adopted Western liberal democracy, despite the fact that it shares the basic beliefs of the Chinese political culture.

One must realize the limits of the usefulness of a cultural explanation, even though culture does have an indisputable role in shaping a country's developing strategies and reforms. As the author notes, Chinese culture is not monopolistic (p. 106). Utopianism is part of traditional Chinese culture, but Chinese culture cannot be characterized as all utopian. Therefore, the author may have overstated his case about the real impact of utopianism on China's modern-day reform movements from the Late Qing to the Deng Xiaoping era. If indeed the argument can be taken at the face value, one will still have to face the dilemma about future direction of China's political reform: will China forever be trapped by its utopian version of the past and never be able to engage in a liberal reform? Can political culture be changed by the march of modernity and globalization?

Baogang Guo

SEIFERT, ANDREAS. Bildgeschichten für Chinas Massen. Comic und Comic-produktion im 20. Jahrhundert. Böhlau Verlag, Köln [etc.] 2008. viii, 309 pp. Ill. € 46,20; doi:10.1017/S0020859011000101

Increasingly, visual materials are being seen as primary sources for the study of aspects of the recent history of the People's Republic of China. When researching visual images, or more specifically in the case of the study reviewed here, pictorial stories or comics, we need to know more about the dynamics of the production of those images. Moreover, as they were designed and produced to provide information, change attitudes, or even behaviours, we have to look at the reception of such images and the effects they may or may not have had.

So what is it exactly that we see when we analyse comic books, as Seifert has opted to do? What do we know about the broader communication strategy that guided their publication at the time? What do we really know about the actual production process of any given pictorial story, from design to print, to distribution to consumption? Were specific artists commissioned for certain topics because of their artistic abilities or political standpoint? Were the original stories and accompanying artwork selected from a much wider offering of similar or comparable pieces? Who decided on the number of copies to be printed? Who gave the final imprimatur? Were specific themes produced for specific target groups? How and how widely were they distributed? Do large numbers of editions and copies also mean that the comics in question were in huge demand?

These and other questions are addressed in the very thorough analysis by Andreas Seifert of this erstwhile omnipresent, but academically largely overlooked, genre of the pictorial storybook. After delineating the historical roots of comic books and the developments in style and content that can be observed after the collapse of the empire in 1911–1912, he considers the didactic functions that the booklets were increasingly seen to have. With both children and the less literate as their main target groups, pictorial stories were considered excellent vehicles to spread literacy, normative knowledge, and even political propaganda. The writer and essayist Lu Xun, one of the most influential cultural voices in Republican China, was among the more forceful proponents of this view. Even the lowest levels of society could be reached using this medium, mainly through the

distributive functions of the so-called pavement libraries, where booklets could be rented. And renting comics is what children, coolies, labourers, and others did with a vengeance, even if the contents of the booklets dealt more with emperors and villains, courtesans and concubines, than with didactic or political topics.

After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the pictorial stories were incorporated into the communication strategy that the Chinese Communist Party applied to unify the nation and educate the people in the new ideology and goals of the government. To this end, established artists from various disciplines were co-opted into the arts establishment to provide wholesome and didactic works with clear propaganda purposes, in line with the demands on cultural production that Mao Zedong made in his 1942 Yan'an speeches (pp. 62–71).

Seifert argues convincingly that the subsequent period can be divided into three stages of development: 1949–1964 (including the Great Leap Forward), 1964–1976 (spanning the Cultural Revolution), and 1976–2000 (introduction of the market), with each stage marked by distinctive, dominant characteristics (pp. 71–143). In the first stage, the production side of picture books was established, including the political and organizational subordination of artists and writers; here, credible hypotheses are developed on the political chain of authority and the mechanisms of censorship (pp. 66–68, 187–201) in the cultural field. In the second, ideology and political themes and demands came to dominate picture stories as much as they did society; even within the set mould of the dominant worker/peasant/soldier/martyr stories, Seifert demonstrates how little is left to artistic independence and/or inspiration. In the third stage, designers and writers had to search for topics and styles themselves, finding inspiration in pre-1949 and even more traditional storylines and artistic styles, or turning out epigonistic work that echoes Western (Walt Disney) or Japanese comics.

