Bing Xin avoided national politics, and her thoughts on China were present only in words of nostalgia for the motherland. In the 1958-1960 \textit{Letters} national politics is a central topic. In the very first chapter Bing Xin says that her motherland had experienced a lot of changes, “stepped out of hell into the

paradise and will now step by step become better and better.”242 She says that she, her little readers and everyone in China are happy and lucky, and children are luckiest of all, as a lot of wonderful days and deeds are awaiting them. Now six hundred million of their fellow citizens will work in joy and peace; thirty years ago she had not even dreamt of this happy day.243 She calls China “motherland” and praises the “beloved” Party without which there would be no New China.244

The theme of collective labor and work, so central to CCP ideology, is very strong in the cycle. In this, both Ye Shengtao and Bing Xin followed the prevailing trend in literature of that period. Krista Van Fleit Hang says that the image of individuals changing society with their new ideas of freedom and democracy during the May Fourth period in 1950s gave way to “the idea of change through collective action.”245 And writers were taking active part in this collective action. In order to renovate writers’ literature “the practice of delving into life (深入生活 shenru shenghuo) was institutionalized in the cultural field of 1950s and 1960s, as authors and artists

242 Zhuo, *Bing Xin he ertong wenxue*, 207.

243 Ibid., 207.

244 Ibid., 251.

spent time working and living among the peasantry.”\textsuperscript{246} While during the May Fourth period intellectuals were the ones to awake and educate the nation, during the Mao era they also needed to be reeducated and transformed.\textsuperscript{247} Bing Xin describes the everyday work of people, tells children about planting trees, the labor in the USSR and the enthusiasm and friendship of the peoples. Of the Uzbek Republic in the USSR, she utters a familiar refrain: “Uzbek’s today is China’s tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{248}

In her third letter published on April 4, 1958 Bing Xin says that it had been a pleasure for her to take part in the construction of the Ming Tombs Reservoir. She claims that people started working with joy and describes the beautiful surrounding scenery. She says that people had become their own masters and explains how the reservoir will produce electricity. Bing Xin tells her little readers that there are a lot of people working hard on the project, which is to be finished by June rainy season, and that with red flags flattering around they are creating a new beautiful world. \textsuperscript{249}

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\textsuperscript{246} Ibid, 3. Bing Xin herself took part in manual work. A front-page report in \textit{People’s Daily} on November 15, 1955 states that the writer among others was about to go to the country for “real life” experiences.

\textsuperscript{247} Hang, \textit{Literature the People Love}, 5.

\textsuperscript{248} Bing Xin, \textit{Ji xiao duzhe}, 244.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 213.
\end{flushright}
As for direct messages to child readers, Bing Xin says that they need to appreciate their happiness and realize their responsibility for the country’s future. She encourages children to develop themselves, to create, to write diaries that describe their lives, and to express their emotions after different events, such as attending a zoo. As before, she encourages them to listen carefully to their teachers and to study well.\textsuperscript{250} She opines that one of the most prominent characteristics of a socialist state is its care for children and future generations. The state provides them with the opportunity of development in all aspects; in turn they are responsible for building a beautiful future for the state.\textsuperscript{251}

The tone of the cycle, as the above examples illustrate, is pompous and didactic. Bing Xin concentrates on uplifting language and themes, emphasizing positive feelings and personal development and responsibility over distinguishing friends and enemies; she introduces to children different parts of the world and aspects of labor; and she expresses a desire that they become strong, positive and hardworking. Whereas Ye Shengtao’s works from the Republican period were received positively by the regime, Bing Xin’s were often criticized for excessive sentimentalism and lyricism. They were said to lack revolutionary ideology and to depict the world in idealized terms. Bing Xin changed her style greatly in 1950s; however, her works did not become revolutionary and militant enough to stop being criticized. The critic C.T. Hsia wrote

