

# China's Modern Sketch—1

## The Golden Era of Cartoon Art, 1934-1937

by John A. Crespi

The Turbulent  
'30s

Windows  
on an Era

Graphic  
Variations

Sources  
& Credits

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#### NOTES for Chapter 1

1

*Modern Sketch* was suspended from publication, and Lu Shaofei detained, from March through May of 1936 after the front cover illustration of February's issue 26 offended the authorities with an unflattering depiction of China's ambassador to Japan, Xu Shiyong. The magazine *Modern Puck* (Manhua jie), nearly identical to *Modern Sketch* except for its name and editor (Wang Dunqing), filled the three-month gap and then continued to run independently through the end of 1936.

2

For a discussion of *shidai* and the idea of the modern in early-20th-century China, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, "In Search of Modernity: Some Reflections on a Mode of Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Chinese History and Literature," in Paul A. Cohen and Merle Goldman, eds., *Ideas Across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990), pp. 109-135.

3

These demographic statistics are from Edward Denison and Guang Yu Ren, *Building Shanghai: The Story of China's Gateway* (Chichester, England and Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Academy, 2006), p. 251.

4

For more on Shao Xunmei's career in the Shanghai cultural scene, see Jonathan Hutt, "La Maison D'Or: The Sumptuous World of Shao Xunmei," *East Asian History* 21 (2001), pp. 111-142.

5

*Shanghai Sketch* was in fact merged with the pictorial magazine *Modern Miscellany* (Shidai huabao, or Shidai for short) in 1930. Both magazines were produced by the forerunner of Modern Publications, China Fine Arts Periodicals (*Zhongguo meishu kanxing she*). This connection made for a direct lineage to *Modern Sketch* four years later in terms of both brand name and editorial staff. The word "sketch" in the title of both magazines was probably borrowed from the British high-society weekly *The Sketch: A Journal of Arts and Actuality*. As John A. Lent points out, borrowing names from foreign periodicals, like "Puck" and "Punch," was common practice in Asian publications of the era. See John A. Lent, ed. *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humor Magazines, and Picture Books* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 4.

6

All reproductions of images from *Shanghai Sketch* in this unit are from the two-volume photocopied version released by Shanghai Shudian Chubanshe in 1996.

7

Zhang Kebiao, "Haishang caizi gao chuban—ji Shao Xunmei" (A Shanghai talent takes up publishing: remembering Shao Xunmei), *Shanghai wenshi* 2 (1989), p. 7.

#### NOTES for Chapter 2

1

"Shidai Manhua tougao jianyue" (Guidelines for submissions to *Modern Sketch*), *Modern Sketch*, no. 16 (April 1935).

2

[editor's note], *Modern Sketch*, no. 8 (August 1934).

3

This observation regarding the two artists' Modernist styles is Lu Shaofei's, who noted in particular Zhang Guangyu's careful study of the Ming dynasty painter Chen Laolian (1598-1652), best known for his human figures in woodblock book illustrations. See Lu Shaofei, "Ji dacheng er gexin" (From achievement to innovation), *Zhuangshi (Decorative arts)* 54 (1992), p. 6.

4

Chinese cartoonists of the 1930s had no compunctions about recognizing specific foreign "masters" (*shifu*) whose work caught their eye in foreign periodicals, and which they would copy in the process of learning their art. See Xu Chengbei, "Manhua jia de shicheng" (Cartoon masters and their disciples), *Lao manhua (Old cartoons)* 1, pp. 115-118.

5

*Modern Sketch*, no. 20 (August 1935).

6

Contributions sent from Hong Kong were probably included under the category "South Seas." Also, it is not clear if the list refers to contributors whose work was actually published or to all the individuals who contributed, successfully or unsuccessfully. Exaggerated figures on circulation and readership were rife in Shanghai's highly competitive magazine market. However, guilty parties in such misleading practices were mainly promoters of new periodicals yet to gain a market foothold. *Modern Sketch* had been in print for three years when these statistics were published, so we can take these data as reliable, if not fully precise.

7

For more on the fascinating but little-known artistic trail blazed by Huang Yao, see [the Huang Yao Foundation website](#).

8

See Wang Yuyun, "'Hai He fushi an': yixiang jiyu Dagongbao de Shuli" (The case of floating corpses in the Hai River': based on a review of L'Impartial), *Qianyan (Forward position)*, 7 (2010), pp. 122-125, cnki.net.

9

Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849-1949*, translated by Noël Castelino (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 84. See also Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 55-56.

### NOTES for Chapter 3

1

Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practice from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), p. 26.

2

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 67. The discussion of closure below relies upon McCloud's analysis in chapter three of his book, especially pages 60 to 72.

