

# Surrealism in Chinese Periodicals: Hedonism, Horror, and Shanghai's Former French Concession

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## Introduction

Within an orientalist frame of reference, the cosmopolitan metropolis of Shanghai became known as the “Paris of the East” during the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, the 1930s witnessed a boom in periodical production due to a burgeoning middle class, relatively relaxed rules surrounding censorship, and copious printing presses situated in both the former International and French Concessions. As Danzker et al. put it, Shanghai became “one of the first global cities of the Modern era: in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a whirlpool of revolutionary ideas, conflicting nationalist aspirations, unrestrained commercial expansion and military occupation. A glittering *fata morgana*, by 1930 the fifth largest city in the world. Shanghai seduces and entices the imagination of the time” (18).

Idiosyncratic elements of Parisian life during *Les années folles* were transplanted into a Chinese setting. Shanghai's former French Concession became China's cultural epicentre, hosting the Shanghai Art College, French Aurore University, and a multitude of artists' studios. Artists who returned from studying abroad in both Tokyo and Paris flocked there to pursue culturally hybrid artistic practices, drawing from both western avant-garde influences and traditional Chinese iconography.

Unsurprisingly, it was here that Chinese surrealism was born. Chinese surrealism was neither a homogenous entity nor the preserve of one particular artistic group. It transcended the painterly, photographic, and even *manhua* (cartoon) medium.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in terms of theoretical engagement, avant-garde painterly societies not only assimilated surrealist aesthetics, but also demonstrated an in-

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<sup>1</sup> The term *manhua* is more widely known by its Japanese name *manga*. The same characters are used in both Japanese and Chinese, however the term is of Chinese origin. For an illuminating discussion of surrealism in relation to Chinese cartoonists see Bevan's *A Modern Miscellany*.

depth understanding of surrealist thought. *Juelanshe* (The Storm Society) (1932-35) published their manifesto in a journal called *Yishu Xunkan* (Art Trimonthly) in 1932, crediting the “dreamscapes of Surrealism” (Andrews and Shen 78), along with the contributions of many other avant-garde movements. Indeed, the advent of surrealism in China was concurrent with Dada, cubism, futurism, impressionism, and constructivism, despite these movements predating it. Two causes most likely explain this. First, the return of students from Paris and Tokyo during the late 1920s to early 1930s who had come into direct contact with modernist currents gave rise to artists “experimenting in an effort to reach their own individual style” (Crozier 263). Second, having defeated both communist and regional warlord factions, centralized rule by the Nationalist party between 1927 and 1937 belatedly created more stable circumstances to catalyze artistic experimentation. As Kuiyi Shen puts it, “there was still time for Shanghai to catch up with the excitement of the roaring twenties” (“Cubism” 217). Notwithstanding, individual artworks in the 1930s can most often be identified as surrealist-inflected in the vast majority of Shanghainese periodicals, where the inspiration of particular European surrealists is often evident.

Beyond the Storm Society, the Chinese Independent Art association (1934-35) was a more staunchly surrealist grouping, comprised of Chinese students who had studied abroad in Japan under Satomi Katsuzo (Andrews and Shen 175). The group created a special 104-page edition of the journal *Yifeng* (Art Winds) entitled “Introduction to Surrealism” in October 1935. This issue contained theoretical essays on the movement and a translation into Chinese of André Breton’s first manifesto, while reproductions of European surrealist paintings were commingled with their own Chinese surrealist artworks. The association held an exhibition in Shanghai’s former French Concession at the same time.

While the dissemination of surrealism in Chinese periodicals was highly widespread, I am limiting the scope of my analysis in this instance to five principal outlets that most consistently published surrealist works during the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> These periodicals can be broadly sub-divided into two sub-genres. First, the periodicals *Yishu Xunkan* (Art Trimonthly) and *Yifeng* (Art Winds) were highly specialist and theoretical in nature, documenting the activities of the Storm Society and the Chinese Independent Art Association respectively. The second category is the

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Bevan has revealed further evidence of surrealism in the periodical *Wenyi* (Literature and Arts) (“Intoxicating Shanghai” 66). I am currently working on surrealism in the periodical *Xiandai* (*Les contemporains*), edited by Shi Zhecun. Shi, via his friend and fellow modernist Dai Wangshu living in Paris, was asked by French surrealist poet Eugene Jolas to dedicate a special issue of *Xiandai* to the movement, but Shi refused, believing surrealism would not be useful in a Chinese social context. See Schaefer (257-58) and Shi Zhecun’s *Shi Zhecun Qishinian Wenxuan*. However, Shi equally noticed that the work of many artists such as Zhou Duo, Lin Fengmian, Pang Xunqin, and Lei Guiyuan exhibited surrealist influences and he included such surrealist pieces in his periodical. Front covers of *Xiandai* were particularly surrealist in quality. See Shi Zhecun’s *Shi Zhecun Qishinian Wenxuan*.

glossy, mass-market lifestyle pictorials with a broader scope and circulation, hinging upon photographic reproduction. Of these, *Liangyou* (The Young Companion) was the most popular with a circulation of circa 50,000 copies per issue in 1935 (Wang Chuchu 248). Other noteworthy publications include *Shidai* (Modern Miscellany), a rival to *Liangyou* noted for its high printing quality, and *Shidai Manhua* (Modern Sketch), a satirical periodical which incisively tackled political issues through the media of *manhua* and photomontage.

Periodicals served to reflect the zeitgeist of Shanghai's modern era. As Vinograd (186) notes: "It may have been that the structure of systematic classification by topics and categories from the late 1920s was no longer satisfactory for urban and social worlds characterized by overlaid sensation and excess." Within the same volume or even the same page, depictions of lavish lifestyles coexisted with those of social inequality and the impending threat of Japanese aggression. This is a particularly surrealist form of organization given the movement's advocacy for the Hegelian dialectic and the resolution of opposing forces. Indeed, in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1929), André Breton affirms, "Tout porte à croire qu' il existe un certain point de l' esprit d' où la vie et la mort, le réel et l' imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l' incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d' être perçus contradictoirement" 'Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions' ("Second manifesto" [781]; *Manifestoes* 123). In fact, Shanghai, like Paris, could even be positioned as an intrinsically surrealist city, considering the contradictions it was able to subsume. For Vinograd, Shanghai periodicals enabled "[d]eeper psychic processes of projection and fantasy . . . that were akin to the content of dream work' (180). To borrow from Benjamin's terminology, utilizing their prismatic capabilities, periodicals acted as a platform in which incongruous signifiers of Shanghai modernity could be seamlessly juxtaposed, from grandiose imperialist architecture to scantily clad women. Indeed, the portrayal of modernity in Shanghai periodicals was often synonymous with surrealist notions of desire in both an economic and libidinous sense, akin to André Breton's definition of desire as "the only motive of the world, . . . the only rigor humans must be acquainted with" (*Mad Love* 88).

In conjunction, Freudian psychoanalysis was readily cited among Chinese surrealists. As Lupke notes:

In the 1930s and 1940s . . . there was a great deal of translation of Freudian texts and terminology in China. The Shanghai modernists were one group particularly fascinated by the unconscious, the subjectivity of perception, fantasy. (102)

Scharff states that, in fact, Freudian thought entered the Chinese intellectual landscape very early on, starting with a translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams*

by Zhixiu Qian in 1914.<sup>3</sup> Many Chinese surrealists, rather than engage with the contemporary social context, chose to visually reify the dream as wish-fulfilment, enabling them to hone their own artistic voice after the hegemony of the millennia-old genre of national painting or *guohua*, which centred on landscape and natural imagery.

Beyond psychoanalysis, surrealist revolutionary fervour found its way, albeit indirectly, into the pages of Shanghainese periodicals. In 1931, the northern Chinese province of Manchuria was abruptly invaded by the Japanese after blowing up their own railway line and falsely accusing the Chinese of sabotage to create a pretence for invasion. Despite international outcry, the fledgling League of Nations was rendered powerless and the region was colonized.<sup>4</sup> Naturally, this led to an outpouring of anti-Japanese sentiment, including in the Shanghai International settlement, where Japan, along with other imperial nations such as the UK and USA, held extraterritorial rights. Here, ultra-nationalist Japanese monks shouted anti-Chinese slogans and were killed by an angry mob. The Japanese retaliated with the aerial bombardment of the city. A friend of founding member of the Storm Society, Pang Xunqin, a fighter pilot, was killed during this attack (Pang 130). Pang Xunqin's own artistic practice is doubtless one of the most socially engaged of all the painters, ostensibly due to his own lived experience. However, the revolutionary tenets of surrealism which emanate from the thought of Hegel and Marx were scarcely acknowledged. This is likely due to the Nationalist party's brutal purging of communists from Shanghai in 1927 in collusion with the International Concession, forcing them to flee to the countryside. Therefore, in order to protect themselves, it is probable that artists engaged in self-censorship in relation to the political aspects of surrealism; its relationship to communism in its early phase as well as its direct citations of Marx and Hegel could have been politically dangerous to directly draw from.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This was earlier than in France itself. David Lomas notes that Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* was not translated into French until 1926 (58).

<sup>4</sup> The League of Nations was a forerunner to the United Nations with the aim of maintaining world peace. China appealed directly to the league for help amidst the Manchurian crisis. The league found Japan to be at fault and demanded they withdraw from Manchuria; Japan instead withdrew from the league.