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\textsuperscript{250} Bing Xin, \textit{Ji xiao duzhe}, 252-253.
\textsuperscript{251} Bing Xin, \textit{Ji xiao duzhe}, 271.
\end{flushright}
in 1962 that neither Bing Xin’s sentimentalism nor her “exhortations” show her writing talent. He concludes that the range of feelings and emotions in her works is rather limited.\textsuperscript{252} A Soviet academic Cherkassky wrote in 1972 that Bing Xin “had never been a doctor, but merely a sick-nurse,” who did not look for ways out of problems, but rather consoled her weak readers with sweet words.\textsuperscript{253} Her works written after Liberation do not invalidate this statement. But this also proves that Bing Xin did not fully follow the Party’s line, as other scholars have claimed. She viewed educating little readers as a noble and important task.

We can see this, for example, in an October 6, 1953 People’s Daily article “On Improving Work in the Aspect of Literary Writings for Children” [“Guanyu gaijin ertong wenyi duwu fangmian gongzuo de yijian”], in which Bing Xin’s words appear, that the work of a children’s writer is one of a national spirit engineer (a Stalinist formulation).\textsuperscript{254} In doing such work one needs to be careful not to inspire in their young hearts hatred and war and not to raise a generation of easily controlled militant youth (as, it turned out, happened during the Cultural Revolution). Bing Xin’s works from the 1950s do not deviate from mainstream sentiments, but, of the various artistic


\textsuperscript{254} “Guanyu gaijin ertong wenyi duwu fangmian gongzuo de yijian” (“On Improving Work in the Aspect of Literary Writings for Children”), \textit{Renmin Ribao} (6 October 1953), 3.
choices available—including more militant or strident ones—she chose to focus on themes of peace, practical utility, and values such as the importance of hard work and mutual help.

From 1949 through the 1960s, fifteen Bing Xin books (including collections) were published, among them her translations of “The Prophet” by Gibran, poems by Rabindranath Tagore, and Indian fairytales. Apart from being a recognized writer, Bing Xin was a respected critic of children’s literature whose recommendations for which works children should read (or should be read to children) were broadcast via the People’s Daily.255

### 3.2.3 Zhang Tianyi

Zhang Tianyi also became a celebrity writer of the Mao era. He is mentioned in People’s Daily 100 times between 1949 and 1965, sometimes together with Ye Shengtao and Bing Xin. In the article “On Improving Work in the Aspect of Literary Writings for Children,” for example, Zhang is cited as encouraging more people to take part in writing for children, and saying that a literary work does not necessarily have to describe children’s life to be a children’s work. He

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255 For example published on May 26, 1963 article “Duo gei haizimen xie zheyang de zuopin – jieshao xiao puren he lüban” (“Write For Children More Stories Like This – Introducing “Little Servant” and “Travel Companion,” Renmin Ribao (26 May 1963), 5) recommended these two works by Ye Junjian (叶君健, 1914-1999, a famous writer, social figure and translator of “Andersen’s Fairytales.”
also advocated adapting Chinese classics into simplified versions for children.\(^{256}\) He also wrote actively for children himself. His story “How Lo Wen-ying Became a Young Pioneer” [“Luo Wenying de Gushi”] (1954), discussed below, even won a national award.

In the year 1950 Zhang Tianyi already decided to meet the Party’s mandate to write children’s works of the new realistic genre based on first-hand experience. He started collecting the “real” experiences of school children from them and their teachers, a common practice among writers at the time—although “real” elements were routinely fictionalized. In 1951 he was appointed a deputy head of the Central Literary Research Institute, and in 1952 became a member of the Chinese People’s National Committee for the Defense of Children. He held numerous other posts through the early 1960s.\(^{257}\)

In the 1950s the Party established children’s literature research institutes, and Zhang Tianyi’s children’s stories attracted much attention, especially his early works from the 1930s.\(^{258}\) Prominent cultural figures affirmed that Zhang Tianyi’s contribution to new Chinese children’s literature was great.\(^{259}\) Zhang was also in a position to help other writers to get published as the

\(^{256}\) “Guanyu gaijin ertong wenyi duwu fangmian gongzuo de yijian” (“On Improving Work in the Aspect of Literary Writings for Children,” Renmin Ribao (6 October 1953)), 3.


