

**Universal Disorder: Utopianism, Anarchism, and the
Aesthetics of Early Chinese Leftism in the *Shidai Manhua*,
1934-1937**

By

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Abstract

In 1934, a prominent group of Shanghai artists formed the *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch), a *manhua* publication that would prove to be one of the most eclectic, radical, and bizarre periodicals that would grace Shanghai's flourishing print culture scene during the republican period. Recent research on *manhua* periodicals during the Republican period has highlighted its shift from an eccentric and "vulgar" form of art that primarily focused on the contemporary cultural fads of Shanghai, to a left-wing publication that found a place in the battle for national salvation against imperialism, and more broadly against global fascism. Yet, there has been little research that engages with the political contents of *manhua*'s most popular and successful periodical by far, the *Shidai manhua* (1934-1937). This study highlights one of the major motifs present within the *manhua* community that reflects within the *Shidai manhua*, that of an anarcho-utopian belief primarily influenced by the Confucio-Buddhist ideologies of Chinese nationalists and literati such as Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong, Zhang Binglin (Zhang Taiyuan), and Cai Yuanpei. As this study will argue, *manhua* became an artistic method of preserving and highlighting the national essence (*guocui*) of Chinese intellectual thought while combating imperialism, internal corruption, and the state, by blending Western ideas such as anarchism with traditional forms of Chinese ideology and art, like the nascent *manhua* which evolved on the streets of Republican Shanghai.

Preface and Acknowledgements

This thesis is an original, unpublished, and independent work by the author, Joe Cacese. All translations, unless otherwise stated, have been conducted by the author.

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Introduction

China's introduction into the modern world beginning in earnest in the mid-19th century was a messy affair plagued by war brought about by the colonialist endeavors of several Euro-American empires. The aftermath of the Sino-Japanese war, and then the failed reforms in 1898 led to a peculiar crisis of identity for nearly every Chinese intellectual. The response from the Chinese literati during the final decades of the Qing dynasty was one that was fueled by fear, terror, and a lack of purpose as they found themselves caught between a disintegrating world order of *Tianxia* and the emerging world of Western-centric modernity which, by the mid-19th century, was entirely based on a nascent global capitalist system. The world had been torn asunder and turned upside down; wealthy merchants suddenly found themselves in control of social organizations, backed by the world's most powerful military forces, while Confucian scholars found themselves relegated to the wayside. Nowhere was this chaotic order more apparent and transformative than in the city of Shanghai, a quagmire where two worlds merged, to the admiration, or dismay, of many.

In Shanghai, one of the many results of this budding order was the flourishing of a printing press culture which saw itself as a vanguard of modernity inside a backward, sick nation. Under the influence of Euro-American print culture and judging their purpose from the works of Chinese scholars such as Yan Fu and Liang Qichao, throughout the late 19th century and early 20th century, hundreds of periodicals began to establish themselves against the backdrop of Shanghai's own experience with modernity.¹ Newspapers and other periodicals

¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 43-44. Lee notes that Chinese terms such as *shidai*, *xin shidai*, translated from the Japanese *jidai* began to reach increasing popularity during the 1900-1940s among Shanghai periodicals. This comes from their own understanding of Western-centric, linear views of human progress as moving through epochs. For the Chinese literati, these periodicals were an important step (and their own contribution) towards introducing China to the world as a "civilized" nation. The old world was dead, and the new one had begun.

allowed China to engage with the rest of the world, as an observer, critic, even supporter of Western ideas that were rapidly being forced upon the world.

Like any publication, the primary driving force for the founders and sponsors of these myriad periodicals was capital accumulation. For many young artists looking to establish themselves in the new world, the best job available was advertising, particularly drawing women for cigarette, jewelry, and perfume advertisements that can be found abundantly in any Republican period periodical.² As the demand for periodicals picked up in Shanghai, several new forms of drawing such as comic serials (*lianhuanhua* 連環畫) and comics (*manhua* 漫畫) emerged as popular pieces to consume among a semi-literate audience. The term *lianhuanhua*, a series of short picture books, did not come into use until 1927, beforehand being known simply as *xiaoshu* 小書 (little books) or *tuhuashu* 圖畫書 (picture books), or even more crudely as *gongzaishu* 公仔書 (kids' books).³

Many of these types of periodicals were perceived as vulgar or low taste by intellectual circles, however it is important to note that they attracted a popular audience among the illiterate and children. While on the surface these picture books and comics seem crude, early on they came to work as an educational, if not outright propagandizing, outlet. In 1918, Shen Bochen founded the *Shanghai Puck*, one of the earliest *manhua* publications in Shanghai, influenced greatly in content and structure (and name) by the American satirical periodical *Puck*, and

² See Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Pictures and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004). Most artists found themselves living paycheck-to-paycheck at best, or at worst forced to return home or find new work. However, finding work with one of the larger, Western companies was in many ways a stable career. It is under these circumstances that much of later Chinese art was influenced. For the influence of advertising art on Chinese propaganda during the republican period, see, Julia Andrews, "Revolutionaries and Academics: Art of the Republican Period," in *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

³ Shen Kuiyi, "Lianhuanhua and Manhua – Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai," in *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humor Magazines and Picture Books*, ed. John A Lent (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 101.

focused on the noble goal of bridging an understanding between Western and Chinese culture, as well as calling for the fall of traditional culture in place of the emerging, Western-led order.⁴ Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin regard the first example of a “modern newspaper cartoon” (*jindai baokan manhua*) as one appearing in the Russian Issues Alarming News (*Eshi Jingwen*) in 1903 dealing with unwanted Russian advances in the Northeast just prior to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war.⁵ Humor became an important aspect of socio-political criticism for artists in Shanghai.⁶

Shanghai periodicals were not, like any element of Chinese society, untouched by the political waves and whims going on across the world, and inside China itself. As the New Culture Movement began to move across China in full force in the 1920s, many intellectuals became critical of the standing of this “vulgar” literature and visual culture being published in Shanghai. In 1921 for example, Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1958) called for writers to reject traditional focuses on beauty, and for it to be replaced by a “literature of blood and tears” that accurately represented the suffering of China’s people.⁷ While many giants of Chinese literature such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) or Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) had already pushed for the political radicalization of literary movements, it would take more time for this radicalization to reach Shanghai’s printing culture.

⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁵ Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin, *Zhongguo manhua shi* (A history of Chinese cartoons), 16-17. *Eshi jingwen* was published in Shanghai from 1903-1905.

⁶ See Christopher Rea, *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 13. Here, Rea writes “Conspicuousness of laughter inspired heated debates about literary aesthetics, moral values, and China’s broader cultural climate. Writers in the late Qing and Republican periods were highly ambivalent about laughter, celebrating its pleasures while deploring its social and political effects.” While many of these humor-based periodicals took time to become radicalized, the political waters were lapping at the heels of the artists for a long time.

⁷ Ibid., 2.

In the Light of Tradition: Political Pressures and the Radicalization of Chinese Manhua

When the May Fourth Movement exploded out of Beijing in 1919, it did not take long for many publications to follow suit. Attempting to force Westernization through to an ignorant audience, magazines like the *New Tide*, *Short Story Monthly*, and *New Youth* began efforts to introduce Western literature's intellectual trends and schools to China. One of the most famous caricatures emerging from these publications was Chen Duxiu's 陳獨秀 (1879-1942) Mr. *De* (Democracy) and Mr. *Sai* (Science). The two figures are often thought of representing the collective values and consistent stance of the May Fourth Movement, opposing all things feudal, while promoting new ethics and ideas.⁸ The primary target was Confucianism, which was denounced as a 'talisman' for autocratic rule; intellectually, these literary pieces denounced Confucius as the authority underpinning an intellectual autocracy, and in terms of individuality, it denounced Confucian rites as a precursor of ethical autocracy.⁹ The path forward was murky, but it was wholly attached to science (which would make China strong), and democracy (which would awaken China's ignorant masses).

The influence of the Western world, however, was not so quick to catch on in China's artistic realm, and early on there were serious attempts to distance Chinese art from Western ones. Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898-1975) and Zong Baihua 宗白華 (1897-1986) attempted to differentiate Chinese and Western modes of picturing on basis of distinctions between the West's focus on perspectival depth, which they viewed as static and lifeless, and China's focus on the

⁸ Zhu Shoutong, "On the Intrinsic Inevitability of the Birth of the May Fourth New Literature," *Social Sciences in China* 38, no. 2 (2017), 194-196.

⁹ Weiping Chen, "An Analysis of Anti-Traditionalism in the New Culture Movement," *Social Sciences in China* 38, no. 2 (2017), 176.

unseen which were qualities of vitality and life, or even enlivenment 生動 (*shengdong*).

Although this binary is simplistic, the fact that Chinese artists viewed the world in these terms shows the ways in which they thought about images and how they sought to map, clarify, simplify, and structure the complex cultural geography of images.¹⁰

Feng Zikai is an important figure for understanding the cultural encounters that developed early on with modern *manhua* publications. Born in Shimenwan, Zhejiang, Feng attended the Zhejiang First Normal College where he studied under the reformist educators Jing Hengyi 經亨頤 (1877-1938) and Lu Xun, who joined the college in 1909 for a brief time as a biology teacher.¹¹ Despite a rigorous moral and vocational education, Feng changed his subject from science to the arts under the tutelage of Li Shutong 李叔同 (or Hong Yi 弘一, 1880-1942), a famous Chinese painter and future Buddhist monk. Feng's relationship with Li would change his life, introducing him to a world of art, and inspiring him to study the arts in Tokyo, where he became obsessed with sketching quotidian things. Indeed, Feng is often credited with introducing the word *manhua* into the Chinese lexicon, a claim boasted by *The Pacific News*' publisher Zheng Zhenduo, when Feng's works began to appear in publications in the 1910s, but Feng himself credited Chen Shizeng 陳師曾 (1876-1923), the son of famous Qing reformist Chen Sanli 陳三立 (1852-1937), who had earlier in his career primarily drawn ink-sketches of everyday life subjects.¹² Indeed, Feng never did contribute the influence of *manhua* to the

¹⁰ William Schaefer, *Shadow Modernism: Photography, Writing, and Space in Shanghai, 1925-1937* (Durham: University of Duke Press, 2017), 25-26.

¹¹ Geremie R. Barme, *An Artistic Exile: A Life of Feng Zikai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 28.

¹² *Ibid.*, 62-63. Many of Feng's contemporaries celebrated the innovation of his sketches, one friend of Feng and fellow artist, Yu Pingbo, wrote that "These *manhua* are, quite frankly, an innovation, for while they employ the sparse gracefulness of empty space germane to Chinese painting, they also display the verve and energy of Western art." Geremie attempts to trace the true origin of *manhua*, but notes its "chameleon-like" nature, stating that some of the earliest *manhua* was Hong Mai's (1123-1202) *Five Collections of Miscellaneous Notes from the Acquiescent Study*. There is established precedent for the use of the term *manhua* in the Qing dynasty, most famously it is found

Japanese, and most importantly despite being formally educated in art in Japan, never credited *manga* or other similar Japanese art styles to the formation of Chinese *manhua*, staying strong in his convictions that the tradition of the art style could be traced within the Qing dynasty through Chen Shizeng and beyond in order to retain the *guocui* 國粹 of the art.¹³

While Feng Zikai had no doubt played an instrumental role in the introduction of *manhua* as we know it today as a form of political satire or social critique, he himself had second thoughts about its purpose and place within Chinese art. Early on Feng had decided to stay apolitical, and increasingly dedicated himself to Buddhist studies and practices. In 1924, Feng and others established the Li Da High School in the Hangkou International Settlement, but the school's manifesto stated its purpose was not for political ideology but "with the aim of cultivating the individual, undertaking scholastic research, and achieving the transformation of society."¹⁴ One could argue that this lofty ambition was political in nature, but Feng and others did not see it that way. We should also note here the lasting influences of Li Shutong, who impressed upon Feng a strong sense of Confucian values such as self-cultivation and moral rectitude. Ultimately though, Li Shutong and Feng played an important role in maintaining many traditional Chinese elements in *manhua* and keeping it apolitical as the waters of revolution lapped at them.

within the writings of Jin Nong (*hao* Dongxin, 1678-1763), in *Mr. Dongxin's Inscriptions for Miscellaneous Paintings*.

¹³ The term *manhua* as it was imported and formed within China was settled on because it rejected Western naming conventions. Other terms introduced to describe the art were *katong* (cartoons), *fencihua* (satirical paintings), *chouxiang* (caricatures), or just *youmo* (humor). The term *manhua* was formalized with help by Lu Xun, who wanted to ground it in the Japanese tradition of *manga* to root the ontology of comic-sketching as "Asian." However, Huang Dunqing, one of the founders of the Manhua Society, wanted to ignore Feng Zikai and Lu Xun's "importation/re-importation" of *manhua* from *manga*, and declared that the organization themselves had "officially introduced the word *manhua* to China, thereby initiating a process for the study of both the theory and technique of this art form." See Geremie, *An Artistic Exile*, chapter three, pp. 89-93.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

Keeping *manhua* apolitical at such a tremendous point of China's history, however, was nearly impossible. In his book *A Modern Miscellany*, Paul Bevan has effectively traced the political radicalization of *manhua* primarily through the urging of Jack Chen (1908-1995) and the increasingly disastrous and worrying times these artists lived through. As Bevan notes,

The mid-1930s should be seen as the major turning point in the history of the Chinese cartoon. It was at this time that work inspired by Covarrubias and other "decorative" artists was giving way to a more politically inspired art.¹⁵

Manhua artists began to see their place in the struggle for national salvation. In 1926, *manhua* artists banded together and formed the Manhua Society (*manhuahui*), which Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin argue was the first cartoon society in Chinese history.¹⁶ Although short-lived, the society became a center where the most important *manhua* artists would meet, including Ye Qianyu 葉淺予 (1907-1995), Lu Shaofei 魯少飛 (1903-1995), and Wang Dunqing 王敦慶 (1899-1990), three of the most important contributors to the *Shidai manhua*. Incorporating these artists into the leftist-oriented woodcut movement was of considerable importance to leaders like Lu Xun; in 1930 the formation of a Cartoon Study Association 漫畫研究會 (*Manhua yanjiuhui*) was one of seventeen motions passed at the first meeting of the League of Left-wing Writers, however Bevan notes that none of the members of the Cartoon Society were mentioned as having been in attendance.¹⁷ The formation of the Manhua Society also pushed for grounding the tradition of *manhua* within China itself. The founders of the Shanghai Cartoon Association 上海漫畫會 (*Shanghai manhuahui*), for example, explicitly stated in their preamble that the

¹⁵ Paul Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany: Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei's Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen, 1926-1938* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 4.

¹⁶ Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhua shi*, 85.

¹⁷ Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 29.

secondary purpose of the association was to distinguish Chinese *manhua* from Japanese *manga* 漫畫.¹⁸

Prior to the 1930s, the majority of *manhua*, at least the most important and popular publications, focused on cultural and material themes. The most popular in the late 1920s, the *Shanghai manhua* 上海漫畫¹⁹ was mostly apolitical, with subtle criticisms of Chiang Kai-shek appearing infrequently. But throughout the 1920s, an important debate within the Chinese literary community was the conflict between “art for art’s sake” and “art for life’s sake” fueled by the two largest artistic communities of the time, the Creation Society 創造社 (*Chuangzaoshe*) and the Literary Association 文學研究會 (*Wenxue yanjiuhui*), with Lu Xun being the primary orator on behalf of the “art for life’s sake.”²⁰ The tensions within the intellectual community continued to push *manhua* further to the left. Then in 1931, the catalyst for the radicalization of *manhua* artists finally emerged. After the illegal annexation of Manchuria by Japan, the First National Cartoon Exhibition, held that same year, gathered all *manhua* artists together in Shanghai. Recalling the event, Jack Chen notes that when he asked cartoonists at the time what it was that had done the most to develop cartoons in China, they apparently unanimously exclaimed “the famous Manchurian Incident.”²¹ In spite the pestering of Lu Xun and the reluctance of artists, the radicalization of *manhua* was in full swing, certainly realized by the

¹⁸ John A. Lent, and Xu Ying, “Chinese Cartoons and Humor: The Views of First- and Second-Generation Cartoonists,” in *Humor in Chinese Life and Culture: Resistance to Control in Modern Times*, ed., John Lent (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 82.

¹⁹ See Ellen Johnston Laing, “*Shanghai Manhua*, the Neo-Sensationist School of Literature, and Scenes of Urban Life,” last modified October 2010, <https://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/shanghai-manhua/>. Laing describes the publication as a collection of sketches of urban life, involving themes of decadence, and consumerism. The *Shanghai manhua* was the first major periodical that Ye Qianyu, Lu Shaofei, Wang Dunqing, and Zhang Guangyu and Zhang Zhenyu worked on. All of them were members of the Cartoon Society and later contributors and editors for the *Shidai manhua*.

²⁰ Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 214.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

time of the publication of *Shidai manhua*. A cartoon, published in 1937 in *Shidai manhua*'s 36th edition (fig. 1.1), shows all clearly that these artists were fully aware of their own position in the fight against fascism, and their own standing within the international leftist community.²²

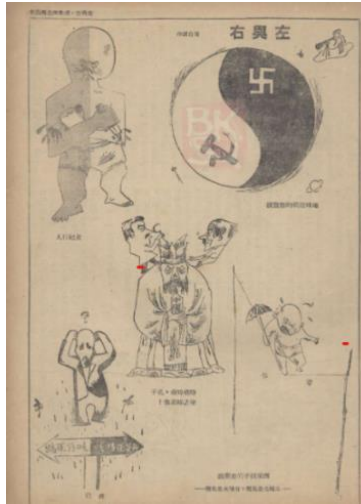


Fig. 1.1: Huang Baibo, 1937, *Shidai manhua* 36, 7.

In 1931, the Storm Society 決瀾社 (*Juelanshe*) was founded by Ni Yide 倪貽德 (1901-1970) and Pang Xunqin 龐薰琹 (1906-1985). Ni specifically wanted to found an artist group that was smaller and more radical than other groups, to be specifically Shanghai based, so as to help fight against Japanese imperialism.²³ Also of note, Ni wanted to spearhead efforts against both conservatism and overzealously Westernized art. The group took its lead closely from the League of Left-Wing Artists, following Xu Xinzhi's 許辛之 (1904-1991) advice that "Now all progressive artists should unite and follow the proletarian revolutionary struggle."²⁴ For most *manhua* artists based in Shanghai, the bridge between personal purpose, China's salvation, and their own work had formally been bridged. This radicalization is important in understanding the

²² Huang Baibo, "Left and Right," *Shidai manhua* 36, February 1937, 7.

