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Images of Japan in the Frontispieces of *Ertong Shijie* during Its Latter Period: A case study on the photographs of Chinese battlefields

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Abstract: The Chinese children's literary magazine *Ertong Shijie* (1922-1941, no publication January-September 1932 or August-October 1937) was launched by ZHENG Zhenduo of Commercial Press. Volume 1, Period 1 (7 January 1922) to Volume 28, Period 25 (19 December 1931) are considered early period, while Volume 29, Period 1 (16 October 1932) to Volume 47, Period 2 (15 September 1941) are considered latter period. ZHENG Zhenduo attached great importance to the illustrations in the magazine, especially the frontispieces as the entrance to the magazine. The frontispieces mainly contain photographs from various countries. Among them, the frontispieces of *Ertong Shijie* during its early period speak favorably of Japan and the Japanese people as a whole. Through the frontispieces of the early period, a positive image of Japan's modernization was conveyed to the reader. However, as the war situation between China and Japan shifted, what did the modern visual frontispieces of the latter period, the photographs, express about Japan, and what kind of image of Japan were they trying to create? This article, therefore, focuses on the frontispieces of the latter period and examines the image of Japan represented in them by analyzing the image of 'Japan' created on the battlefields, particularly in China.

Key words: *Ertong Shijie*, Frontispieces, Japan, Image

Introduction

Ertong Shijie (Children's World) was initially published on 7 January 1922 by ZHENG Zhenduo of Commercial Press. ZHENG Zhenduo focused on making the most of the expressive power of images in children's magazines. In particular, he attached great importance to the frontispiece as the entrance to the magazine. The frontispieces were mainly photographs from various countries. Before the launch of Children's World, the pictures published in Chinese children's magazines at that time mainly showcased the talents of children. In contrast, the photographs published in *Ertong Shijie* can be regarded as a means for young readers to visually perceive the world.

Unlike pictures, photographs that appear as frontispieces at the beginning of children's literary magazines are more likely to capture the attention of young readers because of their reality and visual uniqueness. Readers grasp images of world events through the medium of photographs. The visual representations they construct from these pictures are deeply involved in the contextualisation of the text and historical discourse. In the frontispiece of *Ertong Shijie* during its early period, Japan and the Japanese were spoken of in a favourable light as a whole. Both the improved physical traits of the Japanese people and the developed transport system represented in the frontispiece are part of the image of Japan as a modern, civilised country. In other words, through the frontispiece of the early

period, a positive image of Japan's modernisation was conveyed to the reader.

However, as the war situation in China and Japan evolved, what did the modern visual frontispieces of late photography express about Japan, and what kind of image of Japan were they trying to create? In this article, I would like to examine the role of the frontispiece in *Ertong Shijie* by analysing the images of Japan created on the battlefields, particularly in China, with a focus on the frontispieces of the latter period.

1. What is an image?

How are images of Japan represented in Chinese children's publishing culture? Before clarifying this, we would like to confirm the concept of image. Suga, Kako (2017:23) writes: "The word 'image' is derived from the word 'imago'. Imago originally meant a model of a face made in ancient Rome". As can be seen from this, an image was originally a portrait that took the place of a human being. Wakakuwa, Midori (2005:17) says: "The image is that which is visible. Literature takes the written word as the ultimate object of study, while history studies the incident itself, through all the documents that record it. The aim of art history is in that sense the study of mankind's creative acts with visual media. Naturally, this now includes photography and film". Wakakuwa sees images as visual media.

Berger, John (1986:12) also states that "an image is a re-created or reproduced vision. Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even photography does. The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of various subjects, and the painter's way of seeing is reconstructed by the patterns on the canvas he paints. But we must not forget that our judgements and perceptions of the image depend on our own way of seeing things". According to Berger, an image is something that is reproduced or re-presented. Boehm, Gottfried (2017:2) also states that an icon (an image of something such as a buddha or a mandala) is "a visual representation of something, made from physical matter. From that material reality, we must not forget that something quite different from the material emerges together, such as an 'immaterial thing', a certain way of seeing, or a 'meaning'. The icon is a 'thing' that inhabits a tension between the real and the unreal". According to Boehm's point, an image is positioned between material reality and an idea (the immaterial). Bergson, Henri (2007:8) added: "Let us pretend that we know nothing about the various theories of matter and of spirit, about the various controversies concerning the reality or ideality of the external world. In doing so, he points out, I am confronted with a number of imageries, and

by imageries here I mean imageries in the most vague sense, which are perceived when I open my senses and cease to be perceived when I close them”. As Bergson points out, the image is not only a figure, but also something that is linked to the body, to perception. Based on previous research on these definitions of image, this paper takes one frame of reference that an image (iconography) is a visual art form, and that photography is also an image.