\(^{258}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{259}\) Ibid, 18.
editor of the first all-China periodical for children and youth, *Chinese Youth (Zhongguo Shaoonian Bao)*. In 1953 Zhang became a member of the Children’s Literature Group of the Chinese Writers Association, whose leaders included Ye Shengtao and Bing Xin.

In the 1950s Zhang Tianyi wrote seven works for children and some essays on children’s literature. He did not write any more stories for adults. This confirms my hypothesis that in the Communist period, taking into consideration political impositions on writers, he thought that children’s literature could be more meaningful (and perhaps less politically risky) than literature for adults. It also seems likely that Zhang Tianyi considered writing for children a responsibility related to his official positions in the sphere of children’s literature. Moreover, he disliked that most “new” children’s works of literature in 1950s were translations of Soviet works, and he hoped to see works by Chinese writers.

In the year 1958, after during the “Hundred Flowers” movement, Zhang Tianyi wrote the story “The Magic Gourd” [“Baohulu de mimi”]. As fairytales were not particularly welcomed in the PRC, the author placed all magic events within the frame of a dream of a schoolboy, Wang Pao, who wakes up at the end of the story. In the dream he finds a magic gourd that helps to make his

260 Ibid, 18.

261 Ibid., 14.


263 Ibid., 32-33.
wishes come true. Unlike Zhang’s stories from the 1930s, magic now is available to help a good character. In the beginning of the story the magic gourd explains that it is willing to serve Wang Pao “because you’re someone special. You’re a fine young fellow.” Besides, the magic gourd is looking for someone who needs it. Life gets easier for the lazy boy at first, but in the end he suffers from the gourd’s actions. Thus, in the end, magic is denounced, and good derives only from reality and one’s own efforts.

This application of magic differs from that of Zhang’s earlier hit story, “Big Lin and Little Lin,” which he wrote before “Liberation.” “Big Lin” is similar in that it treats magic as the everyday reality of ordinary people within the story’s universe, and reveals magic to be harmful. But in “Big Lin and Little Lin” magic is an innate characteristic of negative characters, whereas positive character make their living by working hard and not trying to benefit from interaction with those who can use magic. In “The Magic Gourd,” however, magic is not an innate characteristic of any human or animal character; it is attached to a magic object which seeks only to serve its master’s will. Magic itself is not evil, but it can be used for evil. Zhang’s criticism now targets those who are unable to make moral distinctions, and who are blindly obedient to

265 Zhang Tianyi has been cited as saying that the keys to a literary work’s persuasiveness include realism and empathy with the lives of one’s characters. Works for children, in particular, require the author to be absorbed in imagining lives of their characters. See Zhang Tianyi wenxue pinglun ji (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 245, 261.
their “masters.” Such behavior has negative consequences both for people around Wang Pao and for the boy himself.

In “Big Lin and Little Lin” magic is a force that is not subject to human influence. Humans can only try to play by its rules so that it eliminates itself. (In the end, the monster throws the train with his masters into the sea). In “The Magic Gourd,” however, magic depends on the will of its master—in this case a common schoolboy who possesses the power to destroy the magic if he tells someone about it. This is just what he does at the end of the story. The narrative leads young readers along the following path: at the beginning, magic appears acceptable and desirable, but gradually the conflicts and troubles it causes become clear, leading children finally to disapprove of magic when they realize that all the things Wang Pao obtained with the help of the magic gourd were taken from other people. This turn of events itself de-mystifies magic as a force able to create something from nothing, or to transform things (as in “Cinderella”, in which a pumpkin turns into a cab, a tattered dress into a beautiful one, mice into horses). This prepares the young reader for the final revelations about the corrupting power of magic, so that s/he is already prepared to accept Wang Pao’s rejection of the magic object with relief. Zhang now conveyed messages to children “realistically.”