<sup>5</sup> By way of example, the periodical *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), a journal founded by Chen Duxiu in 1915 which promoted Marxist ideas, was shut down by the Nationalists in 1926. Moreover, in 1931 the Nationalist government executed five of the Shanghai-based "Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng" (League of Left-Wing Writers), who were supported by the Chinese Communist Party. While Shanghai's French Concession was safer than most for Communists as authorities tended to turn a blind eye to underground activities, Shi Zhecun relates an important event in "Zhendan liangnian" (Two Years at the Aurore University) while he was living with modernist Dai Wangshu in the French Concession. In 1925, Shi and Dai had entered the left wing of the Nationalist party before they expelled communists. Dai

Amidst this surrealist commingling of psychology and politics in Shanghai, I will analyze pictorial spreads and theoretical texts in *Yishu Xunkan*, *Yifeng*, *Liangyou*, *Shidai*, and *Shidai Manhua* to demonstrate how Chinese artists utilized surrealism to express both the ruminations of the individual psyche and the collective imperative for anti-colonialism, particularly when faced with the existential threat of Japanese military aggression. I propose that the use of surrealism in Chinese periodicals of the 1930s was embedded in both hedonism and horror, from the satiation of individual desires to the revolutionary appeals against Japanese colonial endeavour. Periodicals, known for their incongruous juxtapositions and montage aesthetics, were unique in their ability to subsume these contradictions.

### *Yishu Xunkan*

The periodical *Yishu Xunkan* (Art Trimonthly), based in the French Concession, ran for twelve issues throughout the year of 1932. In 1933, its name changed simply to *Yishu*, also known by the French title *L'art*, for a further two issues. The chief editor of this journal was a founding member of the Storm Society, Ni Yide, who encountered surrealism while studying abroad in Japan. He wrote the Storm Society's manifesto lamenting the present state of Chinese modern art, questioning: "Where have the geniuses the nation used to produce been? Where have [sic] our glorious ancient history gone? What the whole of our modern art world possesses is mere decay and infirmity" (Chao 264). The manifesto, published in *Yishu Xunkan* to mark their first exhibition, implored Chinese artists to exploit "the ferocity of the Dada and the dreams of the surrealism" (Chao 276) as a means to combat stagnancy in the Chinese art world. Ni thought it was vital to create a theoretical publication that could promote ideas surrounding Chinese modern art. Indeed, he stated, "理论的介绍我是认为最重要的·没有正确的理论的指导决不能产生健全的作品·而且一般大众对于艺术的认识也太不足了" 'Without pertinent theoretical guidance, then it is impossible to create robust works of art, when the public's knowledge of art will not be sufficient anyway' (Zhuang 279).<sup>6</sup> As such, periodicals in Shanghai should be seen not only as vessels for the dissemination of surrealist thought and aesthetics, but also as catalysts for creation; *Yishu Xunkan* reproduced relatively few artworks but counted copious artists among its readership.

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was arrested and tortured for a confession; he was eventually released but only because of his connections. Shi speculated that the arrests were somehow related to intelligence from right-wing Nationalist students at Aurore University, observing that after the Shanghai massacre of 1927, Nationalist party students posted anti-communist slogans around the University. Dai and Shi feeling very unsafe, left Aurore and went back to their hometowns. See *Shi Zhecun Qishinian Wenxuan*.

<sup>6</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

The most important works in relation to surrealism published in *Yishu Xunkan* are two essays: Fou Lei's "Xunqin's dream" and Ni Yide's "Surrealist Oil Paintings." Fou Lei, another editor of *Yishu Xunkan*, was a French-speaking translator who spent three years in Paris between 1928 and 1931. Here, he met with artist Pang Xunqin and the pair encountered surrealism first-hand. Fou Lei also translated from French to Chinese Phillipe Soupault's work *Charlot*, dedicated to the life of comedian Charlie Chaplin. Drawing from his knowledge of surrealist literature, Fou Lei couches Pang's artistic state of mind in the language of a surrealist *flâneur* in Paris. Chau particularly draws attention to the montage Fou Lei conjures vis-à-vis the Parisian cityscape: "His stream of consciousness narration ranges from mentions of the city's diverse and seductive populace to specific buildings and places such as Montparnasse, the Eiffel Tower, and the second-hand book stalls along the Seine" (Chau 127). However, Chau and other commentators on Fou Lei's essay fall short of simply terming it as a surrealist piece of writing despite direct references to the movement. The following passage referring to Pang Xunqin is particularly illuminating:

他梦一般观察，想从现实中提炼出若干形而上的要素。他梦一般寻思，体味，想抓住这不可思议的心境。他梦一般表现，因为他要表现这颗在流动着的超现实的心！这重重的梦，层层相因，永远演不完，除非他生命告终，不能创造的时候。薰琴的梦既然离现实很远，当然更谈不到时代。然而在超现实的梦中，就有现实的憧憬，就有时代的反映。

He generally utilises the dream as a method of observation and wants to extract some metaphysical elements from reality. He thinks through dreams and wants to seize this incredible state of mind. He expresses, through dreams, his flowing and surreal heart! These dreams, with layers of interrelationships, will never end until the end of his life, when he can no longer create. Since Xunqin's dream is distanced from reality, he can't fully address the era in which we live. However, in a surreal dream, there should also be visions of reality, and reflections on the present day. (Fou 18)

Further to situating Pang Xunqin as a surrealist, it is clear that Fou Lei has an in-depth understanding of surrealist thought and aesthetics, noting that the movement did not eschew reality and was equally engaged in everyday life. Indeed, dismissing surrealism as mere fantasy was a common misunderstanding in China. Gao notes that Chinese critics often "interpreted the subjective involvement in the dreams and fantasies of the surrealists as an escape from reality, and thus rejected them on such grounds" (Gao 195). This lends weight to Ni Yide's stance that it was incumbent on periodicals to promote theory as well as aesthetics.

Although originally a painter, Ni Yide became most renowned as an art critic in his own right. Ni Yide's "Chaoxianshizhuyi de huihua" (Surrealist Painting), first published in 1933, is theoretically strong while imbued with traditional

Chinese imagery. Granted the range of painters discussed, it is likely based on André Breton's four-part *Le surréalisme et la peinture*, which was serialized in the periodical *La révolution surréaliste* between 1925 and 1927. Indeed, Ni directly acknowledges this publication, but his essay contains several elements that are absent from Breton's original musings. Ni summons Chinese iconography to describe surrealism as “一匹水母漫然地浮在海面上。。。他不是束缚于物质的·也不是死板的形骸的反复” ‘a jellyfish floating on the water . . . it is neither bound to matter nor the repetition of any rigid corporal forms’ (79), evoking both the metaphysical and aesthetic freedoms of surrealism in a manner compelling to a Chinese audience. He directly acknowledges Freudian psychoanalysis, in particular research regarding the dream, couching it as “形成了一个新国王的样子” ‘the image of a new king.’ He introduces the poetic origins of surrealism naming “Aragon, Eluard, Soupault and Breton” alongside canonical surrealist painters such as “Masson, Ernst, Tanguy, Miro, Chirico, Ray.”<sup>7</sup> Ni also describes surrealism as “国际化” ‘cosmopolitan,’ noting Germany and Italy as important epicentres of the movement beyond Paris (80).

Unlike Breton's lyrical, stream-of-consciousness style of writing, Ni, despite some rhetorical flourishes, wrote in a more structured, prosaic style to engender understanding amongst a Chinese public encountering surrealism for the first time. He schematically categorizes surrealist painters into four sub-factions: 1. Picasso and Braque, 2. Chirico, 3. Miró, and 4. Ernst, outlining the principal features of each group (81). Ni states that Picasso's surrealism lies in the “使物的实形和真的物变形而表现之” ‘transformation of realistic shapes’ (82). Indeed, in *Le surréalisme et la peinture* Breton comments that Picasso “trompe sans cesse l'apparence avec la réalité” ‘Constantly deceives appearance with reality’ (31; *Surrealism and Painting* 9), Regarding Braque, Ni Yide pitches the painter as surrealist rather than cubist, commenting “又不想许多立体主义作家那样只用坚硬的线·他的画面的全体充满着抒情诗的香气” ‘Unlike many cubist painters who just use hard lines, his paintings always have a poetic fragrance’ (82). This may partially explain why surrealism had a much greater following in Shanghai as opposed to the geometric figurations of cubism.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the free-flow of the Chinese cursive line could even be said to be akin to the surrealist ideal of automatic drawing.<sup>9</sup> Breton is much more pessimistic regarding Braque, commenting that (perhaps again with regard to geometric formulations) “[c]’est que Braque ‘aime la règle qui corrige l’émotion’ alors que je ne fais, moi, que nier violemment cet règle” ‘[t]hat is because Braque “loves the rule that corrects emotion” whereas my sole concern is to deny this rule violently’ (10). Indeed, the geometric

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<sup>7</sup> Artists' names in Roman characters in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Kuiyi Shen states of cubism in Shanghai, “its impact was far more limited than that of Post-impressionism, and its circle of artists quite small” (“Cubism” 224).

<sup>9</sup> Eugene Wang makes this point in relation to the Parisian-based Chinese modernist Sanyu.

formations of cubism did not sit well with Breton nor with Chinese ideals of aesthetic beauty.