2. Frontispieces of the latter period related to war

In the latter period, from the first phase of Volume 38, the frontispieces were photographic in photogravure editions. Among them, there were 41 frontispieces in photographic editions that were related to Japan. And in the magazine, photographs related to images of the battlefield began to appear as frontispieces during The Second Sino-Japanese War period, and further developed during the war period, with a gradual increase in the number of such photographs published in the magazine. Thus, among the 41 photographs, 40 photographic editions had such a pattern of frontispieces. The representations of photographs visualised the images of the Second Sino-Japanese War period at the time. The reading of visual iconography also enabled a complex and multi-layered transmission of information, intermingling with linguistic information. The function of such illustrations in books was taken over by serialised newspaper fiction, while at the same time new newsworthiness values were found in photographs linked to news (Komori, Yoichi and Fukui, Norihiko 2002:7). For this reason, this section analyses the images of Japan represented in the 40 photographs published in the magazine after the 7 July 1937 the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (the July 7th Incident).

Before analysing the situation, it is important to review the historical background after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident: the clash between the Chinese and Japanese forces at Marco Polo Bridge on 7 July 1937 developed into an all-out war on 28 July, and then on 13 August, war broke out in Shanghai and the war spread to Central China. The reason why the Marco Polo Bridge Incident developed into an all-out war was that, because of Japan’s growing desire to separate and dominate northern China, and despite the growing nationalist rally in China for anti-Japanese salvation that would not allow any more Japanese aggression, Japan disrespected China and easily launched military force under the one-strike theory (Eguchi, Keiichi 1988: 58-59).

In summary, the war between China and Japan developed into an all-out war, which expanded after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. Fervently, the Chinese maintained

resistance to the Japanese aggression. Against this social background, we would like to analyse the representations of Japan that appear in the illustrations, while also attempting to examine the social and cultural meaning of these representations.

3. Images of Japan: Created on the battlefields of China

Forty photographs from the latter period of Children's World are categorized according to the status of the characters. Specifically, they show Chinese soldiers on the battlefield, captured Japanese soldiers, and murdered Chinese. In this section, I would like to clarify how the image of Japan as a foreign country created in China is represented by analyzing the image of Japan reflected in these photographs of the Chinese battlefield.

The first step is to analyze the image of Japan created in the photos from the perspective of Chinese soldiers on the battlefield. There were 16 photographs of Chinese soldiers on the battlefield. There are two main characteristics of the photos. One is that they were taken in such a way as to show close-ups of places, such as battlefields and fortresses, and the Chinese soldiers there. And the other main feature is that the photographs at the front of each volume are not a single photograph, but form stories made up of a number of photographs. For example, a photograph published in Vol. 39, Nos. 4 and 5 has this feature. Chinese soldiers are the protagonists in the three photographs published there.

First, let's look at the photo with the caption which reads “我军英勇的炮兵，在×发炮射击敌军阵地，予敌重创”(My translation: Our valiant artillery fires on the enemy's positions, inflicting great pain).



Picture 1

Ertong Shiji, Vol. 39, Nos. 4 and 5, 5 October 1937, Commercial Press

Picture 1 shows a close-up depiction of soldiers in combat. All of the soldiers in the picture have their gaze turned towards the camera. Despite the fact that the photographs taken from this angle show scenes of actual combat, there is not much tension in the atmosphere.

It can be said that these photographs brought the victorious part of the war into focus through the soldiers, and consequently gave the readers a strong will to overthrow the enemy. In addition, despite these photographs being scenes related to the war, no Japanese soldiers were photographed; only Chinese soldiers were the subjects of these photographs. There were no faces of Japanese soldiers in the scenes. Under these depictions, the representation of Japan as the ‘enemy’ emerges. It is an abstract image of facelessness. Because the enemy is faceless, readers are left to imagine the image for themselves. According to Keen, Sam (1994:32), “the hostile imagination systematically destroys the natural tendency to recognise others as our equals”. And the term “ 敌军 ” (enemy army) in the caption was a designation referring to Japanese soldiers. The term employed here was enemy army, not Japanese army. In doing so, the photograph and caption told the reader who the enemy was and who the allies were.