²³ Ralph Croizier, "Post-Impressionists in Prewar Shanghai: The *Juelanshe* (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China," ed. John Clark, in *Modernity in Asian Art* (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993), 139.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

context in which the *Shidai manhua* was formed and its contributions to Chinese leftism. While the *Shanghai manhua* sold roughly 3,000 copies each issue in Shanghai, the *Shidai manhua* dwarfed this number just four years later, when more than 10,000 copies were published in its first issue. The periodical would also see more than a hundred artists from all around Shanghai contribute to its brief three-year issuance.²⁵

In *A Modern Miscellany*, Bevan notes that the “popularization of cartoons serving political purposes” primarily began after the war period, something further reinforced and argued in Chang-tai Hung’s *War and Popular Culture*.²⁶ However, as this paper will show, the politicization of *manhua*, especially through the *Shidai manhua* but also with notable contributions from smaller publications, the leftist politicization of *manhua* was far underway from the very first publication of the *Shidai manhua* in 1934.

Shidai manhua and Anarcho-Utopianism

Having traced the radical left-wing shift among *manhua* artists in the context of Shanghai print culture, this thesis shall zoom in on the leftist ideas of utopian thought and their influences from late Qing and early Republican literary movements in the cartoon periodical *Shidai manhua*, which ran from 1934-1937. The *Shidai manhua* reached a large audience within Shanghai and had a lasting impact on Chinese art and ideology even into the Maoist period. As Julia Andrews has shown in her book *Painters and Politics*, most of the artists from Republican Shanghai later went on to make propaganda for the Maoist regime, especially during the Great Leap Forward.²⁷

²⁵ Shen, *Lianhuanhua and Manhua*, 115.

²⁶ Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 231, and Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

²⁷ Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See “Introduction,” and “Revolutionaries and Academics: Art of the Republication Period.”

While cartooning fell out of favor, these styles, ideas, and practices remained within the Chinese art community even after the state underwent structural transformations.

The *Shidai manhua*'s publication coincides with what Bi and Huang have called the “era of the essay and *manhua*” (*zawen he manhua de shidai*).²⁸ Following the typical pattern of most periodicals of the time, the *Shidai manhua* was a “*tuwen-bingmao*” publication, or having both “excellent pictures and text” juxtaposed together for educational means. The intended audience of the *Shidai manhua* went beyond educated elites; they were to be for the masses, those who could read all, read some, or read none, but who nonetheless could learn from the pictures. Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (1906-1968), the publisher and financier of the *Shidai manhua*, believed that the most important job of the editors was to “intimate the masses.”²⁹ The composition of the *Shidai manhua* is, as Paul Pickowicz has described of the magazine *Liangyou* 良友, “kaleidoscopic;” inclusive of political propaganda, nude images, cultural critiques, and other things. Earlier literature on the subject has been quick to cast *manhua* as important, but childish and vulgar in nature. But as John Crespi and Louise Edwards have noted, these images are far more complex than given credit for.³⁰ WJT Mitchell states:

Instead of approaching *manhua* as humorous, satirical, pornographic, propagandistic, patriotic, lyrical, or what-have-you pictures that reflect history or express emotions and ideas, I treat them as self-aware commentators on the relationships of power and ideology through which they are constructed and received.³¹

²⁸ Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhua shi*, 93.

²⁹ Bin Chang 常彬, and Limei Han 丽梅韩, “Shao Xunmei ‘*Shidai manhua*’ de ban kan sixiang” 邵洵美《时代漫画》的办刊思想 [The ideology of Shao Xunmei’s established ‘*Shidai manhua*’], *Youth Journalist* 青年记者 15 (2019): 103.

³⁰ John Crespi, *Manhua Modernity: Chinese Culture and the Pictorial Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 11.

³¹ William J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16.

This paper agrees with Mitchell that these comics represent a more sophisticated relationship between the power and ideology of Republican China, and Shanghai itself as a treaty-port city.

Under this historical and ideological framework, the present thesis will examine the *Shidai manhua* through a deeper political lens. Many of the later interviews with the cartoonists themselves give us a highly politicized picture of how they viewed their own contributions. For example, in 1980 Wang Dunqing stated:

The Manhua Society was not just a matter of a few people coming together by happenstance. It was a product of the era. Behind it lay, first, the Northern Expedition and, second, the May Thirtieth Massacre. Several years of chaotic melee during the Northern Expedition together with the incursions of imperialist powers mobilized a group of patriotic young artists who aspired to use their talent to make a difference. Everyone felt a sense of gloom, and some were out of work. It was inevitable that they would come together.³²

In this sense, we can see not only how *manhua* was more than cartoon art, but also how *manhua* played a crucial role in “the narrative of modern Chinese national becoming.”³³

Arguably, utopianism and anarchism are neatly tied together during the late Qing and early Republican periods. However, some modern scholarship brushes aside the early thought of Chinese elites and nationalists in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement. A narrative of a hyper-Westernized, anti-traditional, and anti-anarchist movement emerges when dealing with Chinese political ideology of this time. This thesis will argue instead that the influences of early intellectuals who were mostly disregarded in the May Fourth Movement, such as Kang Youwei and Cai Yuanpei, found a moment of resurgence in their ideas within the leftist-art community during the 1930s. Anti-imperialism is a prominent theme of the *Shidai manhua* which leaves an unsurprising analysis when all is said and done. However, beneath the anti-imperialist messages are a series of works that go further and push the destiny of China in the modern world to its

³² Crespi, *Manhua Modernity*, 25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

limits: that of a leader in the formation of a utopian world influenced and based on Confucian and Buddhist principles.

This thesis will analyze *manhua* artist's utopianism through three prominent themes across the *Shidai manhua*: First, the shared humanity 仁 (*ren*) between those oppressed within what was becoming known as the Third World. Primarily by using women's bodies through photography, in the *Shidai manhua* we find attempts to both reconcile and distance the differences between China and the developing world. Using the example of African colonialism, the *Shidai manhua* frequently promotes female symbols of African, Polynesian, and other developing world cultures in a way that contrasts with the exploitation and consumerism of white women. Non-white cultures are variously portrayed as fully assimilated "playthings" for the West (Hawaii), victims of genocide and other colonial cruelties (Africa), or as lasting symbols of cultural survival in long-colonized areas (Native Americans). This cultural focus that usurps the borders of the state, with influences from Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and Tan Sitong's 譚嗣同 (1865-1898) conceptualizations of *ren*, the Confucian concept of universal humanity.

Second, the Chinese condemnation of both World War I the Italo-Abyssinian War in 1935 saw a reversal in respect for the acceptance of Western rational-based epistemological facilitation. As with the shift in culturalism in the Eastern Miscellany 東方雜誌 (*Dongfang zazhi*), the *Shidai manhua* accosts Western science as corrupted, devastating and degenerate. By contrasting European colonization with Christianity, these artists sought to decenter teleological progress from the West by reinforcing it with Buddho-Confucian rhetoric that was largely influenced by ideas of anarchism during the late Qing dynasty, which trickled into the Republican period.

Finally, the *Shidai manhua* became the home outlet for a number of radical Buddhists that found their way to Shanghai throughout the chaotic years of the Republic. This paper shows that a certain number of laymen Buddhists, perhaps followers of Taixu's 太虛 (b. Lu Peilin 呂培琳, 1890-1947) movement that sought to break away from the Kuomintang (KMT), found a voice within the *Shidai manhua* to fight against the KMT's social projects. Recent research has shown that Taixu was regularly impressed by anarchism and its potential relationship to Buddhism. Although Taixu was patriotic and dependent in many ways on the KMT, this paper argues that a group of dissident Buddhists used the *Shidai manhua* to fight against the New Life Movement (NLM), using anarchist-inspired rhetoric to attempt to triumph over the KMT.

This paper defines anarchism within the framework of the influences of Russian Narodism on East Asia throughout the 19-20th centuries. Recent research has shown how anarchism reached Japan, and then China, through Russia and disguised in the rhetoric of Pan-Asianism.³⁴ This revised history calls into question the established orthodox narrative that has largely been conceptualized by the Soviet Union and China post-1949. This traditional narrative highlights the cohesion of communist forces across the world, and the victory of Marxism. Thus, anarcho-utopianism in the context of 1930s Shanghai was largely influenced by the early Japanese-led ideas of Pan-Asianism,³⁵ which were in-turn dominated by anarchist-influenced civilizational discourse coming out of Russia before Marxism arrived in the East.

³⁴ Konishi Sho, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism, and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 39-40.

³⁵ Torsten Weber, "Alternative Internationalisms in East Asia: The Conference of the Asian Peoples, Japanese-Chinese Rivalry and Japanese Imperialisms, 1924-1943," in *Placing Internationalism: International Conferences and the Making of the World*, eds., Legg, Stephen, et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 203-204; See also Victor J. Koschmann, "Asianism's Ambivalent Legacy," in *Network Power: Japan and Asia*, eds., Peter Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 89. Koschmann argues that the "Asianism" of Pan-Asianism can be found in "anti-modern theories of the state based upon the historical intellectual heritage of an indigenous village community."

The utopian element derives from the indigenous discourse within China during the late Qing, primarily under the influences of Kang Youwei's interpretations of the Confucian concept of humanity (*ren*) and Buddhism. This paper will highlight the syncretization of ideas that took place in the late Qing and early Republican period; though perhaps not purely 'anarchist,' they represent an early shift in East Asian civilizational discourse that survived well into the 1930s. These ideas give us alternative representations of internationalism in the history of Chinese leftism, ones that counter the state-centered approach of Marxism and Maoism. Likewise, *manhua* as method give us an opportunity to decenter the literature, elite-based culture that is prevalent in academic studies, in favor of a largely grassroots and common set of ideas among left wing artists in Shanghai.

This thesis seeks to build off the research of prominent Republican and Qing period historians such as Peter Zarrow, Arif Dirlik, and Edward Krebs, who spotted what has been coined the "utopian impulse" by Zarrow in Chinese intellectual thought, and its anarchist tendencies. Additionally, this paper will build a stronger argument around the links between Republican period Buddhism and anarchism, and to a lesser extent, Taixu and Li Shutong. Justin Ritzinger has recently made compelling arguments that we can see Taixu's popular Buddhism as a reaction to, and conduit for, the spread of anarchism across East Asia in the late 19th-early 20th centuries. Finally, we should note the shifting discourse between religion and its relation to the modern world. Recent research from post-modernists suggests that "religion" as a modern conception did not come into existence before the formation of the secular state.³⁶ Thus, we

³⁶ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 58; See also Arvind-Pal Mandair, *Violence and the Sikhs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University press, 2003). For China specifically, see Jiang Sun, *Revisiting China's Modernity: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2020).

should not understand Buddhism and Confucianism against anarchism and utopianism as separate institutions; rather, they were completely exchangeable for early modern Chinese intellectuals. In this framework, then, this paper seeks to understand the relationship between religion, philosophy, and secularity, and how it translated into the political realm of the Republican period throughout the 1910-30s under external influences such as Pan-Asianism. This study hopes to further enlighten us on how the civilizational discourse of the 1910-30s translated into early leftist propaganda in the Shanghai art community.

Chapter One: Changing Clothes: The Radicalization of Confucian Ethics in *Manhua* Art

While the Manchu-Qing political apparatus began to slowly decline after 1895, Han nationalists and other intellectuals throughout China wasted no time finding a way to come to terms with the fallout of the first Sino-Japanese War. The repeated military defeats China suffered since the mid-1800s and China's introduction to the global world had left an enormous gap in how the Chinese gentry-scholars could perceive their geo-spatial settings. Once the middle kingdom, China now found itself being relegated to a colonial periphery in which contemporary events and progress moved on the terms and by the dictation of Euro-American powers, rather than the central Confucian state of China that held the links of power between heaven and earth.

This chapter traces the emerging spatial-temporal consciousness and understanding during China's transition from empire to the republic. Specifically, this chapter discusses the Chinese understanding of the Confucian value of humaneness (*ren*) primarily through the writings of Kang Youwei, and how it applied to the early modern world; how could such an egalitarian ideal hold up against the hierarchical and belligerent world of the early 20th century? In doing so, what follows shall look at how Kang and like-minded scholar's ideas of *ren* were translated into the realm of aesthetics led by Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940), who introduced the Kantian concepts of aesthetics and the sublime to the Chinese intellectual field. This understanding of *ren* and its role in what will emerge as an early field of Chinese Marxist aesthetics in Shanghai will be linked to the anarchist rhetoric throughout the 1920-30s. Such rhetoric was exegeted through the Eastern Miscellany (*Dongfang zazhi*) and then the *Shidai manhua* in the 1930s just before the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War.

Kang Youwei, the Datong, and Preserving the Native Essence

Toward the end of the 19th century, the Chinese intelligentsia had a growing identification with the peoples of the colonial (non-Euro-American) regions, particularly in Africa and Polynesia, two heavily colonized parts of the world. Initially, scholars were hesitant to throw Chinese culture to the winds in favor of Western intellectualism; Liang Qichao stated that he wanted to use “true” Confucianism to combat the homogenizing tendencies of imperialism.³⁷ China was desperate to maintain some semblance of its classical traditions in the face of Western power, particularly the force of commercialization that capitalism brought with it. Places like Africa served as a warning for China; a collection of “unsophisticated societies that lacked a basic consciousness” would be partitioned by stronger states. Chinese nationalists throughout the period often referred to places such as India, most of Africa and Hawaii as “lost states,” or *wangguo* 亡國. Indeed, despite looking for a way to save themselves from the homogenizing forces of the West, they just as often found themselves appropriating Western rhetoric to explain their own situation by making comparisons between China, India, Africa and others. Africa itself serves as the most important reflection of pre-modernity in the modern consciousness, a place of darkness, for the “production of slaves,” as Qing intellectual Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857) described and understood it.³⁸

Against this backdrop of chaos, intellectual diffusion, and desperation, Kang Youwei saw himself as a revolutionary sage tempered by reformist realism. Kang Youwei’s role as an ardent constitutional monarchist and non-radical is well understood, but his utopian impulses have

³⁷ Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: University of Duke Press, 2002), 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

remained far less clear even though Kang wrote an entire treatise, *The Great Commonweal* 大同 (*datong*)³⁹ about his own vision for the future. It is important to note that Kang's understanding of historical teleology, both for the past and future, would come to take on a purely Hegelian one by the time he wrote *The Great Commonweal*, and it is a major theme of the emerging anarchist worldview in the post-Qing world. For Kang, the use of a linear teleology was appropriated and made into a more Confucian manner, and while Kang had to take into account things such as social Darwinism, his ideology ends on an optimistic note.⁴⁰ A key part of what made the future *Commonweal* so utopian for Kang was *ren*, which he described as a “level of spiritual consciousness, or psyche, they [humans] seek to extend themselves to connect with others,” bemoaning that nationalism had propped up a circumstance in which “they [humans] still only connect with their own kind.”⁴¹ This kind of idea had already been popular among nascent Chinese nationalism, with the idea of *Qun* 群 (groups, or societies) for Kang being what made humans human, and with Tan Sitong arguing that the moral basis of all *qun* was that of *ren*.⁴²

The ability of Kang and others to link the concept of *ren* to the modern global world is important for the way China perceived of itself within a colonial framework. As Arif Dirlik notes:

The ideal of utopianism that began to appear during the Late Qing, heralded by Kang Youwei, once encompassed within the claims to universality of Chinese civilization but no longer contained within the conception of a spatially and temporally limited Chinese nation, now it was

³⁹ The term *datong* is traced back to the *Record of Rights (Liji)* and can be translated as “great unity” or “commonality.” It is used to describe a perfect social order in the Confucian context.

⁴⁰ Federico Brusadelli, *Confucian Concord: Reform, Utopia, and Global Teleology in Kang Youwei's Datong Shu* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2020), 37.

⁴¹ Peter Zarrow, *Abolishing Boundaries: Global Utopias in the Formation of Modern Chinese Political Thought, 1880-1940* (Albany, NY: SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture, 2021), 30.

⁴² Karl, *Staging the World*, 99. For more information on the emerging ideas of race, modern societies and how they played into Confucian cosmology, see Peter Zarrow “Identity, History and Revolution,” in *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885-1924*.

projected upon the new world of nations as a historical project in whose realization China was to a participant.⁴³

This thought is important in establishing the fantastical side of Chinese utopianism with its real-world implications through the eyes of Confucian reformists in the late Qing. The concept of *ren*, *qun*, and utopianism represent Kang's relationship between his own nationalist thoughts. As Jianhua Chen has argued, Kang was perhaps not looking to overthrow the Manchu regime, but he did view his own reform proposals as amounting to remaking the imperial polity as it befit China's standing in the global world.⁴⁴ Thus, this type of rhetoric is not simply idealistic; it overtook the narrative of the role that China should play within the international sphere as a new era dawned. And since *ren* is a product of the larger cosmos that interconnects all humanity, the establishment of "boundaries," which Kang surmised to be nations, classes, and species, led to all types of suffering in the modern world. And in this view, Kang fell short on the issue of abolishing the boundary of race. He believed that "brown and black" races would fall to the wayward, and that the red race was entirely irrelevant due to its disappearance. But "yellows," of course, could and would adapt, using the example of a Chinese child raised in Canada, who took on white appearances and mannerisms.⁴⁵

While most research has focused on Kang Youwei as an intellectual pioneer, of which he was no doubt, it is the case that Kang also contributed to the pressures of modernization among the field of aesthetics in China. Like any other intellectual of his time, Kang was well-versed in art as a hobby, though he came to view the traditional forms of Chinese art such as calligraphy, and *guohua* 國畫 paintings as ungrounded and useless in the age of modernity and began to

⁴³ Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 55.

⁴⁴ Jianhua Chen, "World Revolution Knocking at the Heavenly Gate: Kang Youwei and His Use of *Geming* in 1898," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 5, no. 1 (2011): 89-91.

⁴⁵ Zarrow, *Abolishing Boundaries*, 32-33.

defend realism⁴⁶ as a way of understanding the modern world objectively.⁴⁷ Most of his inspiration came directly from his tour of Europe where he first saw the works of the great Italian artists such as Michelangelo and especially Raphael. Taking his experiences back to China with him in the post-Qing, Kang joined Cai Yuanpei and others on the Shanghai Fine Arts College Board of Trustees, where he sought to focus on the form 形式 (*xingshi*) that could render facial and man-made features more realistically, while making the natural scenery styled in a looser way. Like other intellectuals for his time, Kang's major goal was to find a way to synthesize Western painting and native Chinese paintings, wanting to reject the "vulgar borrowings" from Western art (presumably nudity) while grounding the art in aspects of native Chinese tradition, or retaining at least some part of its national essence (*guocui*). Additionally, Kang sought to revive the style of painting that was popular in the Song and Yuan dynasties, which he related as "realism." Kang wrote in his book "On National Salvation by Material Means" 物質救國論 (*Wuzhi jiuguo lun*) that painting and fine arts should be used to strengthen the nation:

The study of painting is the basis of all studies. Chinese people regard it useless, not knowing that all commercial and industrial products, all tools of civilization, rely on its invention. Commercial and industrial products are materials for practical benefits; tools of civilization silently propel them. Unrefined painting leads to awkward and lousy manufacturing products, making them difficult to sell, not something that can be solved by financial management. Tools of civilization must compete for international prestige and cannot be just stand aside at a time of competition in the new world. Hence painting cannot lack refinement.⁴⁸

Under the leadership of Kang, Confucian scholars and reformists in the late Qing devised a complex way of bringing Chinese philosophy and religion to the modern global world. The ultimate goal of this worldview was undeniably centered around the imaginative importance of

⁴⁶ As Aida Yuen Wong notes, the "realism" Kang spoke of was less the nineteenth-century socially-tinted Realism like that of Courbet or Daumier, and just a more general attempt at realistic portrayals in art.

