



## Other Epistemologies – Remapping the Literary Field in the Sinosphere

Semester Focus: “Other” Approaches to (Hi)stories: Literature and Historiography



### Reading Lei Feng Reading: Propaganda and Intertextuality in *Lianhuanhua* Adaptations

18:00-20:00, Thursday, 28 April 2022 (CEST)

Lei Feng 雷锋 (1940-1962) was a real person – a soldier in the Chinese PLA – raising to posthumous fame as a carefully crafted object of CCP propaganda. How much of his diary which was exploited for this end is factual and how much fictional, is difficult to assess. The diary, however, is the first in a string of texts in this campaign, including a movie (1965), posters, slogans, wall papers, and pocket-size *lianhuanhua* 连环画, the comic books that circulated widely throughout the country: As part of the *Study from Lei Feng* campaign, at least five different *lianhuanhua* were published from which this presentation will set off. Instead of dismissing them as mere propaganda products, my aim is twofold: First, I look at them as distinctly intertextual and intermedial products and at the effects that are produced through this. Second, I look at reading acts in *lianhuanhua*, i.e. scenes where a character – in most cases: Lei Feng – is depicted reading. These reading acts are more than mere intertextual or intermedial references as they explore the status of a respective text and of reading as such. As an art made up from text and image, *lianhuanhua* provide a particular powerful depiction of these reading acts as they consciously cater to the intellectual and to the visual. With these analyses I argue that these comics serve to map the ideological and intellectual field of their time. Moreover, these reading acts point beyond Lei Feng, to the object of his readings: most of what Lei Feng reads points to Mao Zedong, so ultimately, studying Lei Feng signifies studying the works of Mao Zedong. Therefore, I will argue that the authority of the model hero and of the writings of Mao Zedong mutually reinforce each other and that reading represents a core value within the field of Chinese political communication.

#### About the speaker



Dr. Lena Henningsen currently is the PI of the ERC funded research project “The Politics of Reading in the People’s Republic of China” in which she investigates the reverberations of practices and politics of reading in fictional texts. She recently published the monograph *Cultural Revolution Manuscripts: Unofficial Entertainment Fiction from 1970s China* (Palgrave 2021) and a small collection of translated comics (*lianhuanhua*) from China (<https://readchina.github.io>).

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