So, how was Japan represented as the war progressed? Keen, Sam (1994:34) states that “when soldiers on the front line attack and examine the possessions of their killers, but see those possessions, such as letters from home or photographs of loved ones, the image of the propaganda example fades, making it difficult or impossible to kill again”. The current researcher reviewed the magazines photographs involving Japanese soldiers who were taken prisoner of war. There were 25 of these photographs. There were mainly photographs depicting captured Japanese soldiers, weapons, and other military items. These publications include Volume 40, No. 5; Volume 40, No. 11; Volume 41, No. 8; and Volume 43, No. 6.



Picture2

Ertong Shijie, Vol. 40, No. 5, 5 April 1938, Commercial Press

This section first looks at the photographs of the war trophies according to the time sequence of the photographs' publications. War trophies pictured includes aircraft, bullets, machine guns, motorboats, and amulets. It is the war trophy of the amulet that is of interest here. The photograph was in the frontispiece of Volume 40, No. 5.

Picture 2 depicts a Japanese soldier's amulet (talisman). These three photographs of amulets conveyed to the child reader some of the beliefs of Japanese soldiers. An amulet is "something you wear to escape misfortune" (Nihon Kokugo Daijiten 2001(2):1375). A talisman has a similar meaning to an amulet. A talisman is "a note that says the blessings of Gods and Buddhas are contained in it. It can be worn, swallowed, or put inside or outside the house" (Nihon Kokugo Daijiten 2001(5):1006). The three photographs shown are here portray one type of amulets. The amulets in the photographs feature Kobo-Daishi, Sakyamuni, and Fudo Myo-o. What significance did these amulets have for soldiers fighting on the battlefield? In this regard, according to Navy Lieutenant General Iida, Hisatsune (1935:12), a sailor often "wrapped one of the amulets in a hand towel and used it as a hachimaki, and attached the rest of the amulets to the bottom of the first bullet with the translation 'this bullet is my possession'". The researcher Kawasaki, Kenryo (1942:64) also stated, "We were told that the amulets were to protect our shaken and anxious hearts and help us to fight with all our might, so not only did we have no doubts about it, but we still believe so". These amulets not only protected their bodies, but also their minds. The Japanese soldier had only to touch the amulet (talisman) given to him by his family or others to calm his agitation. He believed that if he could receive this supernatural power, he could return alive from the battlefield. In other words, the amulets containing this paranormal power were a source of spiritual support for them. Of course, the Japanese soldiers themselves went to the battlefield in a state of uncertainty as to whether they would be able to return safely to their parents' homes. Under such a state of mind, they had no choice but to rely on some invisible, extra-dimensional entity for their survival.

Another thing to note here is the motifs that appeared on the amulets. The amulets¹⁾ in these photographs, which represent people's wishes for blessings and protection from bad luck, feature Kobo-Daishi, Shakyamuni and Fudo-myo-o. All of these figures are Buddhas associated with Buddhism. In other words, these are amulets that have found some supernatural power in the Buddha. This means that Buddhist thought was prevalent among the Japanese populace, and the belief that amulets could provide power was widespread. Therefore, although Japanese soldiers appeared to be externally westernised or modernised,

as they use modern weapons such as machine guns and wear western clothing, traditional consciousness was rooted in their beliefs. In other words, even though Japan is located in Asia on the map and it appeared to belong to the modern, civilised West, Japanese soldiers did not believe in Western Christianity and strongly preferred Eastern Buddhism, which had been handed down from the past.

In contrast to these talismans in Eastern Buddhist culture, which are created from the names and images of Buddha, Western talismans are created from materials such as herbs, spices, metals, gems, rings, weaves, buttons, and seals. On the starting point of the Western belief in talismans (protective talismans), Hansmann, Liselotte (2014:441) notes that “insofar as illness and bodily dysfunction are regarded as divine punishment, the work of evil spirits and the harmful magic of the living, consecration, atonement rituals, sacrifices in place of sight, incense smoke, the smoking out of evil spirits and the visions that the faithful get from them coincide with medical art”. As can be seen from this, it was believed that for a lot of westerners, belief in a holy object or a talisman could purify one’s sins and illnesses, which were the result of divine punishment. Swanger, Eugene R. (1981:237) then pointed out that “for those who wear a talisman, if they are Christian, they can atone for their personal sins in this life and receive blessings in the next life”. Whereas Western talismans can purify and atone for personal sins, talismans in Eastern Buddhist culture are symbolic of people’s wishes, such as to protect their physical safety and ward off evil.