⁴⁷ Aida Yuen Wong, *The Other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China* (Leiden: Brill Publications, 2016), 85.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

China in a world leadership position. Although during the New Culture and May Fourth Movements Kang would later be decried as another feudal bourgeoisie intellectual unfit for China, his ideas and influence on the conceptualization of China's place in the global world did not die with his exile in 1898. The double upheavals of the fall of the Qing and then the emergence of the May Fourth Movement in 1919 saw Chinese nationalism and intellectual rhetoric undergo significant transformations that would lead to the emergence of the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), two parties who would define the rest of Chinese political history. Cai Yuanpei, a republican and president of Beijing University, would play a significant role in influencing the way aesthetics were understood by pushing his own utopian narratives into the post-Qing intellectual sphere. In many ways, we cannot fully understand the beginnings of Marxist aesthetics without first understanding Cai Yuanpei.

Cai Yuanpei and the Foundation of Anarcho-Utopian Aesthetics in the Republic

Cai Yuanpei was largely educated in Germany and sought to bring back to China with him a more scientific understanding of education. William Duiker notes that “in one respect, T'sai struck a distinctive note in the New Culture Movement, for the heart of his message was that spiritual uplift had to accompany technological and material growth, or to put it in his own terms, art had to accompany science.”⁴⁹ In the realm of humanities for Cai, one of the most important aspects of education was that of the aesthetic, a concept that he had come to fully incorporate into his own intellectual thought under the influence of Kantian studies while at the University of Leipzig. Cai envisioned a greater plan for China and understood aesthetics as playing an important role in that plan. As Kang Liu states:

⁴⁹ William Duiker, “The Aesthetics Philosophy of T'sai Yuan-p'ei,” *Philosophy East and West* 22, no. 4 (1972), 396-7.

First, the aesthetic was conceived as a pre-eminent discourse of enlightenment and cultural revolution, against China's stagnant tradition; second, it provided a humanistic and utopian dimension to Chinese modernity, influenced primarily by Western scientific reason. As a utopian discourse, it promised new formations of universalism and cultural syncretism. Underlying his assumptions of the aesthetic is a distinctly urban and cosmopolitan vision. Although his aesthetic idea was extremely influential, Cai was primarily an educator rather than a literary theorist or an aesthete. His aesthetics, then, is best grasped as a key constituent of his overall project of enlightenment and education.⁵⁰

Cai's understanding of the aesthetic thus best fits Shanghai's place within China and the role that an industrialized city could play in the field of art for national salvation, though by the 1910s Chinese artists were mostly still far from radicalized, especially *manhua* artists. And while contemporary leftists at the time had a rather rudimentary understanding of Marxism aside from those few who traveled to Moscow or beyond to study it, Cai's universalism and utopian discourse placed the aesthetic directly at the heart of Chinese revolution. Liu also notes that the universalist concept not only would come to distinguish communism in China from the KMT's nationalism, but also "rendered the revolution a self-conscious search for an alternative modernity."⁵¹

Cai Yuanpei traveled far and wide around China in his many attempts to revolutionize Chinese education through aesthetics, but most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, we know that Li Shutong, future teacher of Feng Zikai, first met Cai while he taught Japanese at the Nanyang Public School of Shanghai. Li, who was about to become an acclaimed Buddhist monk in 1918, most likely felt a kindred connection to Cai, if not in a quasi-religious way. Cai long proposed that aesthetics be a substitute for religion in the modern world, centering on the concept of a "world soul" that could be expressed in Buddhist, Daoist, or Western metaphysical terms.⁵²

⁵⁰ Kang Liu, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and their Western Contemporaries* (Durham, NC: University of Duke Press, 2000), 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵² Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 29-32.

The mission for Cai, thus, was to harmonize the aesthetic values of the East and West, something that was a point of contention within the artistic community at the time. Cai, an avid fan of Russian anarchist thinker Peter Kropotkin's idea of Mutual Aid, and saw the social Darwinian elements that permeated the works of scholars such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao as an obstacle to be disregarded in favor of cooperation, which aesthetics education would help solve real world conflicts.

Cai Yuanpei viewed religion and aesthetics as two inseparable realms that were marked by the boundaries of pre-modern and modern, respectively. Indeed, Cai was quick to attack Buddhist architecture and Confucian ideas. In a speech given at the Shenzhou Scholarly Society in 1917, Cai stated, "They [those who wish to build up religion] thus wish to organize a Confucian religion, and they run from place to place shouting about it, considering it the most important issue of the day." Julia Andrews notes that Cai is most likely attacking Kang Youwei here, as well as Christian missionaries.⁵³ The goal, for Cai, was to construct the hitherto-unattainable sublime, of which there were two practical elements which he calls exalted beauties:

For example, there are two sorts of exalted beauty, namely the most grand and the most unyielding... That which is *unyielding is like the gales and thunderclaps that overturn boats and topple buildings, or the floods that cover the land, or erupting volcanoes (it even has the power to uproot mountains and sweep across the earth), nothing affects it, no one can dominate it* [emphasis mine].⁵⁴

By the 1930s, the latter of those exalted beauties, the "unyielding," was coopted by Chinese leftists to strengthen the revolutionary power of Marxist aesthetics. *Manhua* serves as a great example of this. *Manhua* is perhaps not the "most grand" of aesthetics, but it was undoubtedly unyielding. Even Shao Xunmei, who repeatedly denied any political intentions, believed that

⁵³ Julia Andrews, "Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education," in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed., Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 183.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

manhua was the best conduit for reaching the masses.⁵⁵ Cai certainly believed that humor was an element of the sublime, coining it “comic beauty,” alluding to a famous ancient tale from the Han dynasty in which scholar-official Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (160-93 BC)⁵⁶ accidentally gave sliced meat intended for court use to his wife and boasted his act to the king, which made the king laugh about the issue rather than push for punishment.⁵⁷ Additionally, as Nick Stember has shown, Shao often included essays by Cai Yuanpei and Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962) in his publications under the China Fine Art Periodical Press (a company the Modern Sketch fell under as a subsidiary), no doubt connecting Cai’s aesthetic theory to Shao’s actions.⁵⁸

Cai Yuanpei helped to introduce a very practical element into the Chinese art realm that had not existed previously. For centuries, literati’s discourses of art had primarily featured artistic practice as a pastime activity for nobility and scholars, an individual contribution to Han culture in an unofficial manner. But Cai disliked the art-for-art’s sake aesthetic that was popularly competing with more politically active artistic scenes such as Dadaism in the West. Rather, he viewed aesthetics as a way of cultivating a humanist worldview and a weapon to attack Western imperialism. Writing on the issue of moral decadence in contemporary times, Cai noted that “The powerful Western nations, with their expansive colonialist agenda to grab resources and plunder far-flung regions,” engage in fights in a style he characterizes as private funding 私斗 (*sidou*), a direct contention with humanist views. Cai viewed a new moral order in which concern and commitment for public good and well-being 公益 (*gongyi*) triumphed all

⁵⁵ Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 57.

⁵⁶ A Han dynasty literary figure, noted for his broad learning and sense of humor; see “Huaji liezhuan” (The jesters), *Shiji* (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju), 10, 3205-8.

⁵⁷ Andrews, “Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education,” 188.

⁵⁸ Nick Stember, “The Shanghai Manhua Society: A History of Early Chinese Cartoonists, 1918-1938,” Master’s Thesis (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 86.

other needs, that people must shred their self-centeredness to achieve common good. As Ban Wang notes, the terms used by Cai encapsulate a utopian image of proto-socialist community, and while Cai may not have identified with the communists, he was certainly on his way to influencing them.⁵⁹

As with Kang, there was an idealistic, utopian side to the practical side of Cai in which China would play a fundamental, if not an outrightly prime role in reshaping the world. In 1904, Cai published “A New Year’s Dream,” understood by now to be a major piece in early Chinese anarchist thought. The story centers around China (who is anthropomorphized with the name “China-Citizen”) and his agony of China in a recognizably colonial world. In the end, China-Citizen watches his nation play a major role in a post-world war environment, with China leading the way to unifying the world through a series of international courts, the establishment of a world army, Cai states:

Although we won the war, we didn’t want to take advantage of this fact. With their armies scattered, we proposed a truce. We proposed establishing an international court and unifying the world’s armies. The composition of the court and army was to reflect the population of each country. Aside from domestic police forces, no one could maintain their own armies. If two countries quarreled, the case would be decided by the international court. In cases of disobedience, the World Army would deal with them; and in cases where the people of a country objected to the government, they could sue in the international court.⁶⁰

It is important here to note that in the end of Cai’s story even though China dominates the world, it leads to a destination where a path to peace and happiness is established for all people; thus China is not one that seeks dominance for its own sake. The description of Cai’s utopia is much aligned with Kang Youwei’s *datong*. However, Cai’s world does mark a significant break with Kang’s earlier utopia in the realm of race. Whereas Kang saw the matter of race being tossed

⁵⁹ Ban Wang, “Aesthetics, Morality, and the Modern Community: Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, and Lu Xun,” *Critical Inquiry* 46, no. 3 (2020), 506.

⁶⁰ Zarrow, *Abolishing Boundaries*, 57-8. These words are the final ending of the book, and its most utopian, cosmopolitan element.

aside through extinction or by successfully assimilating into a dominate, homogenous culture, Cai's utopia is cosmopolitan in nature, despite the fact that the story mainly plays out in a China-à-vis-West way. On the lack of reference to the rest of the colonial world, Guangyi Li notes:

What Cai Yuanpei has in his mind, in my opinion, is a Confucian confidence that assumes China as the moral center: 'If such a state of affairs exists, yet the people of far-off lands still do not submit, then the ruler must attract them by enhancing the prestige of his culture; and when they have been duly attracted, he contents them. And where there is contentment there will be no upheavals.'" – Reformation of foreigners through culture is just a modernized version of the tributary system.⁶¹

Thus, Cai was able to perhaps more successfully integrate China's traditional world views within a Western framework that still relies on a linear teleology. Though in this narrative China replaces the West's dominant standing, which differs from what Kang Youwei had proposed. One could go further and argue that Cai perhaps genuinely believed that Chinese culture was the only appropriate civilizational force to bring about the closest thing to a recognizable utopia, as Western thought had become too entrenched in belligerency, evidenced by social Darwinism, which Cai saw himself fighting against in the ideological arena.

Throughout his life, Cai Yuanpei was determined to support theories of cooperation rather than competition as the path to forming a better world. In 1918, Cai rejoiced in the fact that the Allied victory was a victory of might over right, and of light over darkness. The religious undertones in Cai's messages cannot be understated and help shed light on the influences on Chinese anarchist thought. In "The Ebb and Flow of the Dark and Light," published in 1918, Cai cited the Zoroastrian struggle of light and dark as the real-life struggle fought during WWI.⁶² Therefore, we should understand Cai's inquiry into the realm of aesthetics as one of quasi-religious curiosity in the realm of metaphysics. Bringing with him a very Kantian understanding

⁶¹ Guangyi Li, "New Year's Dream: A Chinese Anarcho-Cosmopolitan Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2013), 95.

⁶² Zarrow, *Abolishing Boundaries*, 61.

of aesthetics, Cai believed that the only real way humans could throw off their boundaries was by bridging the conventional “phenomenal” world 現實 (*xianshi*) and the noumenal world of the “thing-in-itself” 實體 (*shiti*); again, this is in the same way as Kang Youwei understood them, in things ranging from states to families and class. Cai wrote, “And across this bridge, the illusionary distinction between self and other may be destroyed.”⁶³ As Cai’s Western education left a deep impression on him, he would spend most of his time relating Chinese concepts to European ones. In this comparativist manner, he also equated French *fraternity* with the Confucian concept of *ren*.

Cai Yuanpei played a major role in championing anarchist, and then repurposed anarchist ethics in the form of early Marxism. Building on the utopian tradition of the late Qing, Cai went further to envision a China that is empowered not necessarily by scientific advancement, but rather by aesthetic education. Though for Cai the two could go hand-in-hand. He stated that science would eliminate the obstacles of the phenomenal world, and that art would describe the phenomena and noumenal world and guide people “into enlightenment.” In keeping with the times of Chinese understanding of scientific development, Cai also supported the formation of a “militant citizenry,” first for the defense of China against imperialism and then for the carrying out of global utopianism. Though it had its dangers, Cai argued that civic education would tame any bellicose feelings among such a social organization.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid., 65. In Kantian terms, the noumenal world is the world of physical things outside of us, what really *is*, such as a car or dog. But Kant argued that our minds are created in such a way that we cannot comprehend the world the way it truly is, therefore our understanding of the world is the “phenomenal world,” or rather the way each individual uniquely perceives it, while there is a “real,” noumenal world that surrounds us. For more information, see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/>.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 65.

There are three major ideas that Cai Yuanpei greatly influenced during the 1920s-30s: First, social Darwinism should be discarded in favor of a system influenced by Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid, whatever that could look like. Second, while cooperation was pivotal and the only real path to utopia, militant action along the way can and maybe should be taken by China (and by extension other colonial states, as one could imagine). Third, China would be *the* leader in the establishment of world utopia, not merely a participant; and as with Kang Youwei's example of the Chinese Canadian, the Chinese people should not be assimilated to another culture. In light of this, Cai helped introduce Chinese traditions into the kinds of aesthetics he learned from Europe. He advocates that aesthetics must find a way to replace religions, which would be understood by Cai to be Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, with aesthetics.

The Anarcho-Utopian Rhetoric and Aesthetic in the 1920-30s: The Eastern Miscellany and Modern Sketch

The overwhelming narrative of the May Fourth Movement, one that has left a deep impression on the CCP, is that the “childish” ideas of Kang Youwei's *datong* and Cai Yuanpei's “New Year's Dream” were immediately discarded in favor of a full Westernization of China that opposed the old “feudal” order, or Confucianism. Yet while this may have been the popular discourse in the early period of the May Fourth Movement, it certainly wasn't the only one. Chen Duxiu's ideas on the differences between Eastern and Western thought led him to believe that it was loyalty and filiality that represented the morality of a feudal, patriarchal society that compromised the spirit of “semi-civilized 半開化 (*ban kaihua*), Eastern peoples.”⁶⁵ Theodore Hutters suggests that the Eastern Miscellany (*dongfang zazhi*) may have been a massive influence

⁶⁵ Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home: Approaching the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 210.

on the *Qingnian zazhi* 青年雜誌 and *Xin Qingnian* 青年 (New Youth) publications that were coming the “principal organ for educated public opinion in the country.”⁶⁶ At the time of the onset of the May Fourth Movement, Huang Yuanyong 黃遠庸 (1885-1915) was the editor of the *Eastern Miscellany*, and spent a majority of his time writing articles which argued that Western and Eastern thoughts could be synthesized. In a posthumous 1916 article, “The Clash Between Old and New,” Huang makes distinction that although Western thought may have a clear claim to superiority in dealing with the modern age, it does not allow it to affirm its ontological supremacy. Hutner’s notes that “this distinction is easy enough to make, perhaps, but it is one that the radical reformers of the years to follow always strenuously denied.”⁶⁷ This message of Western-Eastern harmony, however, continued to decline under the leadership of Du Yaquan 杜亞泉 (1873-1933), who took over a leading role after Huang was assassinated in San Francisco in 1915.⁶⁸ Du argued that not only was Western culture not superior to Chinese culture, but also it was *inferior*. In his 1916 article “The Quiet Civilization and the Active Civilization,” Du stated:

The dimensions of this tragedy [World War I] are unprecedented not only in our own history but in world history in general. For my part, I cannot help but entertain doubts about the Western civilization that I had once held in such high regard. As for those in our country who imitate Western culture, I will no longer be able to credit their expressions of faith in (Western) morality and its other achievements (*gongye*).⁶⁹

Du also noted that Chinese traditional civilization was what was needed to remedy the defects of Western civilization. Hutner argues that this type of rhetoric coming out of the Eastern

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 215.

⁶⁸ I have not come across a clear reason for Huang’s assassination, but it is assumed from his works that he may have had underlying sympathies for Yuan Shikai’s monarchist revivalism, which led to his assassination by republicans abroad after he attempted to flee China.

⁶⁹ Hutner, *Bringing the World Home*, 218.

miscellany was “neoconservatism,” which was a reaction to Chen and the New Youth. What is important here is that we can see the fulfillment of Cai’s thoughts playing out during the May Fourth Movement in the print world, albeit somewhat suppressed by the more radically pro-Westernization wing of the Movement. Chinese culture wasn’t inferior or even equal to Western culture, it was outright superior. The violence of WWI was all that Du needed to see what “scientific progress” brought forth.

The *Eastern Miscellany* was a dominating periodical for its time. It served as an influential piece for all Republican-period publishers. Hui Wang has called Du’s ideas “Continuism,” espousing a need for “continuity from the old to the new.” This was necessary for Chinese nationalists, because “continuism” solves a major issue for China: The Qing emperor was not just the emperor of China, but the Khan of Mongolia, the Tribal Elder of Manchuria, the living Buddha of Lamaism; Du thus saw the birth of the republic as China losing much of its cosmopolitanism. Hui Wang suggests that it is under these circumstances that Du was able to link the state to cultural issues and underpins *Eastern Miscellany*’s shift from political to civilizational and cultural issues.⁷⁰ This shift from politics to cultural affairs is important to understanding the context under which the *Shidai manhua* was produced (see chapter 2). Du wanted to examine the differences civilizations, not just between the West and East in geo-cultural terms, but in *civilizational* terms of difference. Du accosted Western civilization for being unnatural, whereas Chinese culture was natural. This is because Westerners relied on

⁷⁰ Hui Wang, “The Transformation of Culture and Politics: War, Revolution, and the ‘Thought Warfare’ of the 1910s,” *Twentieth-Century China* 38, no. 1 (2013), 12.

individualism versus the group (clannish) competition in China, and so on.⁷¹ The paradigm of civilization turned civilizational subjects such as technology into questions of cultural traditions.