Regarding Di Chirico, Ni describes his paintings as follows:

他的作品是古典主义的面和敏锐的线的结合。 . . . 契里珂所爱取的画材 · 是透视的建筑物的风景 · 有强烈阴影的教堂 · 大理石像 · 人体模型.....而且他的画材是带有文学的色彩及诗的幸福而自由地驱使着。

His work is a mixture of neo-classicism and exquisite lines . . . Chirico particularly admires the landscape of buildings, churches cast in shadow, marble statues, mannequins, his paintings have a literary feel imbued with the freedom of poetry. (83)

In *Le surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton also refers to the interiors and mannequins of Di Chirico (3). Ni describes Miró's painting as being “他的热情像透明的胶质物一般 · 具有轻快的结晶 . . . 他的精神像蜜蜂一般的甜蜜” ‘like a transparent substance that rapidly crystallizes . . . his spirit is as sweet as a honeybee’ (84), perhaps emphasising the playful aspects of Miró's oeuvre. Finally, while praising certain aspects of Max Ernst's work, Ni Yide comments that “他并没有像毕加索弥罗一般的才气 · 到处持有平凡的铁块一般的重” ‘he does not have the talent of Picasso or Miró, everywhere his work feels heavy like iron’ (85). As such, Ni Yide's critique remains contingent upon the legacy of traditional Chinese painting where the beauty associated with the free-flowing cursive line dominates. Notably, Ni Yide omits Salvador Dalí from his analysis. Granted, Dalí entered the surrealist movement later than many of his European counterparts, so there was a time-lag for knowledge of his works to reach the shores of Shanghai. Dalí's works first began to be reproduced in *Yifeng* magazine in 1935, having been introduced in Japan in the early 1930s. Indeed, Dalí was not cited in Breton's original series of *Le surréalisme et la peinture*.

*Yishu Xunkan* was thus the earliest outlet to provide an in-depth understanding of surrealism and paved the way for the visual circulation of surrealist imagery in Shanghai. Ni Yide's role as an art critic was instrumental in this respect. Although, the Shanghai-based daily newspaper *Shenbao* first reported on surrealism with a very brief paragraph in 1931 (Xie), it was not until the publication of the Storm Society manifesto in 1932 and the society's first exhibition that the Chinese public could fully gain an insight into what surrealism meant.

## Shidai

The journal *Shidai*, also known by its English title *Modern Miscellany*, was a key outlet for disseminating surrealist painting of both the Storm Society and the Chinese Independent Art Association. It was the second most popular pictorial in Shanghai after *Liangyou* and was based in the French Concession. As Kuiyi Shen aptly notes: “The contents of *Shidai* mainly aimed to suit Shanghainese taste, that of a rising middle class with enthusiasm for, and even fantasies about, a modern,

Western style of life in the Chinese city" ("Modern Showcase" 135). The picture quality in *Shidai* was second to none for the time. Shen reveals that the editor of the magazine, Shao Xunmei, "sold part of his personal real estate and used \$500,000 to buy the most advanced German printing press and accessories then available" (Shen 143). Although in black and white, we can see that *Shidai* dedicated a high-quality spread to reproduce paintings from the second Storm Society exhibition in 1933 along with photographic reproduction of works of some of the key artists exhibiting (fig. 1).

As previously mentioned, not all of the painters belonging to the Storm Society can be considered surrealist, but a fair proportion of the works in this spread can be read as such. First of all, Yang Taiyang's *Still life* appropriates the Greco-Roman heads of Di Chirico while Magritte's pipe and cloudscapes are incongruously commingled with pears and grapes in a synthesis of popular surrealist iconography. Another work by Yang Taiyang entitled *Chimney and Mandolin* is also included in the spread. The mandolin invokes Picasso's deformations of the popular Spanish musical instrument while the chimney may connote rampant industrialization in Shanghai. Zhou Duo's *Odds and Ends* appears to draw from the surrealist penchant for assemblage, transforming an agglomeration of everyday miscellaneous items into a work of art. Pang Xunqin's *Design* draws from the interstitial figure of Picasso. While Picasso was claimed simultaneously by cubism and surrealism, the lines in Pang's work appears too soft for cubism, diaphanous in nature, seamlessly overlapping each other to create a contorted mass of limbs and abstracted faces, the deconstruction of the human anatomy being another surrealist penchant.<sup>10</sup> *Shidai* did not make any critical comment on these artists' individual works but widely disseminated a modernist aesthetic across Shanghai of which surrealism was a key feature.

Like many other periodicals, *Shidai* gave pride of place to the work of Pang Xunqin, reproducing a full-page color spread of his surrealist-inspired work *Such Is Paris* (fig. 2). An accompanying description of the city and the work's process of creation is written below the painting:

繁华的巴黎是动着的：女人的笑声；男子的烟形；肉的战斗；灯的摇晃。便是一片窗·一面门·一只缸·也没一忽不在的变幻。无论你的视觉怎样敏捷·你也总难得到一个静止的印象；你的笔尖正触上画面，你的对象又不是一秒钟前所看到的那样了。动·动着！玻璃杯接触着嫩红的嘴唇；手指又碰上了冷白的纸牌；洗净了一忽又脏污.....如此巴黎！

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<sup>10</sup> Notably, Sidra Stich (26-27) links the tendency to deconstruct the human body to the surrealist experience of World War I and the corpses dismembered by gunfire and bombs. Stich notes that this is usually associated with visions of the irrational. Given skirmishes with Japan during the 1930s in the run up to the Sino-Japanese war and the bombing of Shanghai in 1931, it is probable that many Chinese surrealists had lived experience of witnessing mutilated bodies as a result of conflict.

庞薰琴先生新从巴黎回来·但他并没有把那曾使他沉醉疯狂的巴黎丢在脑后。在半夜以后·街道上息止了一切的声·庞先生的眼前便又现出他热爱的巴黎·耳边便也闹忙起来。他拿出画纸·把颜色依了当时看见的听得的一切涂上去·这张动的画便诞生了

The bustling and prosperous Paris is constantly moving: the women's laughter, men's cigarette smoke, the thrill of the flesh and the swing of the lights. Everything is constantly transmogrifying itself: be it a slab of windowpane, a door, or a jar. No matter how alert your eyesight is, you can hardly capture a stilled impression. While the tip of your brush is on your canvas, the object of your painting is no longer what it looked like a second ago. Move. Moving! The glass is in contact with the soft red lips; the fingertips are touching the cold white cards. One minute it is washed clean and the next soiled in dirt. . . . Such is Paris!

Mr. Pang Xunqin was just fresh from returning from Paris and he hadn't put the Paris that he was madly in love with behind him. In the small hours of the morning, when the streets quieted from all that clamor, the Paris that he adores again appeared in front of Mr. Pang's eyes. Even the Parisian noise rang in his ears. Then he took up his canvas and created the palette of what he saw and what he heard. There the painting of movement was born. (Chao 272-73)

This painting is one of Pang's most well-known works and has certainly received the most academic commentary. Indeed, Fou Lei's was evidently referring to the painting in "Xunqin's dream" published in *Yishu Xunkan*. Interestingly, the commentary in *Shidai* considers the main feature of the work to be an attempt to invoke movement on a still canvas. Overlapping figures certainly do create a transmogrifying effect amidst a city brimming with activity. However, in terms of the painting's surrealist features, it is instructive to consider each element of the painting in isolation. First of all, the cosmopolitan nature of Paris is tangible through the multiple races included in the composition, possibly including a reference to Josephine Baker whom Fou Lei mentions in "Xunqin's Dream". We can also see a urinal in the bottom right hand corner, which is likely an allusion to Duchamp's famous work *Fountain* (Zhu 94). A lamppost seems to house a human posterior, which calls to mind Man Ray's *Prayer*. Notable allusions to the surrealist ideal of chance are manifested through the symbols of playing cards and a chess board (the latter notably created by Man Ray). Details such as the balconies allude to Haussmanian facades. Textual fragments such as *bal*, *café*, *hot*, *ncing* (presumably referring to dancing) actually appear more reminiscent of synthetic cubism, a testament to Pang's borrowings from the entire gamut of European modernism. However, what perhaps makes this work surrealist overall is that it is composed by Pang as an involuntary, oneiric vision as the accompanying text indicates, an idealistic portrait of the artist's adopted city where he studied painting between the years of 1925 and 1929. This painting was



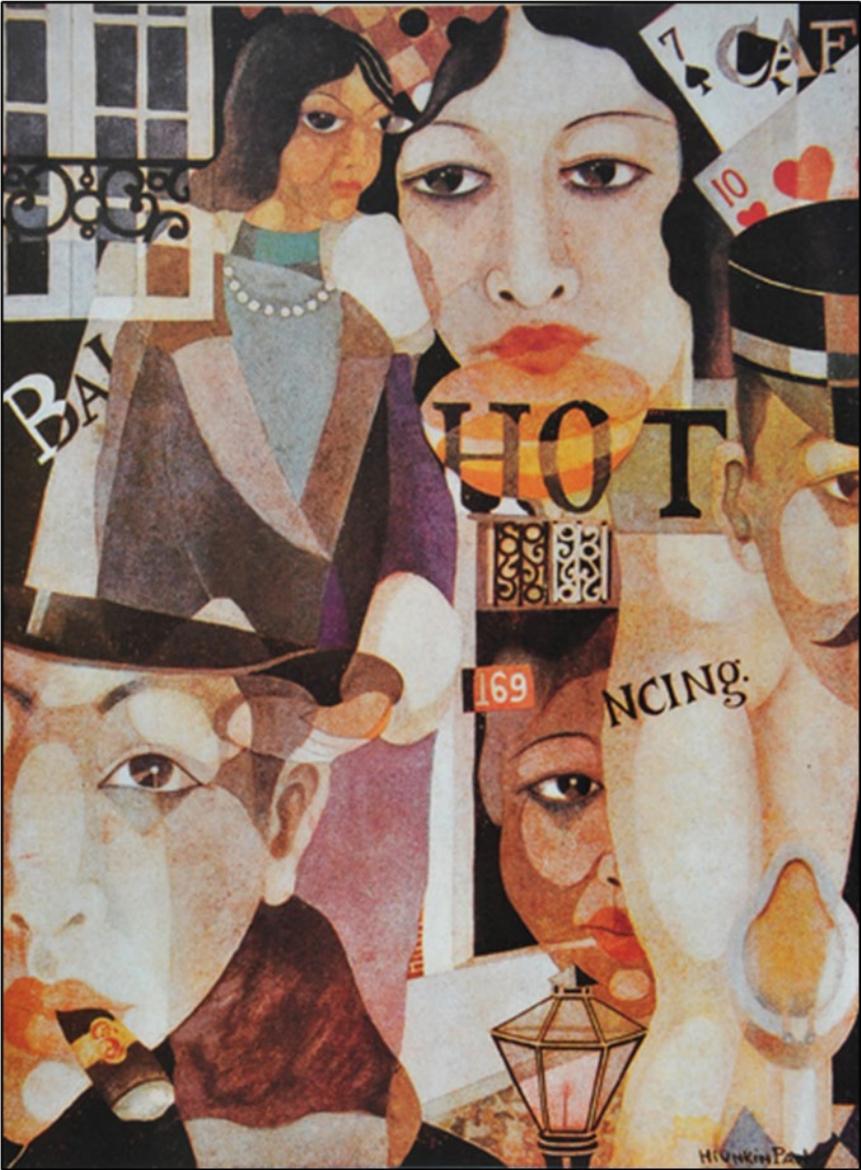


Figure 2. Pang Xunqin. *Such is Paris*. *Shidai (Modern Miscellany)*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1931, p. 8. Courtesy of the Pang Hiunkin (Pang Xunqin) Archives at the Li Ching Cultural and Educational Foundation.