Although Buddhism originally provided people with benefits in this life and the next, about Japanese Buddhists, Imai, Jun (1975:211) pointed out that they “loved life and valued this life, and were unaware of the ideas of ‘cause and effect’ and ‘transmigration’ brought by Buddhism, and even the Buddhism they accepted was mainly worldly, focusing on blessings and prayers to ‘sustain and prolong life’”. As can be seen from this, Japanese Buddhism became entrenched in the mental climate of the Japanese national character, which is alien to traditional Buddhism, by being associated with benefits in this life. Therefore, the protective charms (amulets) that had taken root among Japanese adherents of Buddhism in Japan could be seen as providing benefits (safety, protection from bad luck, etc.) to oneself in this life, rather than to the self in the next life. Therefore, among the possessions of Japanese soldiers taken prisoner of war were not talismans (amulets) associated with the cleansing and atonement of personal sins in Western Christianity, but talismans (amulets) for safety in this life.

Importantly, the publication of Buddhist amulets held by Japanese soldiers on

frontispiece of the magazines conveyed to readers the images of Japanese soldiers who lacked competence and relied on Buddhism. Thus, although Japan may have appeared to be a modern country on the outside, another image was that it was frail and the soldiers were not all confident. They appeared in the photographs as prisoners of war with a weak will to fight. In addition, the amulets, machine guns, and other weapons in the photographs, as well as the captured Japanese soldiers, were all presented to the reader as symbols of defeat. Through these photographs, readers could recognize Japan as the enemy and confirm their images of the war. This appealed to the readers' full support for the war, and convinced them of victory.

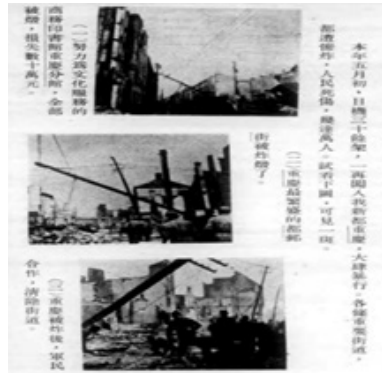
However, the image of Japan as an enemy encompassed not only that of a weak country, with Japanese soldiers lacking competence and relying on the Buddha; as the war progressed, the brutality and ugliness of the 'enemy' emerged. Over a five-year period from February 1938 to August 1943, Japanese forces bombed the wartime capital of China, Chongqing, 218 times. A total of 9,513 aircraft were deployed, dropping 21,593 bombs, killing 12,889 civilians, wounding 14,700, and destroying 17,680 houses, according to the magazine *Shōnen Kurabu*, 'The Bombing of Chongqing', which depicted airmen chatting about showering the city with bombs on 'a wonderful bombing day'. Japanese youths of the time were overjoyed at the great battle that blew up the tyrannical enemy and its facilities (Torikai, Yukihiro 2008:160).

Through the description 'The Bombing of Chongqing', the Japanese magazines could be read as intending to make readers, who are mostly children, expect brutal war scenes, and the publications actively induced them to participate in the war. Commenting on these intentions, Ishiko, Jun pointed out that "the purification of children's publications was supposed to be about eliminating vulgarity and decadence and artistically and educationally enhancing what children read and see, but in fact it was a speech control aimed at raising children to become adults who would be loyal to the Emperor and dedicate their lives to his cause" (Nihonjido Bungakugakkai Hen 2003:111).

In contrast, how did the Chinese children's literary magazine *Ertong Shijie* describe the air raids from Japan? Picture 3 depicts Chongqing after it was bombed around May 1939. The scenes depicted there reflect part of the Japanese air raid strategy to burn the wartime capital. The caption indicates that important roads were destroyed, and the casualties were around 10,000. It is important to note here the number of casualties. The fact that the casualties actually reached well over 10,000 indicates that the raids were indiscriminate

bombing raids targeting the general population, who were unarmed. In other words, this was a massacre involving the general population who were not combat soldiers.