This transition to a civilizational-subjects topic was in full swing by the 1930s. A major theme present in the *Shidai manhua* is the Confucian concept of *ren* and how it was applied to the colonial world as *manhua* artists understood it. Indeed the Shanghainese artists certainly understood colonialism better than their contemporaries due to their city's unique place within the colonial periphery. The two major areas that *manhua* artists sought to identify with were Polynesia, specifically Hawaii due to its large Chinese community and racial similarities, and Africa, the example of the worst kinds of Euro-American colonialism. *Manhua* artists were worried about the encroachment of Western materialism in Shanghai and saw Hawaii serving as a principal example of the future of yellow people as an American colony. A comic in the first issue of the *Shidai manhua* drawn by Zhang Zhenyu 張振宇 (?-?), "The Honolulu Savage's Dance," describes a beautiful and bountiful set of islands being overtaken by the horrors of American colonialism (fig. 2.1):

Blue seas swish and swash, white clouds circle atop the green coconut forests there, which are like pillars supporting heaven, looking all around you! Their fruits are moist, the animal's meats are plump and fatty, the volcanoes are ablaze, the entire place is immersed in a hot atmosphere! It is baptized by the culture of the US gold dollar, its primitive blood seeped in alcohol. The speed of expansion of Shanghai's commercial port has enlarged the city exponentially; is it a plaything? Like thousands of fawns beating their chests are the feeble hearts of gentlemen (*shenshi*)...⁷²

Zhang expresses his fears of the result of Shanghai's development by using Hawaii as an example. The type of gentleman Zhang is referring to would be the kind of dilettante that

⁷¹ Ibid., 23. Du argued that there were two social conditions that led the East and West to where they were by the 1900s. The first was the emergence of the Western nation-state, whereas China comprised of an amalgamation of peoples. The second was that western maritime trade was far more developed in the West, while China relied on an inland, agrarian economy, which Du argued brought about stability and less competition. Du argued that these two factors created manifestations of "the tranquil and the active civilization," the "natural existence and competitive existence."

⁷² Zhang Zhenyu, "Honolulu Savage's Dance," *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 1 (Jan. 1934), 20.

frequented Shanghai's foreign concessions in search of theatre, clubs, and consuming the variety of goods offered there. In other words, a Chinese man flirting with the seduction of Western culture. Much like the lucrative and seductive islands of Hawaii, Shanghai was another location being slowly engulfed by the materialist West. However, not only does Zhang ask his readers to be weary of the threats the West poses, he also effectively renders Hawaiians as savages, on the margins of civilization. He uses the character *ta* 牠 to refer to the Hawaiians; with the radical 牛, which refers to oxen. These are agonies towards the fast-changing and lucrative businesses of Shanghai. Western culture perverts. But China, as seen in Shanghai, was able to successfully incorporate the more sophisticated elements of Western culture and commerce to create a thriving economy while maintaining political independence. Clearly, Zhang did not see Shanghai as being unsalvageable to the seductive opportunities of capitalism.

Hawaii may seem like a far-off place of conjecture for the Chinese, and while there is no evidence that any of these artists visited Hawaii, Rebecca Karl has shown how cultural connections between Hawaiians and the Chinese formed in the late Qing, when King Kalakaua sent a letter to the Qing court begging for "Asians" to unite in a futile attempt to save Hawaii from colonization.⁷³ Thus, by the 1900s educated Chinese would have been aware to some extent of both Hawaii's situation and the large Chinese laborer population in Honolulu. Even more disturbing for Chinese students in Japan, the 1903 Osaka Exposition had placed China in the same category as the "raw barbarians" of Korea, Hawaii, and India.⁷⁴

⁷³ Karl, *Staging the World*, 58-59. The letter details King Kalakaua's wishes to unite all of Asia in an attempt to stiffen resistance against colonization from the West.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.



Fig. 2.1: Zheng Zhenyu, 1934, *Shidai manhua* 1, 20.

The use of women's bodies to make comparisons between the East and West, especially when dealing with consumerism and materialism, is an unsurprising but common strategy throughout the *Shidai manhua*.⁷⁵ However, while modern scholarship primarily focuses on the role female bodies played in material respects, understandably so due to the influence of communism in China, we must look past materialism and towards the cultural messages in these pages. In *Shidai manhua* 6, a series of photographs accompanied by descriptions depict various mothers from around the world, titled "Maternal Love of the Laboring Women of the World... and Their Brave and Resourceful Ambitions" (fig. 2.2 & 2.3)⁷⁶ The women displayed are from different cultural groups from around the world, including women from Guangdong, Brazil, Nigeria, Myanmar, Malaya and Singapore, Japan, Southern Europe, and Canada among other countries. The text mostly relates to how women around the world all carry their children in some sort of similar fashion. However, there are a few key things we can grab from this piece. First, in both Brazil and Canada, the pictured women are native Americans, labeled as "red-

⁷⁵ Most of these artists came from backgrounds in advertising. For more information on advertising and the Shanghai art scene, see Ellen Laing, *Selling Happiness*.

⁷⁶ No Author, "Maternal Love of the Laboring Women of the World... and Their Brave and Resourceful Ambitions," *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 6 (Jun. 1934), 25-26.

skinned Indian women” 印第安紅種女人 (*yindi'an hong zhong nuren*) instead of what one would traditionally think of as “Brazilian” or “Canadian.”

Secondly, while the text besides the various women point to their fatigue-inducing lives of taking care of women and working, the text beside the Japanese woman is markedly aggressive in tone and description. The Japanese description reads “A typical Japanese woman, putting her hands aside in order to do work is extremely common, because society has brought about their purpose of being given to service.”⁷⁷ The text surrounding this one seems to imply that Japan’s Westernization forced women into a form of indentured servitude. It’s obviously not too hard to understand why a Chinese nationalist was portraying Japan in such a negative light by the 1930s, but the sympathy for other, less civilized peoples, compared to the Japanese, shows a certain position of political allegiance. This is the case if we compare that caption of the Japanese woman to the one for a Brazilian indigenous woman, which reads:

South America, inside a Brazilian countryside – The work of a red-skinned Indian (*yindi'an hong zhong nuren*), her burden is hung down from her head; in this way she can freely use her two hands and feet to make a living.

Some women are even hailed as exemplary for their dedication to cultural ritual such as scarification and tattooing, processes which would likely be perceived as strangely savage in 1930s Shanghai. In another series of pictures in *Shidai manhua* 5, titled “The World of Fantasy and Seductive Witchcraft... Heretical Culture’s Rise to the Top,” a lady who is supposedly from the Congo in Africa 非洲的剛果 (*feizhou de gangguo*) has a face painted red and white, wearing dancing clothing and having a scarred and tattooed body (fig. 2.4).⁷⁸ She is exalted by the author

⁷⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁸ No Author, “The World of Fantasy and Seductive Witchcraft- Heretical Culture’s Rise to the Top,” *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 5 (May, 1934), 20.

as having a scarred body that “stands for the great admiration of her race” 全身刺的柔滑為族中
 最激賞 (*quan shen ci de rou hua wei zu zhong zui jishang*). In a paragraph next to this, a trope of
 dancing (white) females is accosted:

The Magnus song and dance team [The Silver Goddesses], their bodies are fully smeared in
 aluminum powder. The skin on their shoulders is soaked in this type of irritant; *only those who
 are unhuman can tolerate it (feiren ren suoneng renshou)*... The advertisements are plastered, ‘it
 nourishes the eye in a way nothing else can [emphasis mine].’

Similar bodily comparisons can be found in other works, such as “Curly Hair and Culture.”⁷⁹



Fig. 2.2 & 2.3: 1934, *Shidai manhua* 6, 25-26.



Fig. 2.4: 1934, *Shidai manhua* 5, 19.

⁷⁹ No Author, “Curly Hair and Culture,” *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 5 (May 1934), 19.

The appearance of one's clothes and the changing of clothes is an important theme that juxtaposes with the nudity so common throughout the *Shidai manhua*. Comics showing fascist dictators such as Hitler and the Spanish autocrat Francisco Franco (fig. 2.5)⁸⁰ wearing garments like African ones show us that there was no true difference between fascist "brutes" and African "barbarians." But perhaps one of the most intriguing comic in the *Shidai manhua* is a brief picture titled "Hitler's New Clothes" (fig. 2.6).⁸¹ A photocollage of Hitler's face placed over the body of an African tribesman is juxtaposed next to a comic of Ethiopian King Haile Selassie (1892-1975) who is drawn as a monkey (perhaps the artist's rendition of a baboon) wearing military regalia. Below, a sardonic poem written by Huang Miaozi titled "The Jade Emperor Urgently Complies with Imperial Law" reads:

Check out the Black Chicken King (*wuji wangguo*) who indiscriminately uses weapons of war, plunging people into an abyss of misery (*shengling-tutan*),⁸² not understanding what the magical effects of sacrifice for one's own country feels like. As he continues to disparage China he reads traditional Chinese books for ten years, and he has come to accept Eastern culture (*lingshou dongfang wenhua*), thus allowing him to rectify his past mistakes, enduring humiliation while suffering in silence... to everybody's satisfaction in this life.⁸³

The poem is an obvious slight against Hitler, but the interesting aspect of this work is the belief that Chinese civilization has the power not to defeat imperialism through martial means, but rather cultural means. Just as Du Yaquan had once posited that Chinese culture was superior to Western culture twenty years prior, *Shidai manhua* artists and authors were continuing to take the fight against imperialism into the civilizational realm, thus building on the influence of Du's "Continuism" ideologies by using the contemporary example of Africa with special focus on Abyssinia due to the ongoing Italo-Abyssinian War.

⁸⁰ Wang Zimei, "An Analysis of Franco's Spirit," *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 28 (Apr. 1936), 5.

⁸¹ Jiang Mi, "Hitler's New Clothes," *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 21 (Sep. 1935), 5.

⁸² Black Chickens (*wuji*), known colloquially as silkies, are chickens native to China who are known for their exceptionally smooth, silk-like plumage. They have been long desired in Chinese cuisine and are also known for their dark meat. Additionally, black chicken meat is regarded as a curative food in Chinese traditional medicine.

⁸³ Mi, "Hitler's New Clothes," *Shidai manhua* 21, 5.



Fig. 2.5: Wang Zimei, 1936, *Shidai manhua* 28,



Fig. 2.6: Jiang Mi, 1935, *Shidai manhua* 21, 5.

5.

Africa's existence as the high mark of colonialism allowed Chinese nationalists to target the darker side of European expansion. In standing with the rhetoric that Du Yaquan wrote in the *Eastern Miscellany* that Western progress was inherently unjust and dangerous to those who wield it. In *Shidai manhua* 8, we are greeted with very dark humorous comic called “A Children’s Book on Colonialism.”⁸⁴ Using stereotypical Jim Crow depictions of Africans, Europeans arrive to trade alcohol and enslave the native populations, who are drawn as dim-witted. However, the second page shows Europeans in a rather barbaric light as well, beating enslaved Africans and even executing a group of them by firing squad as a child runs away. For *manhua* artists, stories from Africa give them a way of fighting back against Euro-American colonizers in the fashion of the famous 1899 Rene Georges Hermann-Paul comic “Barbarie – Civilisation.”⁸⁵ *Manhua* artists effectively reflected the brutal realities of colonialism and

⁸⁴ No Author, “A Children’s Book on Colonialism,” *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 8 (Aug. 1934), 8-9.

⁸⁵ For more on the role cartoons played in the West during the colonial period, see Ellen Sebring, “Civilization & Barbarism: Cartoon Commentary & ‘The White Man’s Burden’ (1892-1902),” https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/civilization_and_barbarism/cb_essay05.html.

criticized the colonizers. It was a warning for China, lest they end up like Africa. Similar sentiment and position permeate different issues of the *Shidai manhua*.

By the 1930s, especially after the 1931 Manchurian Incident, the aggressive implications of Western technological progress had brought about a great distrust among Chinese nationalists in the superiority and efficiency of Western ideas and methods. WWI may have been an impersonal event for the Chinese overall, but the Japanese invasion of Manchuria was not, which forced a call to action among all nationalists across the country for national salvation. Rethinking the attractiveness of technology, *manhua* artists targeted what they saw as the belligerent and corrupting nature of Western civilization. An interesting blend of photomontage and drawings titled “The Course of Recent European History, along with the Present Stage—War and Peace” shows an intimidating collage of war. The remains of dead bodies, politicians bickering amongst themselves while bombs rain down in the background and disaster looms, young men being mobilized for war- that is modern European history (fig. 2.7).⁸⁶ Similar pictures poke fun at the major fascist leaders of Europe while interestingly, the UK and France, both direct colonial powers in China, are absent from these portrayals. “Reminiscing Over Pictures of Today’s Battlefields,” is one that depicts Hitler and Mussolini standing over the ruins of a Spanish city during their civil war.⁸⁷ The author sarcastically bemoans that “Italy’s Mussolini, Germany’s Hitler... must be moved by the state of the universe, as we pity the fate of the times 悲天憫人 (*beitian-minren*)!”

⁸⁶ No Author, “The Course of Recent European History, along with the Present Stage—War and Peace,” *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 6 (Jun. 1934), 6.

⁸⁷ No Author, “Reminiscing Over Pictures of Today’s Battlefields,” *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 30 (Jun. 1936), 12.

Once again, turning to the example of Africa, in their 1935 publications, the *manhua* artists portray the fall of Italian imperialism at the hands of Ethiopian fighters. In a comic in *Shidai manhua* 23 (November of 1935, a month after the Italian invasion), Ethiopian warriors, by throwing spears at an Italian soldier, manage to impale the Italian and force a victory. The text repeats the frustration of many nationalists' angers at Chiang for not retaliating against the Japanese invasion four years earlier, using Abyssinia as an example of heroic, albeit futile, resistance. It reads:

Using primitive era weapons that are limited to resisting wild beasts, today's Abyssinians resist a civilized nation's military, so that the rest of us, under Abyssinia's guidance can understand the result. The judgement is as follows... Conquering nations have decided on behalf of uncivilized nations, by means of destroying treaties of alliances, that black people should be subjugated.⁸⁸

While the text in some ways conflicts with the message of the comic (Ethiopians triumphing over a clueless Italian soldier), the implications of a European invasion are clear: colonial empires unjustly determine the fate of those less powerful.

Taking the matter of imperialist invasion beyond the realm of war and politics, European invasion in Abyssinia invokes a civilizational clash of cultures. In "The New Bible," a desperate Haile Selassie bows in front of Jesus, while a column of tanks and planes roll through a burning village and dead bodies (Fig. 2.8).⁸⁹ The text states a conversation between Jesus and Selassie:

Abyssinian King: Master! I now repent. My people are rapidly dying (*si jin le*), I still cannot put my enemies to flight, I finally lost my country (*zhongyu wangguo le*), who's fault is this exactly?

Jesus: This is naturally your own fault; you've forgotten God's word... 'When someone hits the left side of your face, you turn the other cheek.' God will bless and protect every peaceful nation. Who would need embrace the policies of non-resistance! As for evil demons, God will punish them anytime!

Abyssinian King: But how does not fighting lead to peace? Does this not resign us to [the state of] being slaves from a lost country?

Jesus: Do you truly not believe in God? Is God's word not suitable for the 20th century?

⁸⁸ Jin Mei, Untitled, *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 23 (Nov. 1935), 19.

⁸⁹ Wang Zimei, "The New Bible," *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 27 (Mar. 1936), 21.

In some ways, the use of the Italo-Abyssinian War is not just a cry of outrage against an obviously illegal invasion of a weaker nation by a stronger one, but stands as an allegory of opposition to the standoffish government. Considering that the *Shidai manhua* was finally forced to disband in 1937 for the unflattering portrayal of a Japanese diplomat, ironically just months before the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War.⁹⁰ Regardless, Africa served as a perfect example for exposing the dark side of modernization and colonialism. It presented a living warning to those in Shanghai, China: what would happen should China fall into a state of chaos and if they cannot defend themselves against imperialism?



Fig. 2.7: 1934, *Shidai*

manhua 6, 6.

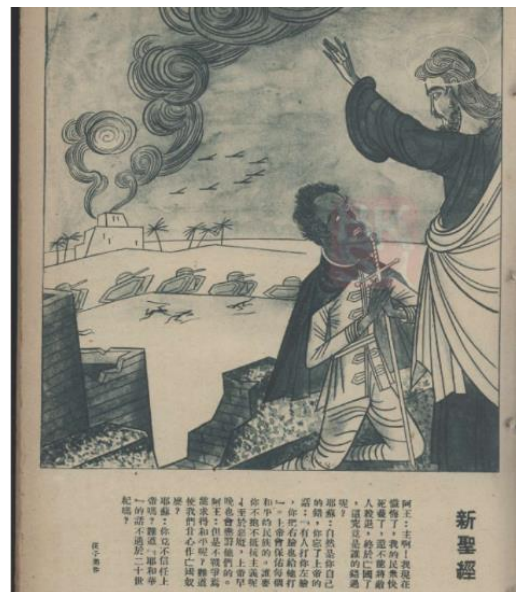


Fig. 2.8: Wang Zimei, 1936, *Shidai manhua* 27, 21.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the political and historical contexts in which Chinese leftism emerged during the early twentieth century through the facilitation of primarily anarchist

⁹⁰ Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 228.

thought. I have argued that Kang Youwei's utilization of *ren* as a core value in understanding a more inclusive Confucian worldview left a deep influence on later Chinese leftists. This idea of *ren* was often extended to looking at the similarly oppressed peoples of the colonial world, as well as those on the peripheries of a Western-dominated global order much like Shanghai itself. In the *Shidai manhua*, this idea of *ren* is extended to the portraying women, who often stand in as a metonym for their respective states or societies. At the same time, the concept of "civilizational frontiers" was of great interest to Chinese intellectuals and nationalists in the Republican period. While there are plenty of comics portraying those spatially marginal ethnic groups within China itself (Mongols, Tibetans, Uyghurs, etc.), this recognition of the marginalized was extended to the rest of the non-Euro-American world, especially Africa.

The Confucian concept of *ren* was what anchored the connection between the colonial world and China. In light of the kind of magnanimous and benevolent humanness that the principle of *ren* invokes, the Chinese leftists judged the West and Japan as holding against such humane value. When applied to Chinese sovereignty, the political ideology of *ren* also undergirded the intertwined goals of Chinese nationalist's hopes for restoring the former borders of the Qing empire and for the expansion of Chinese power beyond the traditional boundaries of the Confucian world.

As this chapter has shown, the major theme involving African colonialism content in the *Shidai manhua* demonstrates that *manhua* artists pledged to resist the kinds of power domination which they saw as encroaching into their own nation through military actions as well as technology. Still, it is important to note that the narrative of a teleological Western modernization process permeates these *manhua* comics. While demonizing Euro-American, the

manhua artists also project their othering of the Polynesians or Africans in material terms, rather than civilizational terms.