All this took place within the context of an attempt by the industry to maintain its share of the market, to entertain a potential audience that was fed up with politics, had become by and large apathetic, and simply wanted to be entertained. The question of how to satisfy an audience became all the more relevant as the pavement libraries started to disappear in the 1980s: more than before, stories had to please potential readers in order to be sold. It is surely an irony that the children who grew up with comics, now all middle-aged collectors, constituted the majority of consumers in the period 2000–2010 and will continue to do so in the next decade (pp. 247–251).

In addition to providing a chronological analysis, Seifert delves deeply into the actual content of a number of the picture stories to illustrate how social, political, and economic changes influenced that content. First, he closely analyses how a well-loved and vetted (revolutionary) novel *Hongyan* [*Red Rock*, 1961] was turned into a pictorial story. He begins by looking at questions such as: how is language turned into images, and which elements are highlighted more in which genre? In the process, he compares the novel with two pictorial editions (or better still, interpretations) published in 1964–1965, one from Shanghai, one from Harbin (pp. 155–183). One of his main conclusions is that the pictorial editions – shorter by necessity – cannot be seen as translations of the literary version. Rather, the original novel provides building blocks for the simplified retelling/redrawing of the story.

Secondly, the author compares two editions of the same comic, *Qiaojiu Wang shushu* [*Saving Uncle Wang*, 1962 and 1972 editions]. Obviously, the political landscape changed enormously in the decade separating those two editions, and the question arises as to how that was translated into a comic strip (pp. 208–218). Seifert argues that the politicization

of society as a result of the Cultural Revolution is reflected in the more explicitly revolutionary representation of the story's protagonists (peasants, soldiers).

The third comparison drawn by the author involves two editions of *Bai mao nü* [*The White-Haired Girl*, 1965/1979 and 1997 editions]. Seifert's analysis (pp. 218–232) shows how this revolutionary classic, originally conceived in 1944 and one of the model works propagated during the Cultural Revolution by Mao's wife Jiang Qing, was depoliticized and abbreviated to a considerable extent in the 1997 edition in an effort to ensure it might appeal to the reader and connoisseur of the late 1990s. However, as part of that process, it became an almost completely different story. The elements of personal liberation from class and gender suppression, revenge, revolution, and anti-Japanese war were traded in for what seems to be a tragic love story. As such, it has become precisely the entertaining fairy tale that consumers are craving for.

One of the main drawbacks of this study is that the comic genre is approached in utter isolation, divorced from the broader policy developments in the field of culture and art and the political and ideological demands made on cultural producers in general. If Seifert had approached his subject from this meta-level, the result would have been less cluttered, less repetitive, and more convincingly and more tightly argued. Moreover, this essentializing of pictorial-story production misses the fact that many of the designers discussed, for example Ding Binzeng and Gu Binxing, were also active in other fields, such as propaganda design, block printing, or political cartoons. We are thus left to guess the extent to which the vicissitudes of other artistic domains influenced their experiences and their work. Lastly, stricter editorial controls would have benefited the reader of this otherwise commendable study.

Stefan R. Landsberger

JOSEPHSON, PAUL R. Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth? Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917–1989. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. 2010. ix, 342 pp. Ill. £34.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859011000113

Writing about the construction of the future State Automobile Factory (GAZ) in 1930, Boris Agapov, a correspondent for the Commissariat of Heavy Industry's newspaper *For Industrialization*, lamented bureaucratic bungling and the resultant shortages, shoddy work, and other deficiencies, but dreamed of a time when "one hundred and forty thousand machines [...] four in a row [would] come from the assembly shop, the biggest shop in Europe, one and a half kilometers long". A one-time Constructivist poet, Agapov, also envisioned the new city that would spring up next to the factory, the City of Socialism, as a city with "rectangles everywhere [...] each rectangle consisting of a clubhouse, nurseries, kindergartens, cafeterias, libraries, baths and showers working round the clock".

Boris Agapov's dreams perfectly capture the technological utopianism that Paul Josephson has taken as the subject of this broad-ranging but quite personal and obviously heartfelt book. Josephson evinces a fine appreciation of the emancipatory thrust of the Marxist socialist project but also the fatal error of its leading proponents of regarding technology as value-neutral. Asking at the outset "What was *socialist* about socialist technology?," he concludes that the rhetoric of its advantages over technology employed by capitalists – rationally planned rather than market- and profit-driven; solicitous of