In the 1954 collection Stories of Chinese Young Pioneers, neither satire nor fairytale elements are present. The book includes three stories and a play: “Going to the Cinema” [“Qu kan dianying”], “How Lo Wen-ying Became a Young Pioneer” [“Luo Wenying de gushi”], “They and We” [“Tamen he women”], and “Yung-sheng at Home” [“Yu Sheng zai jiali”]. These stories teach children to help others and not to seek public praise or be selfish. They should work as a
team without competing for fame and be diligent and well-organized at school, at home and elsewhere. The language is simple and the messages straightforward. Zhang’s attitude toward characters is friendly. In “Going to the Cinema” a school girl on her way to the cinema picks up a notebook that someone had left on bus and, choosing not to go to the cinema, which she had dreamt about for long, tracks down the owner of the lost item. The message of self-sacrifice and concern for others is self-evident. The theme of team cooperation and the priority of the collective over the personal good propels “They and We,” in which a girl lends her dress to a performer so that the team can succeed. “How Lo Wen-ying Became a Young Pioneer,” written in a form of a letter by schoolchildren to their steel worker friends, follows the lazy schoolboy Lo Wen-ying, who finally improves with the help of classmates and is allowed to join the Young Pioneers. The play “Yung-Sheng at Home” tells the story of a schoolboy, Yung-Sheng, who is a good student but a bad son. With the help of his elder sister, he realizes that to be a true Young Pioneer one must be good both at school and at home. Consequences of actions remain important, and Zhang continues to use the dialectic of positive and negative behaviors leading to good and bad ends, respectively. He encourages children to believe in the victory of good over evil and exemplify positive behavior.

In “The Magic Gourd” and Stories of Young Pioneers characters are not black and white; they are ordinary schoolchildren or Young Pioneers who struggle with their own flaws. In “The Magic Gourd” each action taken by the gourd for his master has certain results, encouraging child readers to see the consequences and draw conclusions. Stories of Young Pioneers concentrates on changes of moral values and on the characters’ understanding something new.
The importance of being a good student in “How Lo Wen-ying Became a Pioneer” and of being a helpful family member in “Yung-Sheng at Home” are two examples. The character leads juvenile readers to certain conclusions about the consequences of different types of behavior. The contrast between lifestyle and consequences is also prominent in “Big Lin and Little Lin,” in which honesty and hard work help Little Lin and his friends defeat negative characters, whose greed, malice, and hypocrisy become their undoing.

*Stories of Young Pioneers* portrays the crowd as a positive force. The crowd is represented by classmates (“How Lo Wen-ying became a Young Pioneer,” “They and We”), or by passengers on the bus (“Going to the Cinema”) and usually provides helpful advice to the main character, leading him or her towards the truth. Zhang’s stories of the 1920s and 1930s always had a main character; in the 1950s, not all did, and groups of characters tend to be the collective protagonist. The stories encourage the juvenile reader to identify with and respect the masses, and to conform to their wisdom. As children are not yet able to distinguish between right and wrong, the crowd becomes their teacher.

Zhang’s stories also show an awareness that children are receptive to praise for good deeds and disapproval of bad deeds. “They and We” contains the moral that one’s behavior should not depend on whether he or she gets the praise of the general public or not. In “The Magic Gourd” laziness is a key issue; lack of diligence is present in Lo Wenying’s character in the story “How Lo Wenying became a Young Pioneer,” and misbehavior at home - in Yung-sheng’s character from “Yung-sheng at Home.” In the two latter stories, children do not deserve to be called Young Pioneers until they improve. And when they do, they get praised. In Zhang Tianyi’s
stories from the 1950s there are no villains, only people who can recognize their flaws and change for the better. At a time when militant stories based on conflict between friends and enemies were popular and widely encouraged, Zhang chose to create only works with positive messages.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