The criticisms are instead portrayed through material poverty and a lack of technological modernity; for they used such things as spears against rifles. Along those lines, they described Hawaii as *naturally* beautiful and bountiful, where the only enjoyable things are plump animals and moist fruits, unlike the developed and cultured Shanghai. In this way, *manhua* artists successfully created an “other” from their own conception of Africa in ways appropriated from Western discourses. In so doing, those *manhua* artists attempted to maintain an element of *ren* that would allow them to find common *cultural* grounds with African or Polynesian tribes—who were “backwards” primarily because of their inability to adapt to the forces of Western materialism and scientific progress. For the artists, what ultimately mattered was the preservation of culture, not necessarily the demonstration of an ability to harness Western powers by material and technological means.⁹¹

In addition to the Chinese connection to the colonial world that emerged at the turn of the century, we can see that Cai Yuanpei’s visions for a cosmopolitan, social Darwinian-free utopia changed in the aftermath of the 1931 Japanese invasion. While Cai endeavored to fight against such belligerent ideologies, the circumstances of the 1930s differed so greatly from the 1910s as Japanese imperialism went from anxious thought to terrible reality. In this respect, Cai’s more militant ideas find more acceptance among the *manhua* community in the 1930s. However, Cai’s

⁹¹ See “The Song of the Black Man,” *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 7 (Jul. 1934), 9. A black jazz musician is depicted singing a desperate song about losing his culture (“Black man! You forgot the ballads your forebearers taught you... The song you sing is now the white mans!”), with a call to revitalize his native traditions (Black man! You’re wearing the clothes your forebearers gave to you, start singing with the pitch your ancestors indulged you with, black man, you are *a man!* (*ni cai shi ren!*)). The comic is part of a set of comics under the title “An Enthusiastic Caricaturist’s Vigorous Struggle against the Vestiges of History,” and is accompanied by many comics fearing for the sacrifice of China (*zhongguo zhi xisheng*).

beliefs and Du Yaquan's rhetoric had significant influence in the way that *manhua* artists viewed the world regarding civilizational clashes between East and West. Unlike earlier May Fourth periodicals, the contents of the *Shidai manhua* outright rebuke Western teleology and the supremacy of modern sciences in the fashion of Du's own criticisms of Western culture within the *Eastern Miscellany*.

When visualizing the space of the world surrounding them, the *manhua* artists demonstrates that there is a linear teleology that has been well incorporated into Chinese leftism by the 1930s. But the spatial order of the colonial world had been reorganized. Here, the influence of Kang Youwei is far more apparent. *Manhua* artists of the *Shidai manhua* managed to not only to break down boundaries between China and the rest of the colonial world, but also to actively construct new boundaries between China and the West on a cultural basis. While the opinion of where China fell into this order varied among individual artists, their consistent depictions of the heroic Abyssinian king Selassie evinced their collective criticism against Chiang Kai-shek's own inaction in the face of Japanese imperialism toward China.⁹² After all, how could China, in the image of Cai's "New Year's Dream," be the establisher of a utopian world for the common good of humanity, when it was Abyssinia, not China, fighting back against imperialism on the battlefield?

The transition from political to cultural "continuism" that began with Du in the *Eastern Miscellany* goes to various extremes in the eclectic Modern Sketch. From the content inside we see the formation of a kind of anarcho-utopianism that is rooted deeply in the Confucian belief

⁹² See Wang Dunqing, "The Crownless King Selassie Arrives to Call on a Friend," *Shidai manhua* (Modern Sketch) 30 (Jun. 1936), 10. On this page, a picture of Chiang and warlord Feng Yuxiang at Lushun Mountain is edited and Selassie's face is photoshopped over Chiang's, making it look like a meeting between those two. Bi and Huang suggest that this is a satire of Chiang in comparison to what would've been viewed as a feudal (backwards) king (Bi & Huang, *Zhongguo manhua shi*, 107).

system, but now faced the need for a colonial subject to challenge imperialism by civilizational means. *Manhua* artists, just like other nationalists at the times, undoubtedly believed that this was China's destiny. While it is obvious that a nation like China would be outraged at the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, what is important here is the attempts by *manhua* artists to use Abyssinia's efforts as an example of how to overturn, and perhaps usurp, Western linear teleology. Should China be able to fend off, then defeat, the imperialist powers of the day, it could utilize its most important tool—culture-- to conquer the world and to tear down global boundaries presented by colonialism. With this in mind, the next chapter will examine Confucio-Buddhist subjects in the *manhua* of the *Shidai* manhua. It will investigate how those subjects became cultural-political apparatuses against the encroachment of Christianity. While never a popular religion in China, many of the KMT elites, including Chiang Kai-shek, had embraced Christianity. As this chapter will show, this meant that traditional forms of Chinese religion and philosophy could not only be used against the sprawl of colonial power, but also used to defeat the KMT, a ruling party against which the *manhua* artists found themselves ideologically and practically opposed to.

Chapter Two: The Radicalization of Buddhist Utopianism in *Manhua* Art

During the formative years of the republic, a popular Buddhist laity movement emerged across China as a powerful socio-political force. Holmes Welch has termed the movement a “revival,” yet he questioned in his conclusion whether he had used the correct terminology in deeming this movement a revival.⁹³ In fact, Holmes had overlooked it. In his account as he concludes that Buddhism failed to “capture either the loyalty or the imagination of the more nationalistic Chinese.”⁹⁴ But more recent research has shown that Buddhist thought had a remarkable influence on modern Chinese society and ideology prior to the early Republican period.

Scholars have shown how the Buddhist movement of the early republic coalesced into a radical “this-worldly” utilitarian movement for the support of using Chinese Buddhism to counter imperialist forces such as Christianity and Japanese Buddhism; Buddhists thought were also appropriated abroad to fulfill the establishment of the ancient utopian communities such as Uttarakuru and śambhala (the precursor to the now famous Shangri-La).⁹⁵ This movement was led by two major figures: Taixu (1890-1947), and the ninth Tibetan Pan Chen Lama (b. Thubten Choekyi Nyima; c. 圖丹曲吉尼瑪, 1883-1937).⁹⁶ Taixu wrote much about the establishment of Uttarakuru, which he identified with the Pure Land realm of the Amitabha Buddha. At the same time, the Pan Chen Lama proclaimed the establishment of śambhala. Of course, there are

⁹³ Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 262.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁹⁵ Charles Jones, *Taixu's 'On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm: A Translation and Study*, (New York: Bloomsbury Collections, 2021), 38.

⁹⁶ Prior to WWII, the Pan Chen Lama initiated the Kalacakra-tantra, a tantra rooted in Buddhist eschatology originating during the Muslim invasions of India during the 11th century AD which called for the establishment of the śambhala, a utopian spiritual kingdom ushered in at the end of times by a “last king” to save the world from evil. One Tibetan tradition of Kalacakra-tantra posits the Pan Chen Lama as the incarnate of this last king, though the Indian traditions posit the last king as the Maitreya Buddha. The Pan Chen Lama sought to fuse this ideology with contemporary Chinese nationalism to repel Japanese invasion. See Gray Tuttle, “Tibet as the Source of Messianic Teachings to Save Republican China (2008);” *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, “Kalacakra-tantra,” (pg. 406-407). I am deeply indebted to Dr. Donald Lopez for pointing out this connection with the early republican Buddhist reform movement to me.

differences between these two Buddhist utopias, the discussion of which fall out of the scope of this thesis. What follows shall primarily focus on how this eschatological Buddhist thought influenced early *manhua* aesthetics and art.

Specifically, the following chapter will examine how the late Qing thinkers, Tan Sitong (1865-1898) and Zhang Binglin (*hao*, Zhang Taiyuan, 1869-1936) contributed to the development those Buddhist ideologies in the cultural realm.⁹⁷ In doing so, the chapter will study their influences on Taixu, the greatest figure of the Buddhist reform movement during the Republican period. Taixu played a major role in organizing Buddhist communities across China and made attempts to do so abroad as well in Japan, though with not much success. However, until recently there has not been much research on Taixu's relationship with early anarchist thinkers. Justin Ritzinger speculates that this is due to the circumstances of the time when Taixu composed his autobiography in the 1930-40s that led him to downplay his early political engagements. Along with his connections to the KMT, who by then had largely eradicated anarchist elements of the party and of the May Fourth Movement, it is understandable that Taixu did not want to bring up such ideological impacts on himself.⁹⁸

Taixu's presence across eastern China was pervasive. Recent research has also shown that he worked with the Buddhist master and aesthetician Hong Yi, teacher of Feng Zikai, who is most commonly credited for having founded Chinese *manhua*.⁹⁹ While Taixu remained in the political limelight, Hong Yi and Feng generally attempted to remain apolitical throughout their

⁹⁷ All three major historians of early Chinese anarchism, Arif Dirlik, Peter Zarrow, and Edward Krebs, have noted in their works that Tan Sitong and Zhang Binglin as well as Taixu had espoused a variant of Sinicized-anarchism that had in the past been overlooked in the historiographical record. While Tan and Zhang are mostly noted for their anti-Manchu ideas and actions, they also played a major role in the formation of Chinese anarchist thought.

⁹⁸ Justin Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land: Reinventing the Cult of Maitreya in Modern Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8-9.

⁹⁹ For connections between Hong Yi and Taixu, see Francesca Tarocco, *The Cultural Practices of Modern Buddhism: Attuning the Dharma* (2007). The two mostly composed poetry and songs together.

lives and dedicated to Buddhist practices as personal pursuits. This explains partially why *manhua* and art outside the woodcut movement led by Lu Xun took more time to radicalize, which came into fruition during the 1930s rather than in the 1910-20s during the heights of the May Fourth Movement. Regardless, this chapter notes the anarcho-Buddhist ideologies present within the *Shidai manhua*, ideas largely utilized to attack the KMT's counterrevolutionary New Life Movement (1934-1937) and support the establishment of a Buddhist utopia. As this chapter will highlight, the community of leftist artists in Shanghai was actively engaged in a battle with rightist politics in China over the fundamental understanding and the promulgation of ethics within China and abroad.

The Anarcho-Utopianism of Tan Sitong and Zhang Binglin

Many late Qing intellectuals turned to Buddhism due to their perception of the weaknesses of Confucianism in combating foreign institutions and ideas such as Christianity and science. They saw Confucianism as lacking the “religious ingredients” that was present in Buddhism, and they believed that Buddhism, particularly Yogacara 法相宗 (*faxiangzong*), could be put forth as an alternative to Western sciences.¹⁰⁰ While Kang Youwei, as the primary figure of the late Qing intellectual world, staunchly defended Confucianism as the ideal state religion of China, the influences of Buddhism remained omnipresent. Liang Qichao noted that among his contemporaries, there was almost none who “did not have some connection with Buddhism.”¹⁰¹ Liang himself would become more open to Buddhism after he spent more time away from his master during their exiles, though he always viewed Buddhist superstitions with suspicion.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Sin-Wai Chan, *The Buddhist Theme in Late Ch'ing Political Thought, 1890-1911* (Dissertation. London: University of London Press, 1977), 14.

¹⁰¹ Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, 74.

¹⁰² Barmie, *An Artistic Exile*, 159.

The variant of Buddhism that was popular among Chinese intellectuals during this time was Yogacara Buddhism.¹⁰³

Tan Sitong is most well-known for his publication *On the Study of Benevolence* 仁學 (*renxue*), a metaphysical Confucio-Buddhist treatise published in Shanghai and Yokohama in 1898 and 1901 respectively, which he wrote under the pseudonym “Mr. Lotus Form of All Sentient Beings.”¹⁰⁴ Tan’s goal, like many other intellectuals during their chaotic times, was to find a path leading to peace and propensity. Tan made great use of Yogacara Buddhism in his writings. For Tan, benevolence (*ren*)¹⁰⁵ was the ontological source of heaven and earth. The ultimate society that could be founded should be one in which humanity correctly harnesses benevolence resonates with Buddhist worldviews more generally. The period of peace and propensity is described as a time when Amitabha was “present on earth: people will then be well provided for and happy, mountains and rivers will look like mirrors, thusness [Suchness] will prevail in the dharma realm, and the people will have attained Buddhahood...”¹⁰⁶ According to Tan, this ether-like substance of *ren* was produced by the mind and was equated to the eight consciousnesses of Yogacara.

¹⁰³ See Robert Zim, *Basic Ideas of Yogacara Buddhism* (San Francisco State University, 1995); John Keenan, “Original Purity and the Focus of Early Yogacara,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 7-18; John Makeham *Transforming Consciousness: Yogacara Thought in Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); for cultural background in China, see Jinhua Xia, “Tang dai faxiangzong de shuailuo yuanyin xin lun,” *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 4 (2003): 11-19.

¹⁰⁴ Chan, *The Buddhist Theme in Late Ch’ing Political Thought*, 122.

¹⁰⁵ Tan saw the morality of *ren* as a way of overthrowing authoritarian social institutions such as the family, marriage, and ultimately, government. For Tan, *ren* had always been a universalist element that interconnected the nature of the cosmos; Jesus, Buddha, and Mozi among others, had all understood *ren*, albeit in differing forms. See Zarrow, *After Empire*, 147-148. Justin Ritzinger has also translated this portion as, “The ultimate stage reached will be the descent of [Maitreya] Buddha to earth and the recovery of Vimalakirti from his illness to preach the [Dharma] to the people... all people will have obtained Buddhahood.” Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land*, 32).

¹⁰⁶ Scott Pacey, “Tan Sitong’s ‘Great Unity:’ Mental Processes and Yogacara in *An Exposition of Benevolence*,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21.

Tan's conversion to Buddhism was credited by Liang Qichao as being influenced by his original interest in Christianity and the concept of universal love. His Christian interests leading him to seek answers in Buddhism may be overexaggerated by Liang, but it is true that Tan was deeply interested in religious universalism and had several meetings with Christian missionaries in Beijing in 1893 and 1895. It is far more likely, however, that Tan's interest in Buddhism came rather from his teacher Yang Renshan 楊仁山 (b. 楊文會, 1837-1911), who himself was a lay Buddhist reformer with universalist ideas of expanding Buddhism to the West in an effort to stop imperialism and unite the world.¹⁰⁷ What Tan was ultimately interested in was abolishing binaries between national communities and human representation. Tan argued that to have a distinction between the self and others is to be "nonbenevolent" 不仁 (*buren*). This distinction could be eliminated through communication 通 (*tong*): "that which includes the meaning of all the above three communications is the 'communication of the self and others,'" the three being Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity.¹⁰⁸ Where benevolence prevails, there is communication.

Tan Sitong's universalist message held a certain nationalistic undertone. Despite being interested in finding a universalist solution to current world issues, Tan repeatedly makes the point in his *On the Study of Benevolence* to find the roots of world religions and science in Chinese traditions. Tan wrote that "Western studies all have their source in Buddhism; after all, it is only with Western studies that Buddhism can once again be revealed to the world."¹⁰⁹ The Late Qing theme of pure universalism would be curtailed during the Republican period, as

¹⁰⁷ Chan, *The Buddhist Theme in Late Ch'ing Political Thought*, 40.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

emerging leaders such as Taixu and the Pan Chen Lama would more firmly attach themselves to the nationalist movement under the KMT. This transition would also take place among the leftist artist community in Shanghai.

In 1907, Zhang Binglin published an important treatise, titled “On the Five Negations” 五無論 (*Wu wu lun*). The document has variously been interpreted as being nihilist, or even sardonic, due to its radical negation of every single material institution. Yet recent research has successfully linked Zhang’s ideas on negations more broadly to other contemporary anarchist thought, as well as Yogacara. Wang Hui has interpreted Zhang’s Five Negations as an anarchist critique of coercive social arrangements, which he derives from Yogacara metaphysics and, to a lesser extent, the *Zhuangzi*. In Summary, Zhang believed that any coercive claims against individuals are illegitimate, as are all boundaries and hierarchies.¹¹⁰

Zhang Binglin furthermore believed that Buddhism was the most suitable religion for China to follow because he felt it was “free of the superstition of theism, being able to foster a spirit of revolution.”¹¹¹ The idea that Buddhism was better suited than Confucianism to foster a “revolutionary spirit” was not unique to Zhang. In his 1902 article “On the Relationship between Buddhism and Social Order” 論佛教與滾直之關係 (*Lun fojiao yu gunzhi zhi guanxi*), Liang Qichao also states that Buddhism could ignite a religious “spirit” among the Chinese like Oliver Cromwell or George Washington did in the past; also Liang maintained that Buddhism was a

¹¹⁰ Hui Wang, “Zhang Taiyan’s Concept of the Individual,” *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, ed. Wen-hsin Yeh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 231-259.

¹¹¹ Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land*, 42. See Zhang Taiyan, “On Establishing Religion” (*jianli zongjiao lun*).

purely indigenous product of China, stressing the phrase “Chinese Buddhism” 中國佛教 (*Zhongguo fojiao*).¹¹²

For most of the historic personages of the late Qing, the practice of Buddhism had been turned into a utilitarian socio-political movement. This transition would be intensified by the leading figures of the movement of lay Buddhism during the Republican period. The urge to find an ideological framework that could be successfully implemented to strengthen China spiritually became a necessity as the situation became an increasingly fraught within China. Under pressure from both foreign imperialism and the machinations of opportunistic warlords in the aftermath of Yuan Shikai’s 袁世凱 (1859-1916) failed bid for an imperium, Taixu and the Pan Chen Lama would pick up the pieces of Buddhist ideology in an effort to attach Buddhism more deeply into China’s nationalist movement.

Taixu’s Paradise and the Utopianism of the Pan Chen Lama: Combatting Imperialism

Buddhism during the final years of the Qing and early Republic had become increasingly militant in its utilitarian application. In 1911, the abbot of a temple in Hangzhou, Teyan (d.u.), sold his temple property to purchase two hundred guns and raised an army of five hundred monks and lay followers in an effort to take Hangzhou from Qing officials.¹¹³ In the aftermath of Yuan Shikai’s failed imperial restoration, the resulting chaos had allowed for local warlords to take advantage of Buddhist property where power gaps existed. In 1920 the Christian general and warlord Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 (1882-1948) ordered his troops to destroy all Buddhist

¹¹² Chan, *The Buddhist Theme in Late Ch’ing Political Thought*, 55; see also, Yin Shun, “Liang Qichao yu Zhongguo jindai fojiao yanjiu” [Research on Liang Qichao and modern Buddhism], *Wutaishan yanjiu* [Mount Wutai Research] 3 (2009): 25-29.

¹¹³ Xue Yu, *Buddhism, War, and Nationalism: Chinese Monks in the Struggle Against Japanese Aggression, 1931-1945* (London: Routledge, 2005), 24.

temples and confiscate the properties for military usage. An estimated 300,000 monks and nuns were driven out of their temples, and anything resembling a cohesive network of Buddhist institutions took decades to recover from the incident.¹¹⁴

It was under these circumstances, combined with the pressure of radicalism surrounding the political realm of China throughout the 1910-20s, that Taixu found himself exposed to. Emerging as the leader of a lay Buddhist movement across China, Taixu's Buddhist practices have been characterized as "Human Realm Buddhism" 人間佛教 (*renjian fojiao*), with an emphasis on utilitarian charity such as establishing hospitals, orphanages, and prison ministries among other institutions, funded by Buddhist associations.¹¹⁵ This type of Buddhism grounded in worldly affairs extended deeply into Taixu's philosophical thought. In his "On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm," 建設人間淨土論 (*Jianshe renjian jingtu lun*), Taixu sought to find a way to establish the Buddhist paradise of Uttarakuru within China.¹¹⁶ Taixu's ideas of utopia were deeply rooted in modernity; he had hoped that such a utopia could be achieved by humanity primarily through the advancement of technology.¹¹⁷ This conception of a utopia built by utilitarian means was a major schism that Taixu would bring about between Chinese Buddhism and Western Christianity. He was critical of the "escapist" elements of

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁵ Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land*, 5.