However, the destructive power of the air raids and the tragic scenes caused by them are represented here —instead of pictures of dead bodies— in pictures of the destroyed Commercial Press Building and destroyed roads. Traffic thoroughfare are the conveniences that support people’s movements in their daily lives. Thus, the destruction of roads had crippled human mobility. And, the Commercial Press was responsible for supplying culture to the people. The complete destruction of the Commercial Press Building had made it impossible to supply ‘culture’ to the people. The inhabitants living there felt not only physically crippled but also mentally crippled. These photographs were a reflection of the crippling of the space of Chongqing and its inhabitants. Thus, it can be seen that the air raids conveyed to the reader an image of the ruins of the city and the horrors experienced by inhabitants, while at the same time revealing the atrocities of the enemy country, Japan.



Picture 3

Ertong Shijie, Vol. 43, No. 5, 5 October 1939, Commercial Press

Another thing to note here is the figures in the ruins in the photographs. Whereas there are no lying corpses of women and children in the photographs, the military civilians clearing the destroyed roads are photographed up close. In other words, these figures appear because they call on the people to persevere, and the photos attempt to inspire the people; the shots blur as much as possible the soft side of humanity in war. The war at the present stage is not merely a battle by force, but a total war that combines the national spiritual power of China. In this context, the importance of ideological and propaganda warfare has been called for. This is because it helps to make a wide readership —especially the youth readership— understand the barbaric character of the Japanese militarist ruling group

and the resulting disaster, as well as greatly inspiring the present cherishing of national independence and the deep devotion to the socialist motherland (Liu, Huiwu and Liu, Xuezhao 1984:2).

The publications of the photographs played an important role in building sympathy and mobilising readers — children and adults — by showing the horrific scenes of Chongqing, its own territory, being bombed by the enemy, Japan. At the same time, the publication of the Chongqing bombing spread the image of Japanese atrocities, thereby strengthening the reader's awareness of China, including these regions, as an integral part of the country. In this way, children, the future citizens of the country, would be strengthened in their perceptions of nation and state, which, if extended as such, would lead to patriotism.

Conclusion

This paper has taken the photographs of the Chinese battlefield in the magazine's frontispiece as the object of study, and has examined the images of Japan represented in them. In contrast to the positive image of Japan in the early period, as the war situation between China and Japan shifted, the image of Japan depicted in the frontispieces in the latter period became negative. In particular, after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, as the war developed into an all-out war, more and more photographs told readers what was actually taking place on the battlefields. The concepts of dead Chinese civilians and destroyed buildings and roads in those photographs were all evidence of the Japanese atrocities reflected in them.

As a modern civilised country, Japan used up-to-date weapons to take the lives of ordinary Chinese people who did not have weapons. And they not only indiscriminately murdered the people living there, but also tried to destroy the spaces in which those people lived. The photographs conveyed negative images of Japan to the reader, while at the same time bringing images of the war situation to the reader. In other words, the photographs visualised the war situation as a continuous drama, and at the same time played the role of propaganda.

The medium of a frontispiece, which is a photograph, changed the way the war was reported to a large extent. In the first place, readers often relied on such media sources when perceiving foreign countries. This negative image of Japan was represented in the frontispieces so that the hardships and atrocities of the war could be directly conveyed to the children who were the readers. This enabled the child readers to recognise and judge who

were the enemies and who were the allies. Through this, it enabled the younger readers to take the position of the Chinese themselves. Thus, the relationships between the individual, the state, and society were reconstructed. In the process of such reconstruction, especially in such an era of great changes in social and political consciousness, it is believed that the spirit of patriotism towards their homeland was cultivated by arousing a sense of belonging in the children who were their readers. In this sense, it can be said that despite being a children's magazine, its analysis of international affairs in its frontispieces fulfilled not only the political role of propaganda but also introduced the culture of Japan.

Notes:

- 1) As can be seen from an examination of the photographs published in *Ertong Shijie*, most of the protective charms (amulets) that appeared in the frontispieces of the photo editions were related to Buddhism. Therefore, although there are both shrine and temple amulets in Japan, this paper limits its discussion to those related to Buddhism.

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