This study has traced the birth and development of children’s literature in China and conducted a comparative analysis of the Republican era and the Communist period before the Cultural Revolution. It has demonstrated the importance of the child’s figure in the project of nation-building throughout both periods and shown that PRC developments drew on the heritage of the Republican era, which in turn owed much to the late Qing era and Western developments. This confirms Paul Bailey’s argument that study of late-Qing and Republican education helps to place China’s Communist educational development in a wider context, as post-1949 educational debates were anticipated by the issues and achievements of that period.\(^{266}\) This study has also identified and analyzed numerous differences of attitude towards the child and children’s literature in the two time periods, focusing on both the political and cultural context and in the work of three prominent Chinese writers for children who wrote in both periods, first as pioneers, and later as important cultural figures who also held official posts.

Ye Shengtao’s literary career combined children’s writing with work as an educator. His fairytale “Scarecrow” (1923) described tragic realities in China in the first decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century and was later used by the Communists to illustrate the hardships and injustice of life before “Liberation.” Yet the tragedy alluded to in the work was the victimization of the

\(^{266}\) Bailey, Reform the People. Changing Attitudes Towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China, 2-3.
Republican Chinese intellectual as well as the child. It was necessary to “save the children” by liberating and educating them, so that they could afterwards transform China. The discourse of the child went along with the realization of the urgent need for the country’s development. Through the new fairytale genre, Ye Shengtao expressed the helplessness of an intellectual, who like the Scarecrow wants but is unable to help. Understanding without action is not enough. In his other fairytales Ye created non-human observers to point out problems and flaws of society, as in “The Language of Birds and Animals” (1935), and showed resolution of problems, as in “Emperor’s New Clothes” (1930). In both kinds of works, though revealing the cruel realities of the world, he advocated moral qualities like kindheartedness, honesty and bravery, and encouraged children to think for themselves. During the early PRC period, Ye concentrated more on the educational policy, as he held high administrative posts. For children he wrote mostly essays on education and lyrics of songs. Their genre was realistic and themes were optimistic and related to the state construction, inspiring in children love for the country and for work.

Bing Xin, a prominent woman writer for both adults and children, enjoyed a happy childhood and a privileged education in missionary institutions and abroad. These partly inspired in her Republican period works a sustained theme of love, which runs through her first children’s work *Letters to Young Readers* (1923-1926). In these, she praised childhood innocence, and described the beautiful sceneries, places, and peoples of different countries. In addition, Bing Xin included some arithmetic tasks and poems in Chinese and English in her letters to improve school children’s knowledge. In her short story “Fraction” (1932) Bing Xin used a baby’s first person narration to convey an “innocent” perspective on such issues as friendship and social inequality.
In her Republican period works she advocated kindness, love, sincerity, curiosity and thoughtfulness. For that her works were often criticized, especially in the PRC, for their lyricism and lack of revolutionary spirit, even after she changed her style and themes after the “Liberation.” Her *More Letters to Young Readers* (1958-1960) concentrated on themes of state construction, labor, internationalism and a happy socialist future, also inspiring in children love for the country and for work and optimism.

