

Mariia Guleva, Ph.D. student, Department of Sinology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Website: <https://ksi.ff.cuni.cz/en/people/phd-students/mariia-guleva/>

Email: mariia.guleva@ff.cuni.cz

Doctoral dissertation title: Expose and extol: China's *Manhua* magazine between domestic policies and international interactions, 1950–1960

Dissertation supervisor: Mgr. Ing. Jiří Hudeček, Ph.D.

Stay at Heidelberg University: April–July 2022 (Erasmus 4EU+ exchange)

Thesis abstract:

The dissertation scrutinises the existence of *Manhua* 漫画 magazine published in the People's Republic of China between 1950 and 1960. The magazine served as a central national mass medium for the art form of *manhua*, cartoons, in the first decade of the PRC and this study undertakes an analysis of circumstances and practices which shaped both *Manhua* the magazine and *manhua* the cartoons. It attempts to pay attention both to the complicated dynamics of domestic policies—including the agency of individual authors, their relations with the Communist Party government and “the people”, and changes in political environment—and international interactions, particularly those with the cartoon-centred national periodicals in the socialist camp countries as well as broader personal and mediated encounters with the world of foreign news press.

The central research question of the dissertation is to what degree *Manhua* became a magazine of socialist cartooning. Turning first to the matters of domestic policies, the study ponders who participated in shaping *Manhua* and the cartooning sphere of the 1950s; how those people conceptualised their vision of their art and what place *Manhua* held in those deliberations; how *Manhua* engaged in “serving the people” and how it transformed while doing so. Moving to a broader international situation, the dissertation considers such questions as how *Manhua* fitted among the cartoon-centred magazines from the other socialist camp countries and whether it is feasible to consider “socialist cartooning” an existing phenomenon with distinct features; what came out of personal and mediated encounters between cartoonists from China and other countries and what did they learn from each other; and what happened to the cartoons which were transferred across national borders from one magazine to another.

The analysis demonstrates that *Manhua* was directly connected to the practices of the previous decades and less strongly based on Soviet or other foreign models than is often claimed. *Manhua* core members' attempts to adjust their art to the demands of the new government gave life to numerous creative and theoretical initiatives, but the increasingly stifling ideological control, frequent changes in political direction, vague rhetoric, and the proclaimed goal of “serving the people” destabilised the cartoonists' authority and their confidence in navigating their art through this difficult terrain. *Manhua*'s closure in 1960 can be seen not only as a result of paper shortage, as typically stated, but also as a step to streamline the production of cartoons under the more comprehensive control within newspapers, such as *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 or *Jiefang Ribao* 解放日报. The proximity between *Manhua* and its socialist camp counterparts, Soviet *Krokodil* and Czechoslovak *Dikobraz*, while confirming the existence of “socialist cartooning” with many shared traits, was nevertheless partial and brief. The greatest difference between *Manhua* and the other two lay in the Chinese magazine's highly limited ability to produce criticism of domestic problems, as well as in *Manhua*'s obligation to involve its readers in co-production of cartoons, both of which reflect a larger distinction of Chinese approach to building socialism from the practices of late Stalinist and post-Stalinist Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. The study also shows that the scope and variety of friendly exchanges between cartooning circles of the PRC, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR served to create the performance of unanimity but in fact “learning from each other” was hindered by local conditions and so remained illusory. In sum, *Manhua* was a magazine of “socialist cartooning”, like *Krokodil* and *Dikobraz*, but the similarities between the three went only as far as the similarities between their respective political regimes.