### Liangyou Huabao

*Shidai*'s key rival *Liangyou huabao* (The Young Companion) was the most popular pictorial in Shanghai and based in the city's International Concession. During the

1930s its circulation was reaching an average of 40,000 copies per issue increasing to 50,000 in 1935 (Wang Chuchu 248). The wide appeal of the pictorial may well be due to its broad purview as a lifestyle periodical. As Pickowisz notes: "Liangyou preferred an all-inclusive approach that routinely juxtaposed subjects and styles of different and oftentimes contradictory kinds, traditional and modern, rural and urban, photographic and sketched, Chinese and Western, conservative and avant-garde" (11). These often-incongruous juxtapositions clearly resonate with 1920s and 1930s European surrealist journals such as *Documents*, *Minotaure*, and *La révolution surréaliste*. Given its eclectic subject matter, Ting Li comments that the periodical: "在先锋艺术与大众接受的传播过程中·扮演了重要的桥梁作用" 'played an importance role as a bridge between the dissemination of avant-garde art and public acceptance' (80). The appearance of surrealist works in *Liangyou* can thus be equated with their entering into the mainstream consciousness of Shanghai at the time.

Perhaps inspired by the *Shidai* reproduction of Pang Xunqin's work in 1931, the November 1932 edition of *Liangyou* reproduced Pang's accompanying work to *Such is Paris, Such is Shanghai* (also known as *The Riddle of Life*) as a full-page color spread (fig. 3). Unlike Pang's laudatory portrayal of the Parisian cityscape, the color palette here is much darker. The same signifiers of chance are present, but Jenny Lin convincingly details some of the hedonistic undercurrents present in the work: "The watercolour also integrates artistic tactics aligned with the French Surrealist artworks and writings Pang Xunqin had studied, such as the transformation of everyday objects into occult symbols, the creation of a diaphanous, oneiric tableau, and the picturing of chances lost in the modern city through the figure of the enigmatic woman" (42). The flower, Lin states in her footnotes, was a symbol of prostitution in Chinese culture, prostitutes being literally known as flower girls in Chinese. Gambling was also rife in Shanghai during the 1930s, the dangers of which are possibly alluded to by the disembodied head of a jack next to two fragments of playing cards with spades and hearts. The inclusion of a Chinese opera singer serves as a foil to represent the vestiges of traditional Chinese culture in a scene which testifies to overwhelming foreign influence. Ultimately, Pang is couching Shanghai as a palimpsest of Paris, where colonial impositions have almost erased traditional culture. Interestingly, *Such is Paris* and *Such is Shanghai* were never reproduced side by side by any periodical despite the fact that Pang is deliberately attempting to invoke a comparison between the two cityscapes.

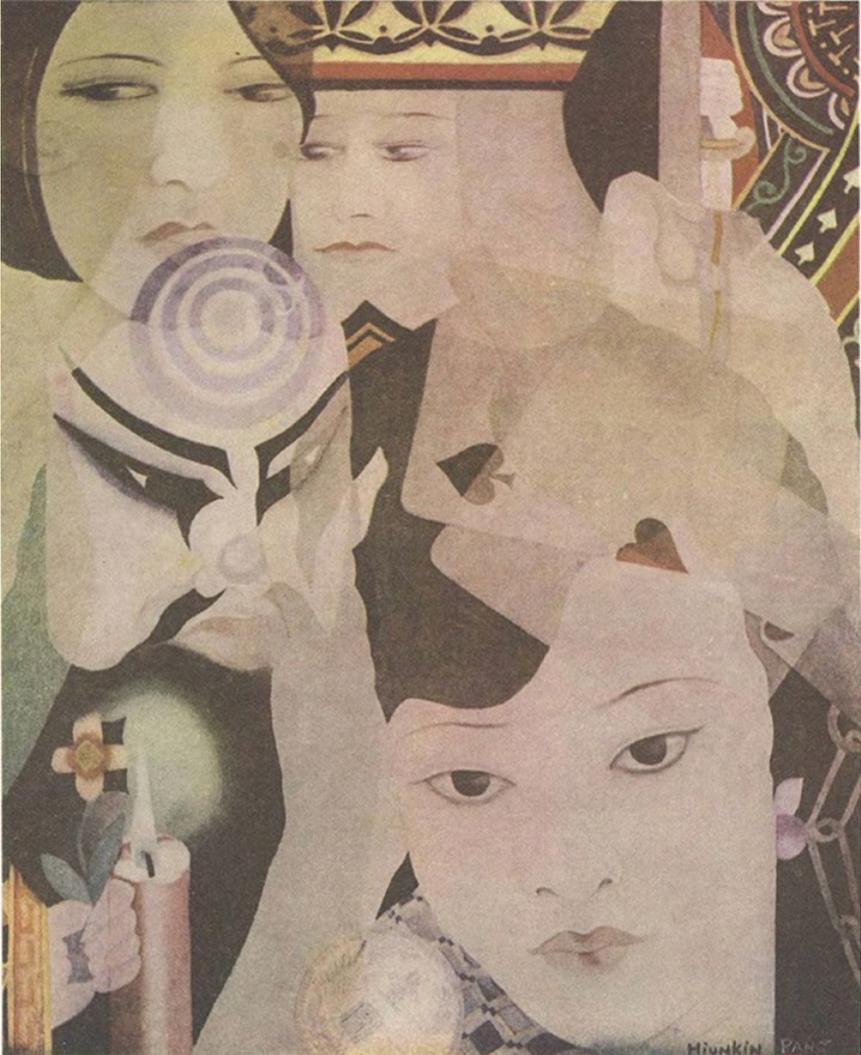


Figure 3: Pang Xunqin, *Such is Shanghai (The Riddle of Life)*. *Liangyou Huabao* (The Young Companion), no. 71, 1932. Courtesy of the Pang Hiunkin (Pang Xunqin) Archives at the Li Ching Cultural and Educational Foundation.

The Storm Society held four exhibitions in Shanghai between 1932 and 1935, and their final one was indeed the most politically charged, with widespread coverage in periodicals despite the fact that Pang Xunqin details in his autobiography that it attracted the least physical attendance (143). In the fourth exhibition, Pang's *Composition* was a flagship work, dominating the Storm Society spread in *Liangyou* (fig. 4). This work was also known by the title *Exploitation* and had a cross-over appeal into the world of cartoonists, appearing in color on the

front cover of a magazine called *Duli Manhua* (Independent *Manhua*) in October 1935, a magazine replete with social satire (fig. 5). Pang's image being chosen as front cover demonstrates that there was a political slant to surrealism in China; the Storm Society was not apolitical in nature despite a penchant for the Freudian aspects of surrealism. Pang explains in his autobiography: "The robot . . . symbolizes the advanced industrialization of the capitalist countries, the peasant woman symbolizes the backward Chinese agrarian society, and the three fingers stood for the forces of imperialism, reactionary politics and feudalism" (paraphrased in Zhu 106).<sup>12</sup> A year earlier at the third Storm Society exhibition, Pang exhibited a highly controversial work entitled *Son of the Earth*, "evoking the plight of drought victims in Chinese villages" (Zhu 37). Depicting the horrors faced by the local population, a father holds a dead son in his arms in what Zhu terms a "modern pieta" (103). While not having particularly surrealist qualities, the work was one of Pang's most overtly political and he is said to have received death threats as a result of its display and reproduction; he was even questioned by police (Andrews and Shen 176). In a journal called *Dazhong huabao* (The Cosmopolitan), the dead body of a child from *Son of the Earth* is shockingly juxtaposed with two nudes by Storm Society artists in 1934. See "Juelanshezhan" (In the Painting Exhibition of the Storm Society) in *Dazhong Huabao* (15). There are certainly disturbing surrealist qualities in this juxtaposition (fig. 6). I therefore venture to propose that Pang Xunqin may have turned to surrealist imagery as a means to enact indirect criticism, bypassing censorship, a use of the movement that continues in China today.

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<sup>12</sup> In the original painting, three fingers are visible but, perhaps due to spatial constraints one or two fingers are sometimes cropped out of the frame in reproductions.



Figure 4: "The Third Exhibition of the Storm Society." *Liangyou Huabao* (The Young Companion), no. 111, 1935. N.B.: This is actually the fourth exhibition of the Storm Society; it is incorrectly labeled.