¹¹⁶ In traditional Indian Buddhist cosmology, Uttarakuru is a *dvipa*—or continent—that lay north of the Himalayan mountains, situating it in what is now modern Tibet, the northern most of four continents surrounding Mount Sumeru, the Buddhist cosmological center. Thought to be a utopian society where no citizens are divided into any classes and need not use labor to produce agriculture, Taixu believed that the Uttarakuru was Amitabha's Pure Land—its position within what was contemporary China reinforced the nationalist tendencies of Taixu's ideology that a utopia could only begin inside China. For more on Uttarakuru as tradition, see Ramkrishna Bhattacharya "Uttarakuru: The Eutopia of Ancient India," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 81, no. 1/4 (2000): 191-201.

¹¹⁷ Jones, *Taixu's 'On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm,'* 38.

Christian eschatology, bemoaning that it made “people turn their backs on the world.”¹¹⁸ The task to actualize a utopia, thus, fell into the hands of the Buddhists.

Written in 1926, Taixu’s “On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm” hosts an amiable link to anarchism while maintaining criticisms against what Taixu calls the “going white” 白化 (*baihua*) of imperialism and the “going red” 赤化 (*chihua*) of class struggle in Marxism.¹¹⁹ In one passage, Taixu remarks that “In the future we should also do away with private kitchens, as when [Bertrand] Russell spoke of common dormitories and refectories and *Kropotkin spoke of common kitchens*—they set out [more] food to eat” (emphasis mine).¹²⁰ The work is also clearly influenced by the democratic institutions of Western states. In Taixu’s conception of the Pure Land (Uttarakuru), there is a rigid, yet democratic, hierarchy with a “Mountain President” at the top (Taixu proposed establishing this utopia at Mount Putuo), who is elected by “the nuns, *śrāmaṇeras*, people from the Ten-Virtues, Five-Precepts, and Three-Refuges levels who are at least twenty years old, and monks who have resided on the mountain for fifteen years since their ordinations and have traveled abroad for at least five years voting in primaries.”¹²¹

That those electing the president must have experience traveling abroad suggests Taixu was looking for cosmopolitan elements to incorporate into his utopia, rather than necessarily outright rejecting anything un-Chinese. This is a theme that closely shadows the messages in late

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 58. Taixu described both ideologies as such: “With struggles in every territory, the opportunity brews for imperialist invaders “gone white” (*baihua* 白化) to come in to and commit slaughter on a mass scale; with all social classes pitted against one another, then the situation is ripe for mass slaughter by a dictatorship of the proletariat “gone red” (*chihua* 赤化). In this present generation, everyone is caught up and constrained in the factional fight between these two powers, the ones “gone white” and “gone red,” and are rocked this way and that in fear and panic.”

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

Qing and early Republican literature and propaganda, including the *Shidai manhua*. It goes back to Cai Yuanpei's "A New Year's Dream," where China is a leader in establishing world utopia, so long as that utopia is grounded within China. Indeed, Taixu was deeply committed to a cosmopolitan vision of his new Buddhist reforms up to 1928, shortly after this treatise was written, and he had regularly attempted to communicate mainly with Japanese Buddhists to form an international Pan-Asian Buddhist movement.¹²² By the 1930s however (in the aftermath of the Mukden Incident), Taixu began to work more closely with the KMT, drafting a charter for the League of Buddhist Youths in Protecting the Nation 佛教青年護國團 (*Fojiao qingnian huguo tuan*), which was to be placed under nationalist authority.¹²³

We can therefore understand Taixu's work as a product of modernity and the times he was living in. Though he downplayed his own connections to anarchists in the earlier part of his life, research has shown that Taixu spent many of his formative years as a lay Buddhist consuming anarchist literature and participating in anarchist institutions, including the Chinese Socialist Party 中國社會黨 (*Zhongguo shehui dang*), founded by Jiang Kanghu 江亢虎 (1883-1954) in 1911. The party, while calling itself socialist, was (even by Jiang's own admission) hardly a socialist instrument. Hardliners in the party, calling themselves "pure" 純粹 (*chuncui*) or "narrow" 狹義 (*xiayi*) socialists defined their ideology as the "Three Negationists" 三無主義 (*sanwu zhuyi*)-- negation of religion, family, and government.¹²⁴ We do not need to speculate on

¹²² Yu, *Buddhism, War, and Nationalism*, 77. However, Taixu's Pan-Asian feelings were soon crushed after the Mukden Incident and subsequent Japanese annexation of Manchuria. In October of 1931, shortly after the incident, Taixu penned "A Letter to Forty Million Buddhists in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan Concerning the Incident in Mukden," where he called upon Buddhists in all these subaltern parts of the Japanese Empire to unite and overthrow their governments. Taixu does take a much lighter stance in the aftermath of the 1932 Shanghai Incident, writing an article titled "Calming the Crisis between China and Japan after the Liaoning and Shanghai Incidents."

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁴ Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land*, 50. Ritzinger also notes that many of the early anarchist societies within China aside from the Party, such as the Conscience Society (*xin she*) founded by Liu Shifu, were full of religious,

the details of the party hardliner's influences on Taixu, however. Taixu admitted himself in his autobiography that around 1910—while downplaying his acceptance of these ideologies—he had begun to read foreign radicals such as Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin and even Marx. Additionally, Taixu credited Zhang Binglin as convincing him that anarchism and Buddhism were “kindred systems of thought.”¹²⁵

Aside from Taixu's popular reformist movement, other Buddhist leaders in the monastic sangha were eager to promulgate their own visions of establishing a Buddhist utopia within China, particularly the Pan Chen Lama in Tibet. This Tibetan tradition of Buddhist tantra, based on the Kalacatra-tantra, proposed the Pan Chen Lama as the figure who would establish śambhala, a spiritual utopia that was grounded in the world by the ninth incarnation of the Pan Chen Lama. Through this tradition, like Taixu's Buddhism, the Pan Chen Lama came to be another important Pan-Asianist figure who looked to save China from Western imperialism.¹²⁶ Establishing China as the spiritual source of world universalism, the Panchen Lama was frequently greeted by thousands of people of different denominations, including Indian dervishes, Daoists, Buddhists, and even Christians.¹²⁷ The Pan Chen Lama stated in interviews that his goal was to spread the “Yellow Religion” 黄教 (*huangjiao*—Buddhism) associated with the Dalai Lama as part of a larger push to “merge the individual traditions” of the world as well as “the universal harmony of world religions” 世界宗教大同 (*shijie zongjiao datong*).¹²⁸

Buddhist-like practices such as abstaining from alcohol and tobacco, prohibiting the use of rickshaws and servants, as well as foregoing eating meat, in addition to disallowing marriage, family names, acceptance of government office, and, ironically, religious practice. See pg. 46.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹²⁶ Gray Tuttle, “Tibet as the Source of Messianic Teachings to Save Republican China,” *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries* 1 (2008), 304.

¹²⁷ Wuyi, “Banchan chuanfa ji” [The Panchen Lama's records of transmitting the Dharma], *Haichaoyin* 6, no. 4 (1925): 11.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 310.

This variant of discourse was again deeply rooted in nationalist ideologies. The Pan Chen Lama would come to be criticized later by fellow Tibetan sangha for working closely with the KMT, which would again be used as a way of inspiring revolutionary fervor among the Chinese population. The Pan Chen Lama rejected the more conservative roles of the traditional sangha, endeared himself to laymen, and sought to use prayer and blessings of the Buddha to “give rise to the happiness of the country and the common people.”¹²⁹ Taixu’s *Haichaoyin* 海潮音 periodical articles began to be published, rejecting the purely spiritual interpretation of the state of *śambhala*. In a 1934 article, an unnamed author claimed that they should not see the realm of *śambhala* necessarily as a dream to be pursued, but rather, as a future reality to be realized. As Gray Tuttle notes, however, the implied message of the article is that the “realm of *śambhala*” was coded language for Tibet to once again becoming a part of China as Tuttle remarks: “The implication is that through holding these *Kalacakra* rituals in China, these territories (Tibet and outer Mongolia) might really become a part of the modern Chinese state.”¹³⁰

The transition of anarcho-Buddhist ideas into the human realm was not simply for improving China while it was undergoing a dark transitional period. The grander vision of these leading movements aimed to bind the world to Buddhism as a means of achieving a cosmopolitan, utopian society. However, in the aftermath of the 1931 Mukden Incident and increased Japanese belligerence, as well as the KMT’s parochial New Life Movement programs that did not include Buddhist renderings of ethics, Buddhist messages become much more nationalized. In the cosmopolitan contact zone of Shanghai, Buddhism flourished alongside other foreign ideologies including Marxism, anarchism, Christianity, and capitalism. These

¹²⁹ Ibid., 321.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 325.

experiences would amalgamate together to form the various, accelerating radical avant-garde publications that flourished within the foreign concessions, the *Shidai manhua* included.

Buddhists were pervasive in Shanghai. There, many Buddhist laymen gathered under the protection of the city's foreign concessions to flee persecution from warlords or the KMT, including Taixu for a brief time in 1913 after the Chinese Socialist Party was absolved by Yuan Shikai's authorities. In 1925, the Buddhist Pure Karma Society was founded in Shanghai, which ran an orphanage and had an out-patient clinic with free Chinese medicines for the poor.¹³¹ The province of Zhejiang itself had been the major site of Buddhist revivalism along the lower Yangtze and it is within this sphere that caught the attention of many Western observers who would later publish much work about this reformist movement.¹³²

Hong Yi, then still Li Shutong, had many connections to the Southern Society, which was a loose cultural organization of patriotic writers and artists that included many Shanghai intellectuals. It was within these circumstances that Li and his student, Feng Zikai, embraced a form of "muscular Buddhism," described by Benjamin Schwartz as a set of practices that focused on more ascetic practices to discipline the self.¹³³ Feng Zikai, surrounded by Buddhism and attempting to escape his own life crises, began to think of ways to merge ideas such as Buddhism and Confucianism in art.¹³⁴ Thus *manhua* was very much born of Buddhist influences, likely from the tradition of Chan Buddhist painting since the Song dynasty (960-1279) when monk-artists dabbled ink paintings in simplistic forms with a spontaneous manner.¹³⁵ Yet, as

¹³¹ Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, 76.

¹³² Barmie, *An Artistic Exile*, 159.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹³⁴ Xiaorong Zhao, "Hong Yi dui Feng Zikai de yishu jiaoyu he sixiang chuancheng" [Hong Yi's influence on Feng Zikai's art education and thought], *Lantai shijie* [Lantai World] 3 (2018), 84.

¹³⁵ Yongming Zhu, *Zhonghua tuxiang wenhua shi – juan 2* [A cultural history of Chinese iconography—vol. 2] (Beijing: Zhongguo shiyong chubanshe, 2017), 652

manhua became more deeply engaged with Chinese politics of the time, in its simplified forms from daily sketches to propaganda posters and comics.

Anarcho-Buddhism and the Shidai manhua

In April, 1934, a piece written by a certain Dafu (大斧 “Big Axe”) was published. Titled “An Exam on the New Life Movement” 新生活運動考 (*Xin shenghuo yundong kao*), the piece aims at targeting the revival of the four social bonds of Confucianism.¹³⁶ The author accosts government officials and intellectuals who are “waving flags and shouting battle cries” 搖旗吶喊 (*yaoqi nahan*) to appeal to the masses. He attacks the movement’s “gold-lettered signboard” 金字招牌 (*jinzi zhaopai*) with its four large characters: *Li, Yi, Lian, Chi* 礼义廉耻- the four social bonds of Confucianism. The author goes on to make two major arguments: first, the officials of the KMT are much like the officials of ancient China, who conduct torturing, kidnapping, and accepting bribes wantonly; second, he argues that Confucianism has been “washed over” by the changes in history, particularly the Industrial Revolution, and the resulting imperialism that had invaded China.

Below the scathing rebuke of the NLM, another piece by Da Weiren, titled “Boundless Buddhism” 无边佛教 (*Wubian fojiao*), states:¹³⁷

Ever since Mr. Jiang [Chiang Kai-shek] promoted the New Life Movement, it has shadowed our entire nation. When our hero Duan Zhi initiated the Kalachakra Dharma Assembly (*shilun jingang fahui* 时轮金刚法会), the entirety of the nation’s important persons have also been shadowed by this; but will we know if the NLM and the Kalachakra Dharma Society will clash? Several years have passed and we have spared no effort in promoting science to save the nation... Science is all embracing, and Buddhist news is also boundless; does it matter whether science comes first, or Buddhism comes second? Although science is omnipotent, and we know it can save our nation, so too can those who worship the Buddha... Tibetans worship Buddha, Mongols

¹³⁶ Dafu, “An Exam on the New Life Movement,” *Shidai manhua* 4 (Apr 1934), 6.

¹³⁷ Da Weiren, “Boundless Buddhism,” *Shidai manhua* 4 (Apr 1934), 6.

worship Buddha, the Japanese also worship Buddha; but the Chinese slander Buddha, and for this reason although red-head Indians (*hongtou asan*) have lost their nation (*wangguo*),¹³⁸ they are still the center of attention in Shanghai's foreign concessions; the Japanese take advantage of Buddhist Dharma to hold sway over East Asia; Mongolians rely on Buddhism to maintain their autonomy [as do] Tibetans; the scholars of our time also advocate Buddhism to save the nation... This is truth! Truth! Put your palms together and call out the Buddhist hymns: "I devote myself to Buddha! I devote myself to monks, to all life, to Amitabha, to Buddhist Dharma saving the nation... Do not continue to entirely confide in science to save the nation, advocate for Buddhism, the Kalacakra Dharma Association, thoroughly study the red-head Indians who seek to [take away] the limelight..."

A small comic accompanies this short piece with a sketch of what appears to be Chiang Kai-shek's face, with a brief caption that states "The mortal body of the Living Buddha Pan Chen Lama" (fig. 3.1). This call to look to Buddhism to save the nation encapsulates nearly every feature of the Buddhist reform movement during the Republican period. This is in alignment with the kind of invocation of Buddhism that had long been put forward as a means of "Asianizing" science by intellectuals among Pan-Asian communities, particularly the Yogacara branch of thought. The *Haichaoyin*, for example, contains examples of authors comparing a universal essence to atoms (*youyuanzi*) and molecules (*fenzi*).¹³⁹

Da Weiren's appeal to Buddhism is also laced with nationalist undertones. Tibetans and Mongolians feature prominently as worshippers of the Buddha, and it is likely that the implied meaning, as with those articles in the *Haichaoyin*, was the reaffirmation of Chinese control over the lost provinces of Tibet and Mongolia. Additionally, the Kalacakra Dharma Association had close ties to the KMT, and there were several offices established across the country supporting nationalist efforts, with a headquarters in Beijing. Beijing was chosen as the headquarters due to the Pan Chen Lama's efforts to stave off Japanese imperialism in Inner Mongolia.¹⁴⁰ This

¹³⁸ The author is almost certainly referring to Sikhs, who were used as police in Shanghai by the British. It is doubtful they are aware that Sikhs do not practice Buddhism. However, this is most likely an attack on India as the ontological origin of Buddhism over China.

¹³⁹ Linque Duo, "Shishi xinbao lun shilun jingang dahui," [*Current Affairs* editorial on the Kalacakra Dharma Assembly], *Haichaoyin* 15, no. 4 (1934), 415.

¹⁴⁰ "Beiping shilun jingang fahui," *Haichaoyin* 13, no. 8 (1932), 47-50.

connection between the Pan Chen Lama and the KMT helped the nationalist government establish a form of cultural legitimacy over the fractured Tibetan and Mongolian provinces.¹⁴¹ It is entirely possible that Da Weiren was part of a Kalacakra Dharma movement that rejected the original movement's ties to the nationalist government, turning to leftist media as an outlet to vent their frustrations.



fig. 3.1: Da Weiren, 1934, *Shidai manhua* 4, 6.

The term “boundless Buddhism” is of interest to note here. The term is used by Buddhists to illustrate the transcendental aspect of Buddhism in the psychology and hearts of all people. In the realm of art during the Republican period, the concept of transcendence was key to establishing an aesthetic in art that could either replace or enhance traditional religious sentiment. Cai Yuanpei’s views on replacing religion with aesthetics has already been discussed. But Feng Zikai wanted to use Buddhism to “transcend” art, and vice-versa. Feng believed that *manhua* could better connect society and nature.¹⁴² The term reappears throughout the *Shidai manhua*, especially in the context of critiquing the KMT.

¹⁴¹ Houhong Wen and Qingying Chen. “Minguo shiqi jiu shi banchan neidi chuanbo shi lun jiao fa ji lue,” [The ninth Panchen Lama’s propagation of Kalacakra-tantra throughout the national interior during the Republican period], *Zhongyang minzu daxue xuebao: zhixue shehui kexue ban* [Journal of Minzu University: Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition] 42, no. 5 (2015), 102-103.

¹⁴² Xing Chen, “Zhongguo chuantong fojiao huihua shiye xia de Feng Zikai fojiao tici huihua,” [Perspectives on the influence of Chinese traditional Buddhist painting in the subject matter of Feng Zikai’s Buddhist art], *Yishu baijia* [Hundred Schools of Art] 32, no. 4 (2016), 161.

There is also a strong connection between “boundless Buddhism” and anti-imperialism. The *Shidai manhua* is full of anti-Christian and anti-Japanese works, some of which merge together to produce interesting *manhua*, such as Ding Jia’s “Like my Lord Jesus, do not Resist,” a clear attack on Chiang’s policy of appeasement towards Japan, as he himself openly held Confucio-Christian beliefs.¹⁴³ The obvious contradiction between the peaceful teachings of Christianity and the violence of imperialism committed by Christian nations was not missed by *manhua* artists, who variously portrayed the church as a menace to China and their own Christian followers (fig. 3.2 & 3.3).¹⁴⁴ Both Taixu and the Pan Chen Lama engaged in anti-imperial efforts, emerging as the key anti-Japanese leaders of the Buddhist reformation movement. After the formal declaration of war between China and Japan in 1937, Taixu would even go as far as to call on Japanese Buddhists to revolt against their government, appealing to their sense of universal benevolence.¹⁴⁵



fig. 3.2: 1935, *Shidai manhua* 23, 16.