3

Wang Dunqing's first *Modern Sketch* article on the art of cartooning, published in the September 1934 issue, discussed sequencing as a way of making modern cartoon art more comprehensible, and thus more accessible, to the general populace. It is safe to assume that by 1934, educated urban readers in China would have been familiar with the conventions of sequencing, as foreign comic strips had been appearing in newspapers and magazines for several decades by then, with Chinese strips following

closely behind. Wang's article was aimed more at potential contributors to *Modern Sketch*, but does address the education gap. Specifically, he recommends that would-be cartoonists purchase a copy of Flemish artist Frans Masereel's wood engraving series, *25 Images of the Passion of Man*. Wang urges readers not just to learn from Masereel, but also to show the book to their servants and rickshaw drivers so that they, too, might be edified by the art of sequenced images.

4

On the opium-related criminal collusion among gangs, foreign concession governments, and the nationalist government, see Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 260-275.

5

The Modern Girl around the World Research Group, *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, ed. Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, et al (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008). On cartoon representations of the modern girl in China in that volume, see Madeleine Dong Yue, "Who is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl?" pp. 194-219.

6

On the transformation of female film roles in the early 1930s toward a proletarian model, see Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 244-267.

7

The photo-spread in *Modern Miscellany* is "Twenty-four Hours of a Modern Lady (from Morning to Evening)," reproduced in Francesca dal Lago, "Crossed Legs in 1930s Shanghai: How 'Modern' the Modern Woman?" *East Asian History* 19 (2000), p. 109.

8

On the global history of the cartoon image of the cow as symbol of exploitation, see Rudolf Wagner, "China 'Asleep' and 'Awakening.' A Study in Conceptualizing Asymmetry and Coping with It," *Transcultural Studies* 1 (2011).

9

Zhang Leping, *Wode manhua shenghuo (My life of cartooning)*, (Beijing: Zhongguo lüyou chubanshe, 2007), p. 2.

10

On Shanghai's street wedding and funeral processions, see Lu Hanchao, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 303. On Shanghai's violent political struggles of the same period, see Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai*, pp. 132-160.

11

See Alex Chun and Shane Glines, ed., *Top Hats and Flappers: The Art of Russell Patterson* (Fantagraphics, 2006), pp. 27-29.

12

For a rich and comprehensive treatment of the modern Chinese woodcut movement through the 1930s, see Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

13

Thanks to Paul Bevan for pointing this out to me in the case of Hu Kao's graphic narrative "Unemployed."

14

Historian Christian Henriot carefully details the grim issue of dealing with abandoned corpses in his article "'Invisible Deaths, Silent Deaths': 'Bodies Without Masters' in Republican Shanghai," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 43, no. 2 (Winter 2009), pp. 407-437.

15

Ye Qianyu, *Ye Qianyu zizhuan: xishu cangsang liunian (Autobiography of Ye Qianyu: a detailed narration of vicissitudes through fleeting time)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), pp. 72.

16

Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 39-44.

17

Pang Laikwan, "Photography, Performance, and the Making of Female Images in Modern China," *Journal of Women's History* 17 no. 4 (Winter 2005), pp. 60-63. For an overview of Shanghai's courtesan culture of the late Qing and early Republican periods, see Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai* pp. 21-72.

## APPENDIX

Selected biographical information for *Modern Sketch* contributors appearing in this unit

Cai Ruohong 蔡若虹, (1910-2002)  
Cao Hanmei 曹涵美, (1902-1975)  
Chen Baoyi 陳抱一, (1893-1945)  
Chen Huiling 陳惠齡, (1916-)  
Chen Juanyin 陳涓隱, (1897-1986)  
Dou Zonggan 竇宗淦, (1915-1992)  
Feng Di 馮棣, (1907-1983)  
Guo Jianying 郭建英, (1907-1979)  
Hu Kao 胡考, (1912-1994)  
Hua Junwu 華君武, (1915-2010)  
Huang Jiayin 黃嘉音, (1913-1961)  
Huang Weiqiang 黃偉強, (1918-)  
Huang Wennong 黃文農, (1901[?]-1934)  
Huang Yao 黃堯, (1917-1987)  
Jiang Mi 江敫, (1912-1989)  
Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄, (1915-2006)  
Liang Baibo 梁白波, (1911-1967)  
Lu Shaofei 魯少飛, (1903-1995)  
Lu Zhixiang 陸志庠, (1910-1992)  
Pang Xunqin 龐薰棻, (1906-1945)  
Shen Yiqian 沈逸千, (1908-1944)  
Sheng Gongmu 盛公木 (Te Wei 特偉), (1915-2010)  
Tao Mouji 陶謀基, (1912-1985)  
Wang Dunqing 王敦慶, (1899-1990)  
Wang Zimei 汪子美, (1913-2002)  
Yan Zhexi 嚴折西, (1909-1993)  
Ye Qianyu 葉淺予, (1907-1995)  
Zhang Ding 張仃, (1917-2010)  
Zhang Guangyu 張光宇, (1900-1965)  
Zhang Leping 張樂平, (1910-1992)  
Zhang Wenyuan 張文元, (1910-1992)  
Zhou Duo (1905-?)

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*Van Jan* (Wanxiang). Shanghai Library.

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