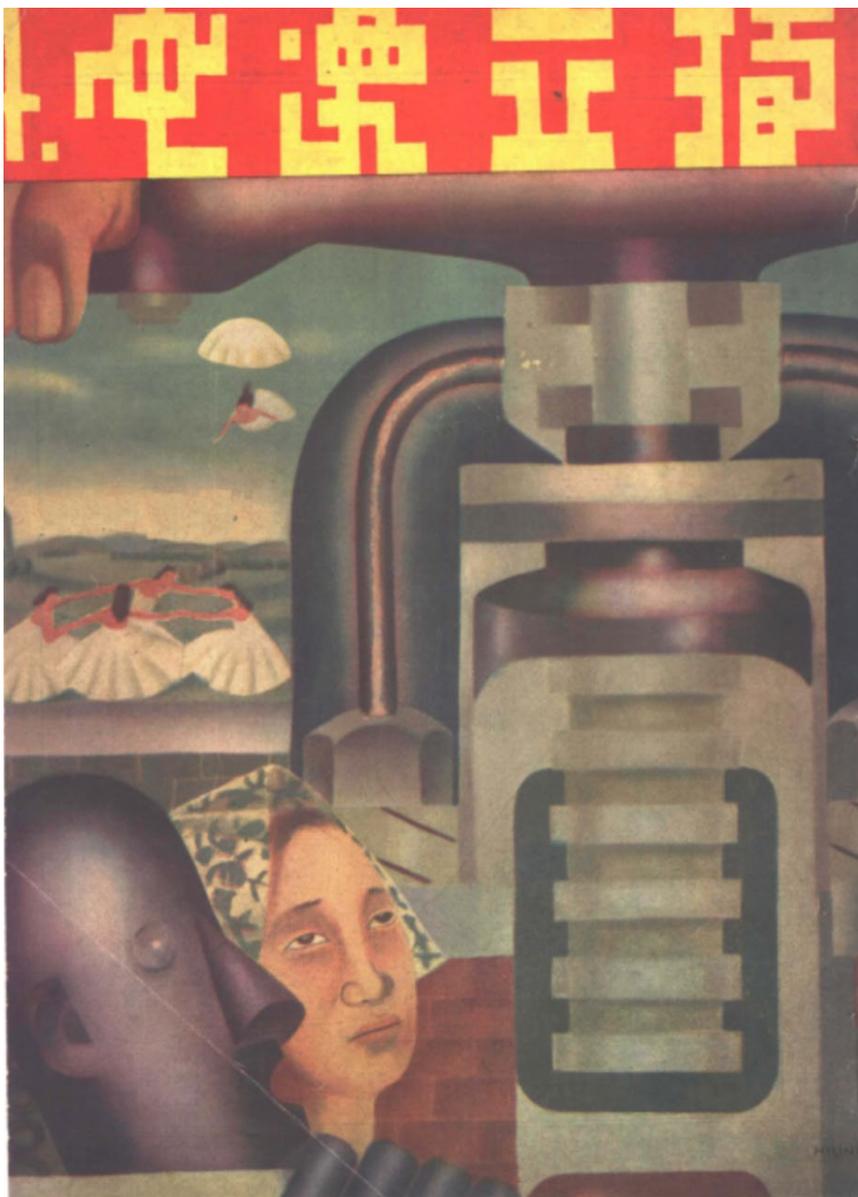


Figure 5: Pang Xunqin, *Composition*. Front cover of *Duli Manhua* (Independent *Manhua*), no. 4, Oct. 1935. Courtesy of the Pang Hiunkin (Pang Xunqin) Archives at the Li Ching Cultural and Educational Foundation.

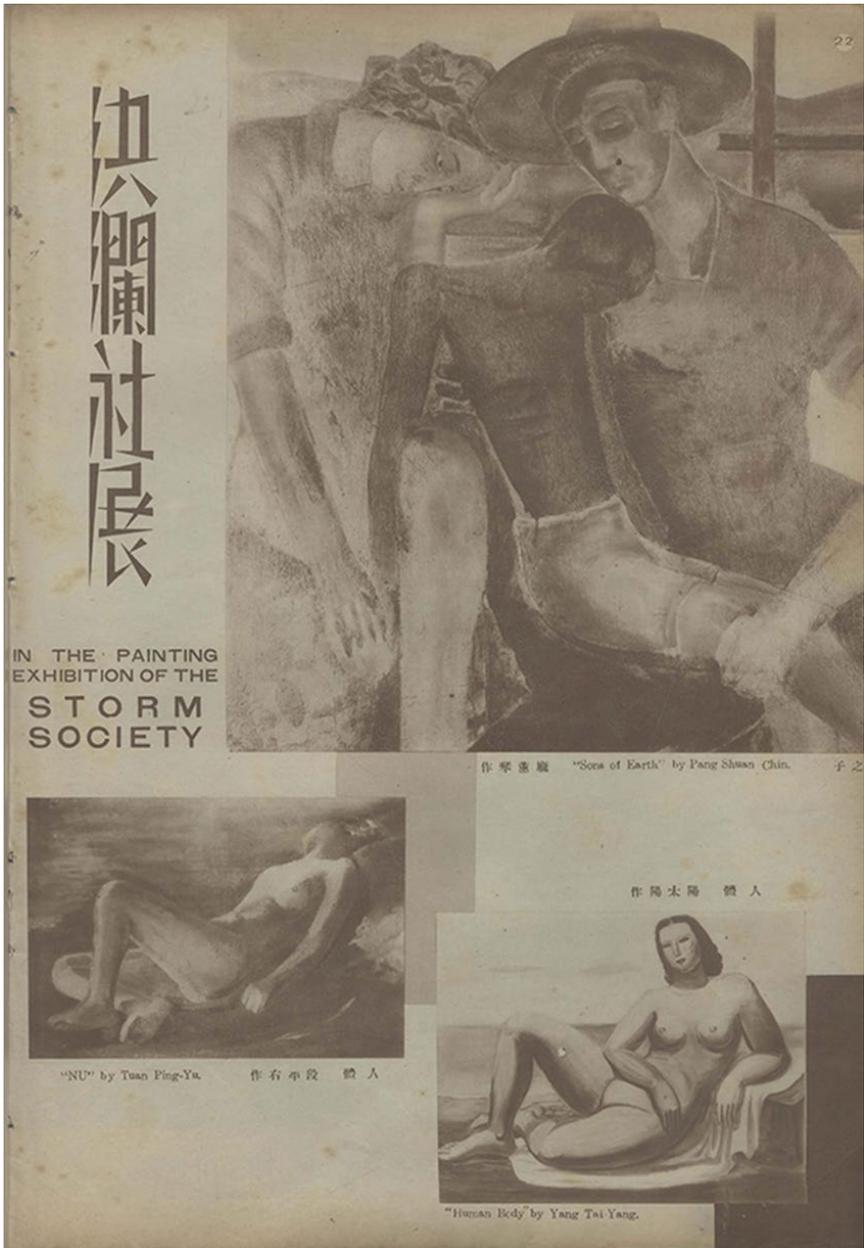


Figure 6: "In the Painting Exhibition of the Storm Society." *Dazhong Huabao* (The Cosmopolitan, 1934, no. 12, p. 22. Courtesy of the Pang Hiunkin (Pang Xunqin) Archives at the Li Ching Cultural and Educational Foundation.

*Liangyou* also reproduced a spread from the Shanghai exhibition of the Guangzhou based Chinese Independent Art Association, whose members originally encountered surrealism in Japan (fig. 7). Zhao Shou's *Jump* depicts a fish rising up from diverse geometric forms. In Chinese culture, the fish is a symbol of good luck and abundance. Interestingly, Tsai Chia-chiu Tsai observes that in the surrealist special issue of *Yifeng*, Paul Klee's 1926 work *Around the Fish* is reproduced in black and white, bearing striking iconographic similarities to Zhao Shou's painting, similarly consisting of a fish ensconced in an abundance of geometric shapes. As such, this is perhaps testament to a direct appropriation of Klee by Shou (Tsai 130). Another painting with particularly surrealist characteristics is *Desire* by Bai Sha. Tsai convincingly argues that *Desire* was adapted from Salvador Dalí's *The Accommodations of Desire* (1929). Given the faithful translation of the word "desire" from the Chinese *yuwang*, this is a highly plausible line of reception. Dalí superimposed the heads of lions onto pebbles, purportedly in an outpouring of sexual frustration underpinned by Freudian psychoanalysis, and highly similar imagery of heads mounted on pebbles is tangible in Bai Sha's painting to the extent that the word "copy" may also be appropriate here. Finally, the work *The World Today* by C. Liang depicts the melting of a road into the sky which appears to parallel the time-space continuum of Dalí. Although the Chinese Independent Art Association only held one exhibition in Shanghai, it was picked up on by all the popular pictorials, equally appearing in the pages of *Liangyou* rival *Shidai*. While based in Guangzhou, it was clear that this group of Cantonese surrealists needed to travel to Shanghai's former French Concession to host an exhibition, perhaps not so much for the impact of the physical display in itself, but to ensure its coverage in mass market Shanghainese periodicals.



Figure 7: "The Second Exhibition of the Chinese Independent Art Association."  
*Liangyou Huabao (The Young Companion)*, no. 111, 1935, p. 20.

## Yifeng

While the members of Chinese independent association were also able to publicize their exhibition via *Liangyou*, they were also regular contributors to *Yifeng* (Art Winds), a journal printed not in Shanghai but rather in Guangzhou and edited by Sun Fuxi who had studied abroad in Lyon. Of course, *Yifeng* was still distributed in Shanghai and well-known to artists practicing there. The October 1935 edition of *Yifeng* provides the single most comprehensive Chinese language resource on surrealism during the Republican era. Several theoretical articles about surrealism were included in this volume as well as reproductions of works from famous European surrealists commingled with works by their Chinese counterparts. Moreover, Zhao Shou translated André Breton's surrealist manifesto from Japanese to Chinese.