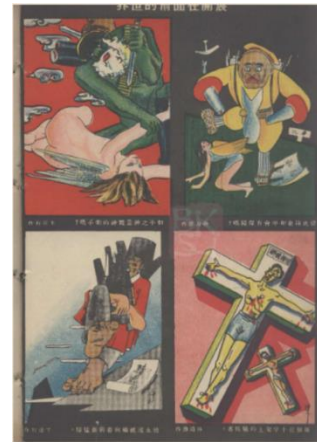


fig. 3.3: Ding Dating, 1936, *Shidai manhua* 27, 20.

¹⁴³ Ding Jia, “Like my Lord Jesus, do not Resist,” *Shidai manhua* 25 (Jan 1936), 6.

¹⁴⁴ No author, “The Roman Pope gives the people the gift of being buried into the barrel of artillery,” *Shidai manhua* 23 (Nov 1935), 16; Ding Dating, “Freely Spreading across the Face of the World,” *Shidai manhua* 27 (Mar 1936), 20.

¹⁴⁵ Yu Guang, Funian Huang, “Zhongguo fojiao jie yu kangzhan yundong yanjiu” [Research on the Chinese Buddhist circles and the resist Japan movement], *Fayin* 7 (2015), 4.

It is clear that the main goal for the *manhua* community was reformation of government officials. In 1937, another piece written by Fei Yun (“Flying Clouds”), a pseudonym which has many Buddhist undertones itself, was titled “An Old Story Written in a New Way: Pursuing Politics,” which imagines an encounter between Confucius and his disciple.¹⁴⁶ Confucius begins by lamenting “Whatever is said atop Lushan, [all the way to] Qingdao, what happiness do these words have?” Immediately, a car pulls up and his disciple exits to confer with Confucius about enrolling in a county administration college (for training government officials). Confucius scolds his disciple, arguing that “today’s government is not lively enough,” and that if his disciple is to truly reform government, he must learn about initiating what is called the Five Beauties and repealing the Four Evils.

This kind of labeling is similar to what Taixu calls the “Buddhist theories of Five Evils, Pains, Burnings and Virtues” in his “On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm,” which also served as an attack on the Confucian social bonds.¹⁴⁷ Confucius, in other words, is being “Buddhicized” by the author to attack corrupt Confucian officials. Confucius is also reoriented as more of a leftist, when he finally states that the things that any government official will be most fearful of is any educated official who teaches those under him to be good people. He states that there must be schools 教育管 (*jiaoyuguan*), trade unions 工會 (*gonghui*), boards of trade 商會 (*shanghui*), consumer cooperatives 消費合作社 (*xiaofeihezuoshe*) in addition to the establishment of *baojia* 保甲. Juxtaposed next to this short piece is a seemingly random comic labeled “a picture of boundless dharma” 佛法無邊圖 (*fofa wubian tu*), which

¹⁴⁶ Fei Yun, “Pursuing Politics,” *Shidai manhua* 35 (Jan 1937), 23-25.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, *Taixu’s ‘On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm,’* 79-80.

shows four Buddhist monks successfully repelling an air raid from a Japanese plane (fig. 3.4).¹⁴⁸

The comic, however, is not placed there randomly; rather, it is symbolism of the power of Chinese Buddhism against Japanese imperialism.

Criticisms did not just extend to domestic officials, however. The contributors of the *Shidai manhua* also wanted to use their ideas to contest the legitimacy of international organizations as well, particularly the League of Nations. In 1936, an article titled “Jesus in Geneva and Confucius” attacks the delegates of the 25th League of Nations Executive Committee and Senior Secretariat Joseph Avenol (*Aiwen Nuo*).¹⁴⁹ In what is likely a made-up dialogue between the author and a senior KMT delegate, the author criticizes the official for “always gripping hard onto the Confucian Doctrine of the Mean¹⁵⁰ and Peace.” The author goes on in length to criticize the actions of the League of Nations for its inaction in Abyssinia, which he calls “a very similar [situation] like your earlier Manchuria,” resulting in useless blood shedding.

Juxtaposed below this dialogue is a satirical comic featuring two observers looking at a statue of a Christian angel and a statue of the Avalokitesvara [Sahasrabhuja] the bodhisattva who is the principal attendant of Amitabha who evolved into the Chinese Guanyin 全觀音 (*quan Guanyin*) (fig. 3.5).¹⁵¹ The conversation goes as follows:

[First person]: Hey! Why did the God of Peace (*heping de shen*) [Christian angel] only spawn two wings?

[Second person]: Hey! You’re truly a fool, God’s have vast magical powers, they are not religious prophets... If she doesn’t take the right precautions first, simply waiting for the great world war to explode, how can we call upon her to flee with our lives?

¹⁴⁸ Wang Zhidun, “A Picture of Boundless Dharma,” *Shidai manhua* 35 (Jan 1937), 25.

¹⁴⁹ Chen Haoxiong, “Jesus in Geneva and Confucius,” *Shidai manhua* 27 (Mar 1936), 6-7.

¹⁵⁰ The Confucian Doctrine of the Mean (*zhongyong*) was written by Confucius’ only grandson, Zisi, as a chapter of the *Classic of Rites (Liji)*. It is a manuscript on Confucian ethics. See Wing-Tsit Chan, “Neo-Confucianism: New Ideas on Old Terminology” *Philosophy East and West* 17, no. 1/4 (1964): 15-35.

¹⁵¹ Shen Zhifei, untitled, *Shidai manhua* 27 (Mar 1936), 7.

[First person]: Oh! Well in that case we should just call upon the many-handed Sahasrabhuja (*quanshou guanyin*), so that, that way when the great war comes, we can throw bombs and release artillery?

[Second person]: Oh! I suppose I didn't quite clearly understand...¹⁵²

Here we see a brief quip highlighting the usefulness of a Pure Land deity to save China from the outbreak of war. We should also note the clear slight against Christ (who is portrayed as a crying angel) being a prophet rather than a god. The author of this comic clearly thought that the pacifist Christianity could not save the world from imperialism, just as it had failed in areas such as Abyssinia,¹⁵³ nor could it compare to the “vast magical powers” present within the Buddhist pantheon.

Combined with the dialogue above the comic in the “Jesus in Geneva and Confucius” section, the authors (who may be the same person using different pseudonyms) are contesting the legitimacy of international Western and secular organizations such as the League of Nations for its failures to protect those last independent states along the colonial periphery, China (Manchuria) and Abyssinia. Although it may seem like a simple joke (a god with a thousand arms being able to better launch missiles at its enemies), we have already seen how Buddhist movements across China were becoming more militarized during the Republican period in response to foreign imperialism and domestic threats from Confucian officials, both of which this piece targets. Furthermore, as we have also seen, exporting Buddhism internationally through the formation of supranational associations or societies was a key part of Taixu's agenda during the formative years of his reformation movement.¹⁵⁴ This type of political theology also extended to the fight against fascism. It is no coincidence that on the next page directly after this piece, another comic and short article titled “The Makeup of World Autocrats: The Great

¹⁵³ See Wang Zimei, “The New Bible,” *Shidai manhua* 27 (1936), 21.

¹⁵⁴ Yu, *Buddhism, War, and Nationalism*, 77.

Masters of Fascism and their Disciples” is loaded with religious terminology.¹⁵⁵ The comic accompanying various contemporary fascist figures, including Chiang Kai-shek, Hitler, and Mussolini, with one particular person wearing religious robes and a gasmask, sitting on a throne made of tank parts, rifles, and spears that seems to represent the figure of the Pope himself, or simply Christianity (fig. 3.6).

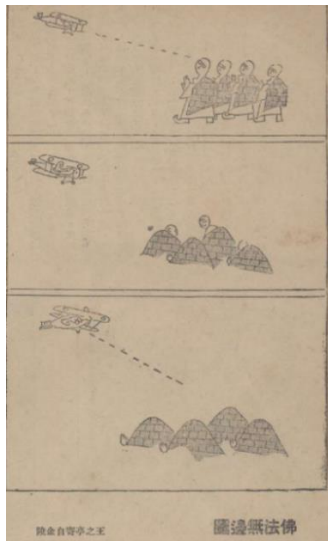


fig. 3.4: Wang Zhidun, 1937, *Shidai manhua* 35, 25.



fig. 3.5: Shen Zhifei, 1936, *Shidai manhua* 27, 7.

¹⁵⁵ Lao Ji (“Old Disciple”), The Makeup of World Autocrats: The Great Masters of Fascism and their Disciples,” *Shidai manhua* 27 (Mar 1936), 8.



fig. 3.6: Lao Ji (“Old Disciple”), 1936, *Shidai manhua* 27, 8.

Conclusion

What can be seen throughout the *Shidai manhua* is an active community of leftist artists, from various educational and social backgrounds, making use of both Pure Land Buddhism and the Kalacakra-tantra promulgated by the Pan Chen Lama. These anarcho-Buddhist ideas were juxtaposed throughout the *Shidai manhua* to do three major things. The first, and perhaps most personally for the artists as refugees across China, was to criticize the KMT and its NLM policies as misguided. The obvious issue with the espousing of high morals by KMT officials was that they were actively engaging in corrupt and immoral behaviors. Many of these artists likely lost friends, family, and even parts of their lives due to the repressive policies of the KMT, which is a part of the reason why they ended up in the Shanghai foreign concession, aside from searching for better financial prospects.

Additionally, the KMT is clearly seen as a fascist party by this community of leftist artists. Maggie Clinton has recently written about the fascist elements within the KMT, arguing that the KMT took on nativist ideologies influenced by Italian corporatism to deploy modernist aesthetics in right-wing literature and art to justify their own anti-Communist violence, in what

she calls “revolutionary nativism.”¹⁵⁶ Whether or not this is a completely accurate assessment of Chiang’s post-1926 KMT party, it is clear that a large portion of the contemporary leftist art community inside Shanghai did see the KMT as part of the larger fascist global movement. Indeed, Ye Qianyu writes in his autobiography that the major goal for starting the *Shidai manhua* was to offer a media conduit that directly contrasted with pro-KMT *Liangyou* 良友 (Youth Companion) in Shanghai.¹⁵⁷

Also, many of the contributors genuinely saw the popular anarcho-Buddhism of their times as a way of not only pacifying Western imperialism and converting the world into a sort of utopia, but also by way of strengthening China spiritually and martially. The rhetoric present in these pieces follow a close line and obvious influence from the teachings of Taixu and the Pan Chen Lama, with some even directly stating their related Buddhist association. While we should not assume that every artist and author contributing to the *Shidai manhua* was captivated by these ideologies, we should note that the publishers allowed the *Shidai manhua* to be decorated with these ideas; enough so that there is an apparent motif throughout the three years that the *Shidai manhua* was published.

This research shows that anarchism, in the form of anarcho-Buddhism, was a key element of early Shanghainese leftist communities. Although research on the *manhua* community has shown that by the 1930s this was a group of individuals who were closely associated with the

¹⁵⁶ Maggie Clinton, *Revolutionary Nativism: Fascism and Culture in China, 1925-1937* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

¹⁵⁷ Ye Qianyu, *Xixu cangsang ji liu nian: Ye Qianyu huiyilu* [An Autobiography of Ye Qianyu: Careful Narration of the Changing Ages, Recorded over the Passing Years], (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989), 70. Though the *Liangyou*, like many other periodicals of its time, held conflicting political ideologies from publication-to-publication, it was a KMT-approved periodical and offered much more, at the least soft, and at the most, pro-KMT stances on things such as the NLM and Chiang’s war efforts against Japan. See Paul Pickowicz, Kuiyi Shen, and Yingjin Zhang, *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

emerging global movement of Marxism, particularly against domestic fascism inside China (KMT) and against both fascist and general Western imperialism (Japan and Euro-America, respectively). It would be misleading to say that the overwhelming discourse present in this community was by any means Marxist, let alone Marxist-Leninist. The goal was not only to establish a communist state (an idea of which many of them had a hazy understanding still by the 1930s), but also to fulfill the promulgation of some form of world-wide Buddho-utopianism as was passed down to them by late Qing intellectuals and Buddhist reformists in the Republican era.

Lastly, the authors of these works believed, as did Tan Sitong, Taixu, and others, that Buddhism, not Confucianism, held the answers to strengthening China against the imperialism and internal corruption. Very few, if any, comics mentioning Buddhism or containing Buddhist themes are *not* juxtaposed by pieces which criticize either the KMT or external fascism.

Additionally, we should see *manhua* as a conduit founded by and associated with well-respected Buddhists (through the pedagogy of Hong Yi and Feng Zikai) for expressing what may be the true national essence in art (*guocui*). Though it took a longer time for these artists to openly produce politically aware content, its shift towards leftist anarchism was decisive by 1931, and the *Shidai manhua* serves as one of the major leftist publications in which these ideas appear in Shanghai.

Although *manhua* was largely eliminated and condemned as vulgar by later Marxists in the aftermath of Mao Zedong's 1942 "Forum on the Arts and Literature" in Yan'an, the spatio-temporal relation of *manhua* to Shanghai, where dozens of *manhua* periodicals appear in the 1930s, and the modern world likely allowed many artists to view it as one of the few appropriate artistic transmission of aesthetics which were both deeply rooted in Chinese tradition and

Western modernity. After WWII, many of these artists turned to producing propaganda for the CCP, while they also produced many *guohua* (national art) type of ink paintings throughout the 1950-60s before the Cultural Revolution.¹⁵⁸ During that time, they were forced to hide many of their formative anarchist ideologies and condemn their early *manhua* art as vulgar in the face of increasing CCP repression. New research might show that anarchism and other traditional influences did not entirely dissipate after the oppression they suffered by both the KMT and CCP. The present chapter has at least shown that their anarchist and utopian ideas flourished well into the 1930s, before the interruption instigated by the crisis of Japanese invasion in 1937.

¹⁵⁸ See Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics*. Ye Qianyu also remarked to Bi Keguan in an interview in 1986 that his “*guohua* colleagues” were the most capable to draw *manhua* (*guohua xi ban ye you tongxue neng hua manhua, tamen shi zui congming de, zui youcaineng de*); Keguan Bi, *Manhua de hua yu hua* [The words and drawings of *manhua*], (Beijing: *Zhongguo wen ji chubanshe*, 2001), 106.

Toward a Conclusion: The Legacy of Leftist *Manhua*

Writing about his first experiences researching *manhua* in the 1980s, Bi Keguan noted that he felt a sudden excitement upon discovering Ye Qianyu's collection of unpublished sketches. He felt it necessary to reintroduce the lost history of *manhua*, focusing first on Ye's now well-known Mr. Wang comic strips, as well as the anti-Japanese *manhua* during WWII.¹⁵⁹ Without doubt, much of the importance of *manhua*'s place in Chinese culture and society has been wiped away due to the implementation of Mao Zedong's ideology on proper, socialist realist aesthetics promulgated in the aftermath of the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts in 1942.¹⁶⁰ For most of the post-1949 period *manhua* has been regarded as childish or a vulgar collection of rudimentary drawings, naked women, and other advertisements to allure readers into the frenzy of consumption that is a hallmark of Republican Shanghai.¹⁶¹ Indeed, Bi himself often regarded the *manhua* of the Republican period as having "two distinct elements:" one good for its anti-imperialism and attempts to radicalize Shanghai's petty bourgeoisie, and one negative (*xiaoji*), for its inclusion of nudity within the periodicals as an "abnormal state of content, part of that period's social ills" (*dangshi shihui de yizhong bingtai*).¹⁶²

Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin were working within the framework that they could. One suspects that part of their conclusion derives from the inability to escape party orthodox

¹⁵⁹ Keguan Bi, *Manhua de hua yu hua* [Manhua words and drawings] (Beijing: Zhongguo wen ji chubanshe, 2001), 99.

¹⁶⁰ Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 13.

¹⁶¹ Bi, *Manhua de hua yu hua*, 130. In an interview with Wang Dunqing, Wang notes that the reason periodicals such as the *Shidai manhua* had such a contradictory composition (of propaganda and advertisements) is due to the fact that there were "four bosses" (shareholders) aside from the "big boss" (*da laoban*), Shao Xunmei, all of whom were responsible for four or five magazines as editors and publishers. Therefore, Wang believes they "took advantage of" the productions of periodicals such as the *Shidai manhua* or *Shanghai manhua* by filling it with advertisements, something the artists saw as an issue among all their periodicals at the time.

¹⁶² Bi Keguan & Huang Yuanlin, *Zhongguo manhua shi*, 107.

interpretations of history well into the 1980s. But this simplification of *manhua*'s place within Shanghai's society and among the literary and artistic circles of Shanghai undermine its contemporary importance. Shao Xunmei never achieved the kind of reverence that Lu Xun enjoys today, but the two were very aware of each other, both popular among the Shanghai literary circles, and butted heads frequently. Shao Xunmei published three separate articles in the *Shidai manhua*, one in 1934 and two in 1935, and each targeted what Shao saw as Lu Xun's narcissism and misguided views on the role literature and arts play in Chinese society.¹⁶³

Li Meihan notes that its likely Shao did not expect to catch Lu Xun's attention, but Lu Xun *did* respond, and the two engaged in a series of debates throughout the 1920-30s.¹⁶⁴ The primary point of contention, regarding *manhua*, was Lu Xun's belief that *manhua* was being used in a wrong way. He entertained the idea of *manhua* as a way of inspiring the masses, especially for instructing the youth 启蒙功能 (*qimeng gongneng*) with its "function of enlightenment." But he could not get over the fact that *manhua* often satirized those marginalized people of society that needed help the most, including gamblers, opium addicts, and the wretched. When discussing Western comics, Lu Xun commented: "Look at European comics, the ones that carry the most weight target women, Jews, revolutionaries—pictures of all the oppressed." Yet, Lu Xun envisioned: "satirical pictures ought to be able to incisively criticize the chronic illness of society" (*fengci hua ben keyi zhenbian shehui de guji*). If they could be used in the way Lu Xun hoped, they would instead critique the feudal practices of China instead

¹⁶³ The three pieces were published as follows: "A Few Bets and a Few People" (*Ji zhong du yu ji ge ren*), *Shidai manhua* 2 (Feb. 20th, 1934); "On Traveling" (*Guanyu youxing*), *Shidai manhua* 14 (Feb. 20th, 1935); "Sincere Words" (*Zhenxinhua*), *Shidai manhua* 19 (Sep. 20th, 1935). Each are sarcastic in tone, and at times Shao even goes as far to claim his literary style is superior to Lu Xun's.

¹⁶⁴ Limei Han 韩丽梅, "Shao Xunmei, Lu Xun lunzheng shishi de zai sikao—cong 'Shidai manhua' shuoqi," [Further Reflections on the Historical Facts of the Shao Xunmei and Lu Xun Controversy – Regarding the *Shidai manhua*], *Lu Xun yanjiu yuekan* [Lu Xun Researcher Monthly] 7 (2019): 36. On pages 43-44, Limei Han has documented 41 different correspondences between Lu Xun and Shao Xunmei between 1928-1936.

of those oppressed groups.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps the artists believed these peoples stood in as a metonym for the nation, in ways in which their very realistic portrayals of addiction and destitution from their real world experiences, combined with their own outcast backgrounds, could reflect the illnesses of the nation.