Zhang Tianyi (1906-1985) began by writing both satirical works for adults and fairytales for children. In “Big Lin and Little Lin” (1932) he used exaggerations and contrasting examples of the positive and negative behaviors of two separated brothers to warn his young readers about the dangers and hypocrisies of adult life. Like Bing Xin, he included pedagogical touches such as mathematical formulas inserted in the dialogues and names. He employed similar methods and messages in “King Tutu” (1933). These stories exaggerated and ridiculed negative characters, associated with fairytale fantasy, while allowing positive characters to defeat evil, often through mutual help and unified resistance. Zhang Tianyi’s children’s works from the Republican period were hailed by critics for being optimistic and active, as were his works from the Communist period. After “Liberation” he stopped writing for adults. While serving as a government official in the sphere of children’s education, however, he wrote among other children’s works the collection of *Stories of Chinese Young Pioneers* (1954), which encouraged children to study well, work hard, be good and helpful members of the family and society, love their country and be good friends. The messages are conveyed in a straightforward manner and use examples, some drawn from personal observation.
The discourse of the child in China was encouraged by the best minds of the Republic, among them Hu Shi, Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren. Children’s literature was started and developed by prominent intellectuals and future officials, who viewed writing for children as an important task throughout their literary careers. While Ye Shengtao and Zhang Tianyi favored the fairytale genre, Bing Xin wrote letters in the first-person. Taking both descriptive and prescriptive modes, she was straightforward in conveying messages; the other two writers favored allegories, metaphors and fairytale elements. Ye Shengtao and Zhang Tianyi depicted the flaws of society, the latter having not only to camouflage his critiques of the Nationalist regime with the help of the fairytale mode, but also to change the titles of his works due to censorship. (“Big Lin and Little Lin,” as mentioned earlier, appeared under no fewer than four titles.) All three writers advocated kindness, imagination, hard work, honesty and devotion in juvenile readers. At a time when many works tried to inspire children to hate imperialists and class enemies, their works encouraged little readers to adopt a positive view towards life and peaceful and sympathetic attitudes towards others. During the Republican period children’s literature was not yet as closely related to education as it became in the PRC, when literacy was also higher. However, including school materials into literary works is one of many proofs that the heritage of the Republican period influenced the course of children’s literature in the PRC. Much of what communist historians have traditionally credited as an innovation of the PRC — realization of the importance of universal education and its relation to nation building, extracurricular activities in schools, editions for children and educative elements in children’s literature, etc. — existed in the Republic.
In the PRC children’s literature became a tool of ideological education. It was now created ostensibly not only by intellectuals, but also by the masses and was subject to strict Party oversight. Authors had to adapt to new rules. This can be seen in the new emphasis on realism and patriotism. The child was not any longer presented as a victim, but rather as a happy citizen of a wonderful country, responsible for its future. Optimism in works of new art was obligatory—by 1956 even Ye Shengtao’s scarecrow was happy. The optimism that intellectuals had in the early 1950s is partly attributable to relief at the end of long-lasting wars and hope for a united country. To be sure, the themes that Ye Shengtao, Bing Xin and Zhang Tianyi expressed in their PRC works were common at that time, yet they all avoided the theme of enmity that was also popular at the time.

These findings are important to our understanding of modern Chinese literature, as they help us to appreciate the changing agendas of writers for children, who were the prime targets of education and moral transformation. This is the first study to compare explicitly the field of children’s literature in the two different eras using the examples from the works of these three authors, who wrote for children in both eras with differences in themes and style. This study has thus provided a panoramic view of modern Chinese children’s literature from its beginning up to before the Cultural Revolution, revealing the processes that caused children’s literature in these periods to be what it was. At the same time it has demonstrated how the three pioneers of Chinese children’s literature from the Republican period tried to “save the children” of the PRC as well. These youth were to be active agents of China’s future, and, as Mao said in Moscow, the world was theirs.
This study also contributes to scholarship on children’s literature in general, first of all by introducing new findings about children’s literature in China in terms of themes and literary styles and methods. Fairytales were a common genre for depicting child-as-victim with the emotional buffer of fantasy. These gave way to works of social realism, wherein the child became an active agent of the national future. These works were used for education in both eras; during the Republican period, they appeared in works of description and satire, while in the PRC they offered prescriptive messages and models of behavior. From describing reality for children in order for them to learn to survive in it, authors moved (or were pushed) toward imagining how the reality should be and telling children how to build it. This tendency is easily traceable when one compares “Big Lin and Little Lin” or “King Tutu” with “Stories of Young Pioneers.” This study has also shown the profound connection in modern China between children’s literature and nation-building. Bringing in much analysis of historical background, it shows what processes were behind children’s literature developments. China being a great power with a long history, this study contributes to our understanding of how it has been viewing, treating and educating its new generations.
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