This journal was far more thorough than even *Yishu Xunkan* in terms of its theoretical musings on surrealism. The "Introduction to Surrealism" included a front cover of Picasso's 1925 work *Still life With Antique Bust* (fig. 8) and several of Picasso's sketches populated the issue as marginalia throughout. The periodical incorporated works by Francis Picabia, Max Ernst, André Masson, Juan Miró, Picasso, Dalí, Paul Klee, and Giorgio Di Chirico. These works of European surrealists were juxtaposed with two works by Chinese surrealists. Zhao Shou's *Met With a Smile* is juxtaposed with Yves Tanguy's *Maman, papa est blessé* (*Mother, Father Is Wounded*) (fig. 9). Incidentally, this title is translated into Chinese as "母亲·父亲生气了" 'Mother, Father Is Angry.' It seems that Tanguy's allusion to the First World War has not been understood here. Zeng Ming's *Moon Night* is juxtaposed with Dalí's 1931 work, *Remorse or Sphinx Embedded in the Sand* (fig. 10). These juxtapositions demonstrate the distinctiveness of Chinese surrealism alongside specific iconographic traits studied from their European counterparts, Dalí's use of shadow echoes in Zeng Ming's work in the same way that Tanguy's agglomeration of shapes feed into the work of Zhao Shou.

In the *Yifeng* special edition on surrealism the following theoretical essays and creative responses were elaborated:

1. "The Surrealist Manifesto" by André Breton (trans. Zhao Shou)
2. "What Is Surrealism?" by Li Dongping
3. "The Theory of Surrealism" by Liang Xihong
4. "Critique of Surrealism" by Zeng Ming
5. "New Trends in Surrealist Art" by Li Dongping
6. "Surrealist Poems and Oil Painting" by Zeng Ming
7. "The Theory of Surrealist Painting" by Liang Xihong
8. "Hommage à la Peinture Surréaliste" Bai Sha
9. "Pablo Picasso et son Rêve de 1929" by Zhao Shou.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Despite the French titles, these last two contributions were also in Chinese.

Two issues later, *Yifeng* published Jin Sa's essay "The Chinese Independent Art Association Exhibition and Surrealism," which analyzed the specifically surrealist characteristics of the Association's second exhibition in Shanghai.

The "Introduction to Surrealism" explains surrealism in a way that the Chinese public could understand. However, in terms of reception, it is important to differentiate between what is said and what is not. There are several notable omissions from the *Yifeng* introduction to surrealism. The first is pointed out by Chingsin Wu, who notes that "[t]he members of the CIAA excluded the Japanese surrealists. Perhaps this reflects the growing antipathy among Chinese artists toward Japan, in light of increasing Japanese militarism and the 1931 invasion of Manchuria" (203). Second is the lack of acknowledgement of the revolutionary aspects of surrealism. I have seen no attempt to translate the "Second manifeste du surréalisme" 'Second Manifesto,' which appeared in 1929 and advocates the revolutionary aspects of surrealism. These works were readily available in Japan where Chinese artists encountered surrealism around this time. Therefore, this does seem to be rather conscious self-censorship as opposed to a lack of comprehension<sup>14</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is important to briefly outline some of the key points Chinese writers made about surrealism in the *Yifeng* special edition in order to grasp how surrealism was portrayed to interested readers during the 1930s. In "What is Surrealism," Li Dongping defends the movement from the accusation that it assumes the form of mere fantasy commenting: "所開【超現實】這名詞，雖是一種【非現實】的東西，可是它決不是【無現實】的" 'Although the term surrealism incorporates non-realistic elements, it is in no way unrealistic' (27). He goes on to give a concrete example that can be attributed to the techniques of many surrealist artists: "這構成是超越了現實物的形狀和位" 'the composition of the picture transcends the shape and position of a real object.' After this lucid explanation, Liang Xihong comments that surrealist theory is very much engaged in real life explaining: "集了一切生活的要素，一切吸收的當中不能不成為【世界的】的了" 'it gathers all elements of life and everything it absorbs cannot fail to represent the real world' (29-30). Zeng Ming's "Critique of Surrealist Art" compares the movement favorably to other modernist trends, stating that constructivism, cubism, expressionism, and Dada all rely on mere aesthetics and it is only surrealism that demonstrates the analytical power to comprehend time and space (31). Li Dongping's "New Trends in Surrealist Art" focuses on innovative artistic techniques, praising the use of collage and other found materials in surrealist painting (33). Zeng Ming's "Surrealist Poems and Oil Painting" explains how the

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<sup>14</sup> The only periodical, to my knowledge, that mentions the revolutionary aspects of surrealism in the Republican era is Shi Zhecun's *Xiandai* (Les contemporains, 1932, no. 4). Here, the author Gao Ming notes the group's affiliation with the French Communist Party and cites the journal *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930-33). See Xu and Song 36.

two media are contingent upon each other and particularly cites the 1925<sup>15</sup> publication of the periodical *La révolution surréaliste* as instrumental in uniting these two strands of surrealism, highlighting the role of periodicals as a site of convergence for mixed media (39).

In Liang Xihong's "The Theory of Surrealist Painting" (42) the following artists are identified as surrealist painters: Pablo Picasso, George Braque, Giorgio di Chirico, Carlo Carrà, Juan Miró, André Masson, Yves Tanguy, Man Ray, Max Ernst, André Beaudin, Paul Klee, Hans Arp, Zhao Shou, Z. L Roux, Pierre Roy, Zeng Ming, Francis Picabia, and Salvador Dalí (42).<sup>16</sup> As we can see, this list focuses on the most famous male protagonists of surrealism; by 1935 the movement was much more diverse and international than the impression given by this list. Certain inclusions seem slightly dubious, Carlo Carrà for example being much more closely associated with futurism. Importantly, Chinese surrealists Zeng Ming and Zhao Shou are given pride of place amongst their European counterparts, but no Japanese surrealists appear on this list. Zhao Shou is lauded as China's earliest advocate of surrealism, having studied André Breton's manifesto and the text *Poisson soluble* in 1930. He is described as "以东洋的精神·以西洋的技法的表现" 'having an Eastern spirit, with a Western means of expression' (Liang 45). As for Zeng Ming, Liang Xihong explains that he imbues traditional Chinese flower painting with elements of fantasy, emphasizing that both artists are working in a cultural hybrid idiom; this is not mere appropriation (46).

In "Hommage à la peinture surréaliste," Bai Sha adopts a different approach, using poetry to praise surrealist painting (48). He elaborates two poems entitled "时间"(Time) and "春日低的历史(History of early spring). In the latter, Bai Sha describes "羽毛在Masson的畫面唱歌" 'feathers singing on the canvas of Masson' (48), presumably alluding to this painter's innovative use of this material. Zhou Shou's "Pablo Picasso et son rêve de 1929" is written as a surrealist stream of consciousness about the painter. In this piece Zhao Shou begins with the provocation, "毕加索是不是物体的妖魔着·这样的说时是无聊的" 'Is Picasso a demon of objects, this way of talking is rather boring' (50-51). Rather, Zhao argues that Picasso transcends the material realm in favor of metaphysical subject matter. Finally, in a later edition of *Yifeng* specifically commenting on the Chinese Independent Art Association's exhibition in Shanghai, the critic Jin Sa inextricably

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<sup>15</sup> Zeng Ming does not cite which issue of *La révolution surréaliste* he is referring to. However, in 1925, the first instalment of "Le surréalisme et la peinture" was published in no. 4 on 15 July 1925. The next instalment was not published until 1 March 1926 in no. 6; therefore we can conclude he read no. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, creating lists of famous personae was in itself a surrealist act with often humorous consequences. The list is also a bold attempt to canonize Chinese surrealists alongside their Euro-American counterparts, given that there is no evidence that European surrealists were aware of a Chinese-based group of surrealists.

links the content of the show to the surrealist movement but is highly critical of Li Dongping's definition of surrealism as non-realistic reality (56). He believes surrealism is simply unrealistic and affirms it therefore has no application in real life and is impossible for people to understand. It would seem that in the context of mounting tensions with Japan, it was Jin Sa's viewpoint that gained traction with painters under increased pressure to acknowledge the threat of the Japanese menace with a return to propaganda-based realism becoming more and more evident in the years 1936-37 just before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. The Chinese Independent Art Association gradually disbanded after its Shanghai exhibition of 1935;<sup>17</sup> the individual works fascinated the editors of periodicals, but the fundamental theories behind surrealism did not gain approval from art critics, probably because they were only aware of one half of surrealist thought. In a Chinese context the individual psyche was not aligned with the imperative for collective revolution.

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<sup>17</sup> Members of the Chinese Independent Art Association still published some articles about surrealism in minor journals during the years 1936-37 but no longer in *Yifeng* after the criticism of Jin Sa.