If we take *manhua* and its history at their face value, then it may appear surprising that Lu Xun was even reading the *Shidai manhua* at all and felt the need to critique it in his writings. Yet, Lu Xun's attention towards the periodical speaks volumes about the importance the *Shidai manhua* commanded not only within Shanghai, but also among active and patriotic literary circles. Within the cosmopolitan space of Shanghai, *manhua* proved to be a formidable force in educating the semi-literate population, and the *Shidai manhua* had been by far the largest *manhua* periodical within Shanghai. As Kuiyi Shen notes, the first issue of the *Shidai manhua* was sold with more than 10,000 copies.¹⁶⁶ Few names could overshadow Lu Xun's in terms of importance for the nationalistic narrative of Chinese history. But we should not allow literary elites to overshadow the importance of key figures in the history of *manhua* and modern Chinese art and aesthetics. After all, both *manhua* and anarchist ideas were intended to be conduits for "the people." Recently, Feng Zikai and perhaps to a lesser extent his teacher Li Shutong (Hong Yi) have enjoyed a great deal of scholarly attention due to the role they played in revolutionizing certain fields of art and aesthetic thought. At the same time, it is understandable why the early histories of *manhua* have been lost to us. Mao Zedong's ideas on art and the CCP's general sentiment of anti-Western bourgeois culture, have relegated an important part of Chinese history and its cultural dialogues with the West to obscurity. With the renewed interest in *manhua* in

¹⁶⁵ Min Niu, "Xin meiti shiyu xia de xiandai manhua zhuanxing yanjiu," [Research on the transformation of modern comics from the perspective of new media] (Dissertation, Hubei University, 2021), 25; see Lu Xun "Lianhuan tuhua—bianhu" (In defense of comic serials), *Wenxue Yuebao* [Literature Monthly], 1932, Jan. 15th.

¹⁶⁶ Kuiyi Shen, "Lianhuanhua and manhua," 115.

present-day China and the world, recognition of the historic importance of the *Shidai manhua* periodical thus becomes all the more necessary to understand.

Continuing the Struggle: 1937-1945

After the *Shidai manhua* was shut down and the subsequent Japanese invasion in 1937, the leading contributors of the *Shidai manhua* each went their separate ways, either together in smaller groups, or independently as the situation called for. Ye Qianyu, Zhang Leping 張樂平 (1910-1992), and others traveled westward, first to Wuhan and then to Chongqing, to accompany the KMT in their fight against the Japanese invasion. Wasting no time, soon after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident erupted, Ye and others founded the National Salvation Cartoon Association 上海漫畫界救亡協會 (*Shanghai manhua jie jiuwang xiehui*), a part of the KMT's propaganda corps.¹⁶⁷ The comics focused on depicting the realities of Japanese invasion, the struggle of the Chinese population and soldiers, and Wang Jingwei's 汪精衛 (1883-1944) puppet state. Xuang Wenjie, a member of the corps, stated that they frequently held exhibitions, and that they received enthusiasm from large crowds. But by 1939, the KMT began viewing the corps with increasing suspicion, especially due to their favorable depictions of peasant resistance alongside the troops, and in 1940 it discontinued funds for the cartoon propaganda corps, forcing many more to spread out even further, especially in Guilin and Xi'an.¹⁶⁸ Many former members of the *Shidai manhua* continued to contribute to the resistance war effort regardless, traveling from Nanjing, Hankou, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong back to Chongqing among other places.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 94.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

¹⁶⁹ Haoran Wu, "Minguo manhua yitan lu zhi si: Wang Dunqing zhiduoqing" [Records on the *Manhua* Circles of the Republic 4: The Bright Star Wang Dunqing], *Shoucang* [Collections] 13 (2015), 158.

Lu Shaofei had decided to depart from the KMT's retreat westward and take the fight elsewhere. Lu had longstanding connections with the KMT; he joined the KMT in the Northern Expedition (1924-1926) in 1924 where he left his post after a few months.¹⁷⁰ Going down to Guangzhou, in 1938 Lu set up the "National Mobilization Pictorial" 國家總動員畫報 (*Guojia zongdongyuan huabao*) to inspire KMT troops to fight. Lu traveled far and wide throughout the years of 1938-1943 and has one of the more interesting experiences in the *manhua* community during the war. Together with his friend Sa Kongliao 薩空了 (1907-1988) in Hong Kong in 1938, Lu trekked together across China to Xinjiang, where, after eight months of travel, they established the *Xinjiang Daily* 新疆日報 (*Xinjiang ribao*) in Urumqi and proceeded to print a series of articles and *manhua*. Distant from the KMT, Lu actually published a poem about the Long March, where he proclaimed them the "strong warriors of the revolutionary Long March" (*Jiang shi geming li changzheng*).¹⁷¹ Lu was also commissioned by Zhang Zhizhong 張治中 (1890-1969) in 1943 to publish a *manhua* series called "Brother Ma" 馬二哥 (*Ma erge*) in the *Peace Daily* 和平日報 (*Heping ribao*). After the war, Lu joined the People's Art Press 人民美術出版社 (*Renmin meishu chubanshe*) in 1951 and produced an array of *manhua* throughout the 1950s-70s, many of which were marginally popular to begin with and totally forgotten by the time of the Cultural Revolution, only rediscovered in the post-Mao period.¹⁷²

Increasing attachment to the CCP and other leftist groups became common among many former *Shidai manhua* artists and publishers. Zhang Guangyu 張光宇 (1900-1965),

¹⁷⁰ Yang Lin, "Zhonggou manhua tan de Bole Lu Shaofei" [Chinese *Manhua* Circle's Bole, Lu Shaofei], *Minzhu [Democracy]* 2 (2016): 38.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 40-41.

originally following Ye Qianyu into Wuhan and Chongqing, left the KMT war-time capital after the New Fourth Army Incident in 1940, blaming the assassination of CCP leader Xiang Ying 項英 (1895?-1941) on the KMT and traveling to Guangzhou and Guilin, only returning to Chongqing on the eve of Japanese defeat in the Pacific War.¹⁷³ Zhang had been one of the earliest and most rapacious critics of the KMT during the civil war period. Seeing the KMT controlled land as nothing more than a dilapidated state full of corruption, Zhang created the *Manhua Journey to the West* 漫畫西游 (*Manhua xiyou*) in 1945, where it was exhibited on November 18th of that year. In this series, Zhang used a blend of stories from the great epic with Zhang's own chapters, which are situated in the backdrop of the land of ancient Aegysine, reminiscent of ancient Egypt (fig. 4.1).¹⁷⁴ The masterpiece effectively uses artistic and literary allusions to criticize the corrupted state of the KMT by using the mischievous Sun Wukong as a hero against the injustices of government officials; one of the stories depicted is the Monkey King, saving "Lady Mengjiang's" husband from corvee labor (fig. 4.2).¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Jiaming Wang, "Zhang Guangyu: bei yiwang de dashi:" [Zhang Guangyu: the forgotten master], *Zhongmei meishu* [China Fine Arts] 1 (2013), 130.

¹⁷⁴ Crespi, *Manhua Modernity*, 95.

¹⁷⁵ You can find comics and translations for Zhang Guangyu's *Xiyou manhua* at <https://www.nickstember.com/manhua-journey-west-part-1-6/>.



Fig. 4.1: Zhang Guangyu, 1945, *Xanhua xiyou*.

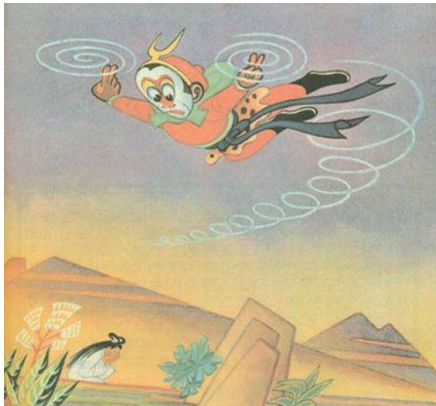


Fig. 4.2: Zhang Guangyu, 1945, *Manhua xiyou*.

Other artists gave up on following the KMT entirely. Cai Ruohong 蔡若虹 (1910-2002), Hua Junwu 華君武 (1915-2010), and Zhang Ding 張仃 (1917-2010) left for Yan'an in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Together, they founded the *Resistance Pictorial* 抗敵畫報 (*Kangdi huabao*) and *Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Pictorial* 晉察冀畫報 (*Jin-Cha-Ji huabao*) in the early 1940s.¹⁷⁶ In 1942 they held an exhibition called the “Three Man Satirical Cartoon Show” 三人諷刺漫畫展 (*Sanren fengci manhua zhan*), which exposed what they saw as certain social and political problems due to the CCP cadre’s heavy handed policing of Yan’an.¹⁷⁷ Zhang E in particular highlighted the narcissism of cadre’s in an article published in the “Liberation Daily”

¹⁷⁶ Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 236.

¹⁷⁷ Jiang Feng, “Guanyu fengci huazhan” (On the satirical art exhibition), Feb. 15th, 1942.

解放日報 (*Jiefang ribao*) in 1943 called “I am No. 6 in the World,” a reference to the fact that they saw themselves only below “Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.”¹⁷⁸ Hua Junwu recalled in a later interview that the exhibition and criticisms caught the attention of Mao, and Mao forced them to meet with him for dinner in order to criticize them for holding an “incorrect attitude.”¹⁷⁹ Eventually, the artists settled for making pieces that mainly targeted Chiang’s policies in KMT-controlled land and his failing war effort.

The Legacy of Early Manhua

The popularity of *manhua* faltered after the establishment of the CCP in 1949, and the main method of popular socialist content was primarily *lianhuanhua*. Only a single *manhua* magazine existed during the 1950s, the *Manhua zazhi* 漫畫雜誌, which shut down in 1960. Its content was quite similar to that of earlier left-wing *manhua*, particularly in its support for the Korean war in 1951-1953.¹⁸⁰ Mainly though, *manhua* and *lianhuanhua* had reverted back to being primarily for children. Outside of China, Japanese *manga* has for a long time overtaken the stage of cultural transfer from East Asia to the rest of the world. But a new wave of *manhua* publications has begun to revive the once dormant Chinese industry and artistic practice, especially as China has opened up to the rest of the world.

The 1980s saw a revival of comic art across Asia. Comic art had been simultaneously seen as either a child’s media for teaching social or educational values, and alternatively as a dangerous influence towards children in particular. In 1955, the Japanese Parent and Teachers Association began a movement called the “Movement to Catch and Release Evil Books,” (c. *e*

¹⁷⁸ Zhang E, “Wo shi shijie de di liu ge,” (I am no. 6 in the world), *Jiefang ribao*, Apr. 6th, 1943, 4.

¹⁷⁹ Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 236-237.

¹⁸⁰ Jennifer Altehenger, “A Socialist Satire: Manhua Magazine and Political Production in the PRC, 1950-1960,” *Frontiers of History in China* 8, no. 1 (2013), 80-81.

shu zhui fang yundong, j. *rerui hontsui undou*) which specifically targeted *manga* to be gathered and burned. But a thriving *anime* and *manga* culture entered China after the reformation, accompanied by a renaissance in the arts with the lifting of state monopolies on things like animation 動畫 (*donghua*) and the pouring in of foreign comic sources. The success of *manga* artists such as Shotaro Ishinomori showed that *manga* or *manhua* could be an appropriate way to reach all audiences aside from children, and touch on every type of social issue and topic.¹⁸¹

The resurgent *manhua* in China may have taken on different artistic forms and aesthetic values, but hidden beneath the new forms of art remained lurked the same unique purpose that *manhua* and comics in general had always thrived at expressing: social criticism. Themes under the influence of Western and Japanese comics such as cyberpunk shifted the media of *manhua* from being openly leftist, to more subtle criticisms of modernity (fig. 4.3).¹⁸² The genre of cyberpunk is an embodiment with a peculiar fascination with, and anxiety of, modernity in the form of urbanization. The mentioning of the cyberpunk genre immediately evokes the imagery of an overcrowded, destitute and dirty city, operated by an authoritarian government who supports wealthy businesses and figures but turns a blind eye to gangster crime, only deploying law enforcement to oppress the locally impoverished people. A person's social class is reflected by their space within an apartment complex (with the lower rungs at the bottom, the wealthy on top). The feelings of claustrophobia are artistic manifestations of psychological distress to the residents of an ever-transforming city like Shanghai or Beijing. Unlike America or Europe,

¹⁸¹ Niu, "Xin meiti shiyu xia de xiandai manhua zhuanxing yanjiu," 23-24.

¹⁸² Yin Yuan, "Saibo pengke manhua yishu fengge he fazhan yanbian yanjiu" [Research on the artistic style and development of cyberpunk comics] (Master's thesis, China Academy of Art, 2022), 22.

though, the primary adaptation of cyberpunk aesthetics came predominately from *manga* or *manhua*, rather than science fiction novels.¹⁸³



fig. 4.3: *Mobisi* (Mobius), 1980, a man flings himself from the top of a building.

Coda

Recently, a new genre of comics from the West, “rage comics,” 暴走漫畫 (*baozou manhua*) has gained increasing popularity in China. Rage comics are most famous for their crude depiction of Xi Jinping as Winnie the Pooh. But more importantly, rage comics were born from the pressures of an increasingly competitive economic global market, in which many youth feel alienated and without hope. It represents a national youth’s reaction to a teetering job market, intense domestic and national demands pushed upon them, and a backlash against increasing inequality.¹⁸⁴ Despite losing their political flare, *manhua* and comics everywhere still represent a successful conduit of media transmission in which all kinds of people can freely express their ideas through art and their communities. Indeed, internet forums provide a unique space between

¹⁸³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁸⁴ Changsheng Yu, “*Xin meijie shiye xia baouzou manhua de wenhua fenxi zhongwen zhaiyao*,” [A cultural analysis of rage comics under the new media horizons] (Master’s thesis, Suzhou University, 2015), 19.

artist and observer, where artists can call upon their fans for advice, ideas, or what they like most. In some ways, then, the situation has changed. Instead of artists pushing their ideas onto others in hopes of ideologically swaying them to their side of the political field, they rather seek commercial success and a lively community to be built around their artistic spaces.

It is hard to measure the exact legacy of something like the *Shidai manhua*. Popular culture has been left behind by many in academia, or simply overlooked, especially comics, which have been associated in as “children’s comics” across the globe. But the creative anti-institutional conduit of comic art remains, and to this day the power that comics command economically and culturally remain in front of us. The Marvel movies franchise, for example, is a billion-dollar business. Companies across Asia such as Studio Ghibli and BiliBili have had great success from comic-*anime* adaptations. And while the content has changed, the foundation of comic art as a moral and ethical source of cultivation remains. Children learn social norms and values from comic art. Adults sometimes find a particular fascination with artworks, perhaps from the nostalgia of an age once passed, or perhaps because of the aesthetic feeling it invokes within them.

Manhua art’s ontological origins remain a question of mystery. In many ways during the early 20th century, *manhua* was the source of open debate among many Chinese nationalists and artists, even in terms of etymological origin, until they finally settled on the term *manhua*, picked by Lu Xun in the 1920s, as a term firmly rooted in “Asianness.” But *manhua*, and comic art by extension, represent no particular national form of art as much as it represents the emerging globalized modernity at the turn of the 20th century. At a time when literacy was coming into its full fruition across many areas in the world, and as an artistic method that could be as reasonably rudimentary as it needed to be, comic art was the perfect method of art to engage in social

discourse, criticism, and ultimately, humor. There is no doubt that the early English and American comics such as the *China Punch* or *Puck* enjoyed reception by Chinese artists in Shanghai in the 1880s-1910s.¹⁸⁵ Comic art instead represents a unique product of transculturation, positioned among a group of young professionals who were often on the brink of poverty, simply trying to share their creative talents with the world, much like today.

Yet *manhua* itself also represents a method of art that embodies the principles of preserving national essence (*guocui*) by applying Western methods to Chinese “substance.” It is true that modern comic art is a product of transculturation, but sketching and similar art forms, as Geremie Barme has noted, can arguably be found as far back as the early Qing dynasty through the works of figures such as Chen Shizeng.¹⁸⁶ Clearly, many *manhua* artists felt that what they were producing was the quintessential method of preserving national essence during the 1920-30s. Huang Mao once remarked:

The sinicized cartoon ... does not disregard the merits in Chinese traditional painting ... We must retain the marvels of brush and ink in Chinese art. But we also lack a scientific approach to drawings and are short of basic sketching techniques. By combining these with Western perspective devices and the art of human anatomy, we can create a new style. In brief, Western techniques must be expressed through our national forms.... If we can blend Chinese reality with our national forms, sinicized cartoons [*zhongguohua de manhua*] will emerge.¹⁸⁷

Manhua was a serious matter for these artists. Not only because it was just their job but also because they truly felt as though they had found an optimal path in saving China, its culture, and its people.

Popular culture such as *manhua* deserves a louder voice in history. If we are to confidently say that modern institutions such as communism or even liberalism truly are “for the

¹⁸⁵ See Christopher Rea, “‘He’ll Roast All Subjects That May Need the Roasting’: Puck and Mr Punch in Nineteenth Century China,” *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair*, ed. Hans Harder (Berlin: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2013): 389–422.

¹⁸⁶ Barme, *An Artistic Exile*, 61.

¹⁸⁷ Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 126.

people” in some democratic way, then we should look at what *the people* themselves are producing and saying, rather than the national literati and other elites. The *Shidai manhua* and the other comic-periodicals in co-existence in Shanghai shaped a unique platform through which authentic voices of an eclectic group of artists were able to directly reach out to their audience, the everyday Shanghainese and any educated members of the society who were willing to flip through the pages of such a “vulgar” magazine, like Lu Xun. Thus, despite clearly being a propaganda periodical in many ways, what separates the *Shidai manhua* from other propaganda visual culture is the fundamental structure and apparatus of the periodical. Propaganda monopolized by a party or state is not the voice of its people, but rather of its leaders. Even though Shao Xunmei was no leftist,¹⁸⁸ the structure of his periodicals reflects this attitude clearly, despite its many internal contradictions.¹⁸⁹ The *Shidai manhua* and its artists, instead of representing comics, China, or May Fourth culture, represent the shifting realities and experiences of a globally cosmopolitan Shanghai, and of modernity itself. Full of contradictions and pluralities, a transcultural experience and a feeling of both hope and despair for what the future would hold in store for it, nevertheless prevail.

¹⁸⁸ Bin Chang, and Limei Han, “Shao Xunmei ‘*Shidai manhua*’ de ban kan sixiang” [The ideology of Shao Xunmei’s established ‘*Shidai manhua*’], *Youth Journalist* 15 (2019), 103-104.

¹⁸⁹ See Bevan, “Shao Xunmei and his Circle,” in *A Modern Miscellany*, 53-92.

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