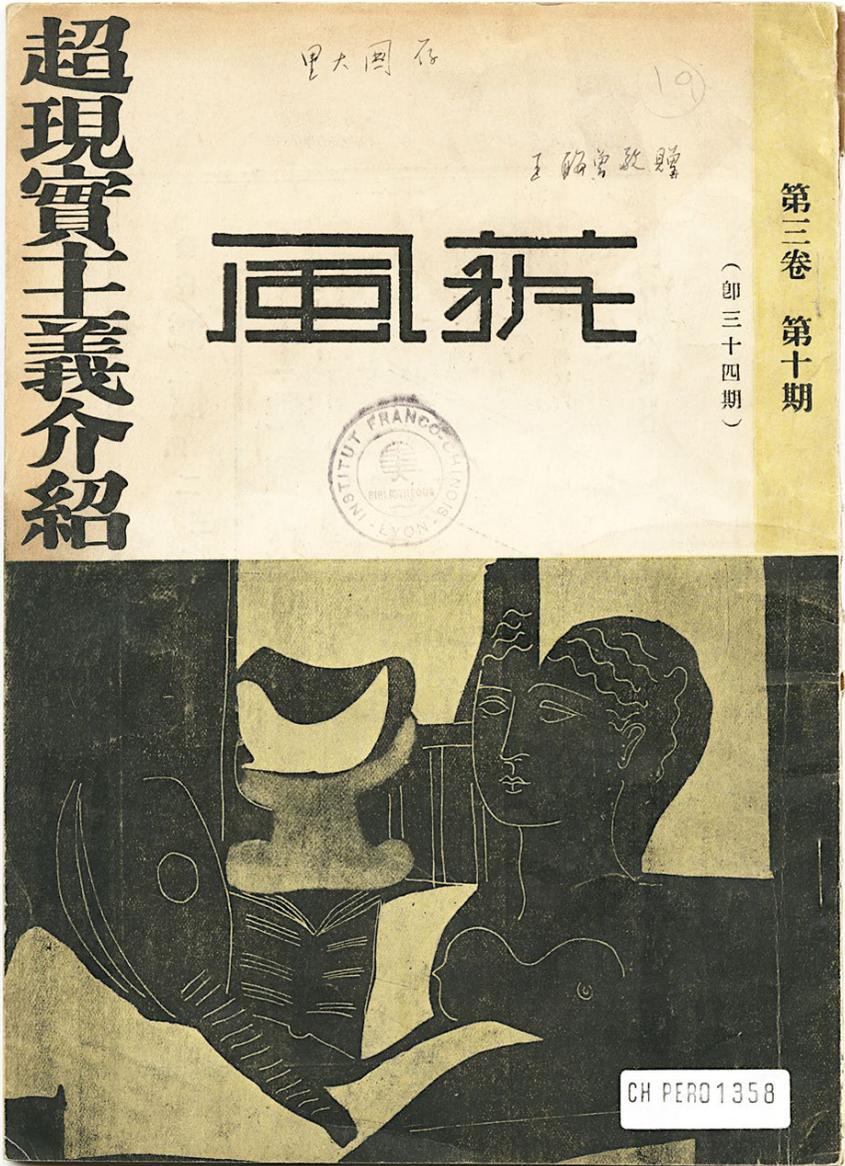


Figure 8: Front Cover of *Yifeng* (Art Winds), vol. 3, no. 10, 1935. "Introduction to Surrealism." Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon: CH PER 01358, property of Université Lyon 3. With Picasso (1925) *Still life with Antique Bust* © Succession Picasso/DACS, London 2021.



Figure 9: Images from *Yifeng (Art Winds)*, vol. 3, no. 10, 1935, p. 19. National Digital Library of China. Above: Zhao Shou, *Met with a Smile*, 1934, oil painting. Below: Yves Tanguy (1927) *Mother! Father is wounded*, 1927, oil on canvas © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2021.

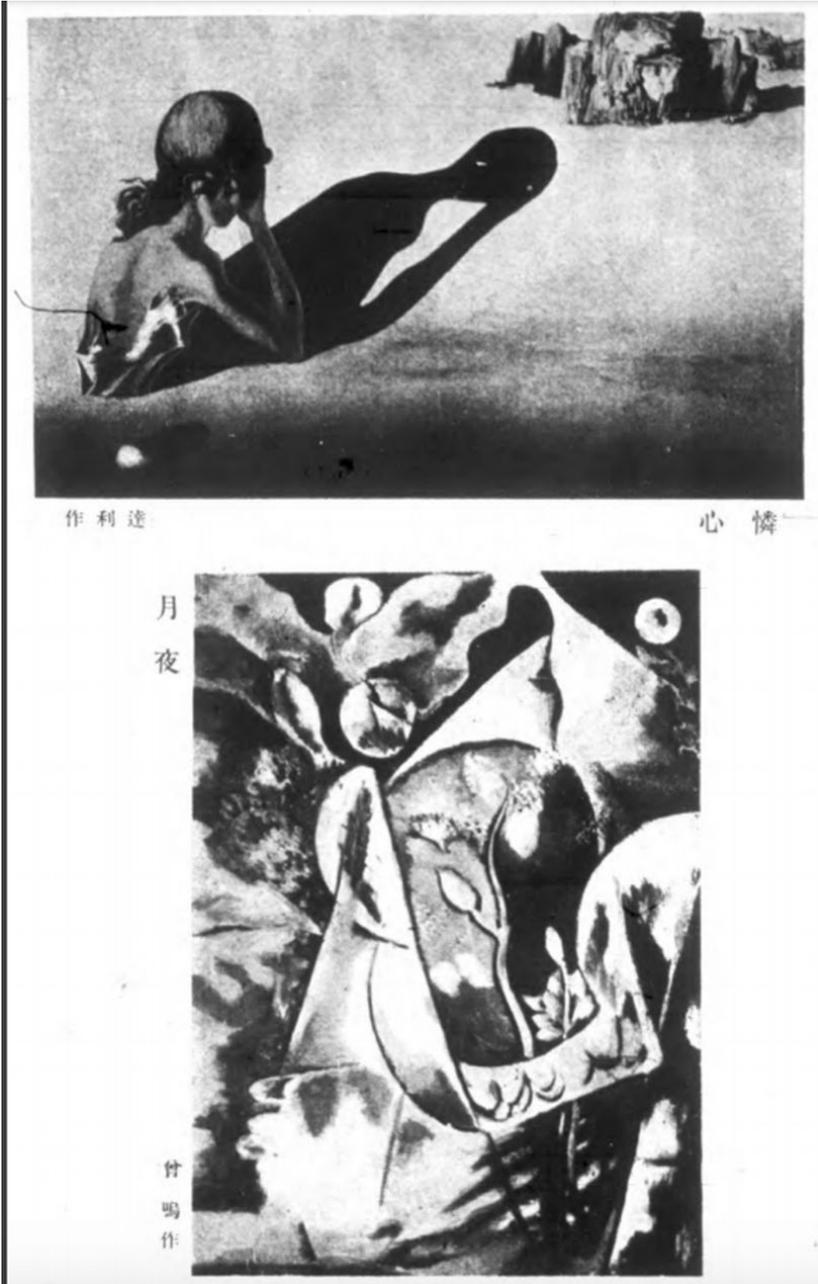


Figure 10: Images from *Yifeng* (Art Winds), vol. 3, no. 10, 1935, p. 17. National Digital Library of China. Above: Salvador Dalí, *Remorse, or Sphinx embedded in the Sand*, 1931, oil on canvas. © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, DACS 2021. Below: Zeng Ming, *Moon Night*, 1934, oil on canvas.

## *Shidai Manhua*

The satirical periodical *Shidai Manhua* (*Modern Sketch*)<sup>18</sup> was the most overtly political and subversive of all those in Shanghai, with a run of thirty-nine issues between 1934 and 1937, running content that other publications would not dare to include. It was based in the former French Concession and had a sizeable circulation of circa 10,000 copies per issue (Caschera 86). John Crespi notes that “the democracy of the popular artistic forms it hosted, united in the mission of fusing art and the era made it a landmark publication.” Indeed, one of the most democratizing genres it regularly featured was photomontage. Crespi states:

[T]he editorial staff worked in an environment saturated with photographic imagery. The Modern Publications office in fact had a photo studio on the third floor of its building on Shanghai’s Hankou Lu, to which the company would invite celebrities for photo shoots. The company also maintained its photo archive at that address, a resource that the editors of *Modern Sketch* could and did raid for material to be satirically repurposed.

While, unlike the members of the Storm Society and the Chinese Independent Art Association, the cartoonists in this magazine do not directly acknowledge surrealism, it is clear that the re-appropriation of materials thoroughly chimes with the technique of repurposing found photography which was widespread in the plethora of Parisian surrealist periodicals.

The sexualization of women in surrealist photomontage and other forms of surrealist photography was widespread. *Modern Sketch* somewhat viciously mixed sex with politics, juxtaposing hedonistic desire with flagrant social inequality as two dialectical elements of Shanghainese urban existence. Jennifer Mundy notes the importance of desire in the thought of the European surrealists: “In the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, desire -- specifically though not exclusively, erotic desire -- came much more to the fore in surrealist art and writings. There was a new willingness to confront the darker aspects of sexuality, and a new urgency in the surrealists’ explorations of the deep workings of the mind” (11). In a Chinese context, desire was predicated on the trope of the ‘modern girl’ (young, attractive and bourgeois), a concept which is succinctly explained by Dong:

Major changes in Republican Era Chinese Social practices – such as the establishment of the nuclear family as the norm; young men and women receiving education or joining the workforce in integrated public spaces away from their parent’s homes; and the emergence of an urban culture targeting the young – opened up space for single young women to play new roles in society. These public roles for women involved

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<sup>18</sup> The title was printed in both Chinese and English.

unprecedented visibility and shifts in representation, including Modern Girl fashions, attitudes, and images. (195)

Indeed, the vast majority of front covers of *Liangyou* were populated by modern girls and popular female actors. However, *Shidai manhua* mercilessly subverted the modern girl trope by literally cutting and pasting them into desperate situations. For example, one photomontage in *Shidai manhua* situates a modern girl languishing amidst the Sichuan drought of 1937 (fig. 11). The piece is entitled “The Sorrow of a Beautiful Sichuan Mermaid” who is sojourning amidst an arid landscape. Invoking a mermaid, of course refers to the lack of water, which in turn led to mass starvation for the Sichuanese.

Directly following this photomontage is a double page photographic spread of mannequins (fig. 12) which appear reminiscent of Eugene Atget’s shop window photographs. The periodical thus appears to juxtapose famine with fetishism, the male gaze infiltrating the shop window at several junctures in this set of photographs. As in Paris, mannequins were also commonplace in the windows of Shanghai department stores. Paul Bevan has observed that “mannequins were also a major inspiration to the surrealists in Europe” (237). In a Shanghainese context, the mannequin serves as another satirical dimension of the modern girl craze sweeping Shanghai, here reduced to an inanimate, manipulatable object.

As Dong notes, “[m]ost of the pieces in the magazines were by young male cartoonists” (207). It is difficult, despite the explicit political juxtapositions between rich and poor, not to view these cartoons as a form of violent misogyny. We should, however, recall that violence inflicted on the female body was a widespread trope of European surrealism. Photomontage was often used by male surrealists to dismember the female into its parts. Very much like the surrealists’ experiences of mutilated bodies in World War One, the Chinese were also suffering from the psychological torment of conflict, displacing the violence inflicted on the male body onto the female. The reception of surrealism in China during the Republican era was wholly male, and this is perhaps reflected most brutally in the treatment of the modern girl in *Shidai Manhua*.

While I have focused here on full page spreads, the marginalia consisting of smaller illustrations in *Shidai Huabao* reveal further affinities to the surrealist movement, albeit the less desirable, misogynistic aspect. The piece *More Than Just Bread* (fig. 13) is a cursive drawing of a decapitated female, proudly brandishing one of her eyes, poised in a statuesque balletic pose atop a loaf of bread. I can only invoke the lament of Mary Ann Caws here: “Headless. And also footless. Often armless too; and always unarmed, except with poetry and passion. There they are, the surrealist women so shot and painted, so stressed and dismembered, punctured and severed” (11). This piece represents an idiosyncratically Chinese envisioning of desire. In Chinese culture, Gaozi’s concept of *shisexingye*<sup>19</sup> can be

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<sup>19</sup> Thank you to my mentor Professor Jiang Jiehong for this suggestion.

translated as “by nature we desire food and sex,” inextricably linking metabolism to sex drive.

Finally, a collage piece entitled *Western Civilization* serves as a damning indictment of colonialism. Notions of gambling and chance are reified by playing cards in a similar manner to Pang Xunqin’s *Such Is Shanghai* (fig. 14). In the foreground, a chorus line of naked modern girls is dramatically offset by a parade of soldiers brandishing gas masks and bayonets marching along the colonial architecture of Shanghai’s Bund, the commercial heart of the city. A priest is holding a bible and a cross; he is wearing a gas mask but his body has already turned green. The queen of hearts, again perhaps in dialogue with Pang Xunqin’s *Such Is Shanghai*, is holding a flower with its connotations of prostitution in a Chinese context. It is difficult to say whether the Chinese surrealists were aware of the European surrealists’ *The Truth About the Colonies* exhibition in 1931. Again, as this was a direct collaboration with the French communist party, acts of self-censorship may have occurred. Notwithstanding, anti-colonialism was itself tolerated by the ruling Nationalist party, which fought to end the unequal treaties imposed by the imperial powers.

Ultimately, *Shidai Manhua* was a highly surrealist periodical despite never formally acknowledging the movement. It is clear, however, that the cartoonists who worked for this journal were at least familiar with surrealist imagery and by proxy with surrealist thought in a city motivated by desire. This was not a group of fine artists who had what was at the time the luxury of studying abroad and yet the resonances with surrealism are hidden in plain sight. As Michael Sullivan affirms, “Artists and the intelligentsia generally knew art only through the magazines” (65).



Figure 11: "The Sorrow of a Sichuan Mermaid." Photomontage. *Shidai Manhua (Modern Sketch)*, no. 37, 1937, p. 10. Special Collections and University Archives, Colgate University Libraries.

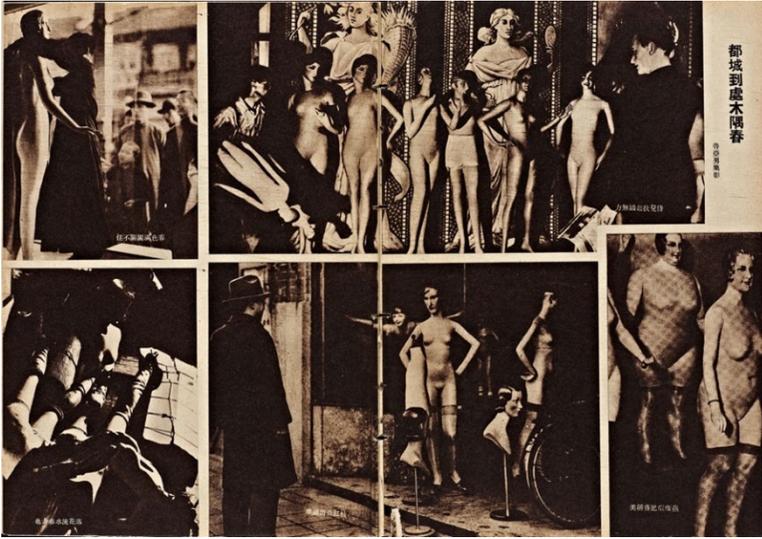


Figure 12: "All over the capital." Photographic collage. *Shidai Manhua (Modern Sketch)*, no. 37, 1937, p. 11. Special Collections and University Archives, Colgate University Libraries.

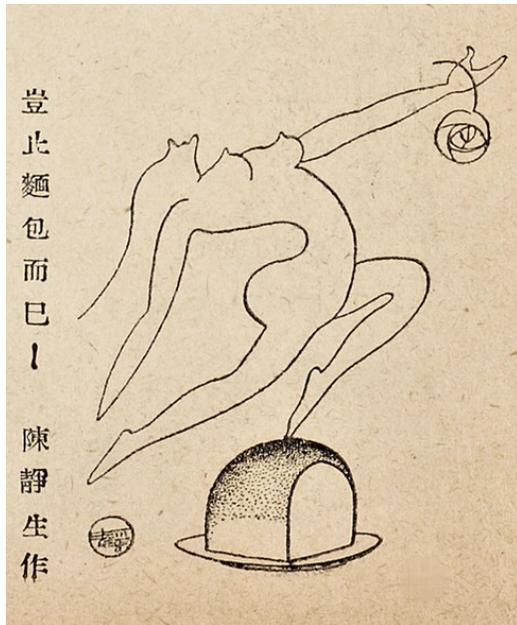


Figure 13: Chen Jingsheng, *More Than Just Bread*. Illustration. *Shidai Manhua (Modern Sketch)*, no. 1, 1934, p. 8. Special Collections and University Archives, Colgate University Libraries.



Figure 14: Wang Jiaohu, *Western Civilisation*. *Shidai Huabao (Modern Sketch)*, no. 15, Mar. 35, p. 20. Special Collections and University Archives, Colgate University Libraries.

## Conclusion

Periodicals were the key source of engagement with Western modern art in 1930s Shanghai, far outweighing exhibitions in terms of their impact despite the inevitable loss of the “aura” pertaining to the original image, to use Walter Benjamin’s term. Surrealist images were often contained in lifestyle periodicals that covered many subjects beyond fine art, spanning current affairs, fashion, international relations, film and book reviews, and so on. This meant that a wide cross-section of Shanghainese at least had a visual encounter with surrealism. Specialist periodicals appealed to art world groupings who wanted to improve their knowledge of the Western avant-garde for the purposes of aesthetic innovation, psychoanalysis, and social commentary. Here the core concepts and theories of surrealism were explained in depth. That is not to say that Shanghainese periodicals merely copied European surrealism blindly. Instead, the idiosyncratic geography of Shanghai’s former French Concession paved the way for a transcultural method of artistic practice. Those artists fortunate enough to have had direct encounters with surrealism abroad in Tokyo and Paris began to disseminate their surrealist-inflected works in periodicals which also reproduced images of canonical European surrealist artworks. This enabled a wider range of actors, many located in the former French Concession, including salaried cartoonists, to draw from the movement in spite of not travelling abroad.

Moreover, periodicals are absolutely vital to cultural memory of surrealism in Shanghai due to the destruction of artworks during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Indeed, Pang Xunqin’s *Such Is Paris*, *Such Is Shanghai* and *Composition* only exist today as reproductions in periodicals. The first two canvases were lost in the carnage of the Second Sino-Japanese war, the third was destroyed by Pang Xunqin’s own hand for self-protection as Mao proclaimed that all forms of modernism amounted to bourgeois decadence. Ni Yide was not so fortunate and was tragically tortured to death during the Cultural Revolution in 1970 due to the legacy of his writings on modernism despite becoming a Communist Party member in 1949. Many cartoonists deployed their skills in service of the anti-Japanese war effort, and, conscious of the rampant social inequality in a Shanghai controlled by foreign imperialist powers, even travelled to communist bases in Yan’an to work for the Chinese Communist Party. After the Communists took power Zhao Shou was sentenced to “reform through labor” in Guangzhou on trumped-up charges in 1958. However, he clandestinely continued to produce surrealist works under Mao’s regime which only condoned the socialist realist aesthetic so despised by Breton. Despite the short shelf-life of surrealism in Shanghai during the 1930s, periodicals brought together the disparate groups of artists who drew inspiration from the movement. Ultimately, Shanghainese periodicals were the most powerful receptacles in which surrealism could be disseminated in Shanghai. Prismatic in their capability to refract the countervailing forces of hedonism and horror

pervading the city, they were at the center of surrealist activity, at the core not the periphery, the center not the fringe.

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