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The Fuming Image: Cartoons and Public Opinion in Late Republican China, 1945 to 1949

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When Cantonese cartoonist Liao Bingxiong (1915–) mounted his show, *The Cat Kingdom* (*Maoguo chungiu*), at the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association (Zhong-Su wenhua xiehui) in Chongqing—China’s wartime capital—in March 1946,¹ he was prompted by more than an artistic urge: He intended to issue a strong criticism of the Guomindang (Nationalist) government for its inability to deal with the country’s rapidly deteriorating situation. The show was an overwhelming success, “creating a sensation in this hilly city,” in the words of one contemporary artist.² The show was greeted with equal enthusiasm when it was put on later in other cities, such as Chengdu and Kunming. Such a favorable reception reflected both the artistry of Liao’s works and, more important, the relevance of cartoons as a powerful tool for airing opinion.

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¹ The show was informally staged a few weeks earlier during the Chinese New Year in Beibei, a town near Chongqing and the temporary campus site of Shanghai’s Fudan University during the Sino-Japanese War. See Huang Mengtian (1981:61–62).

² See Ye (1985:182). See also Zhu Jinlou (1946). Wilma Fairbank, the Cultural Attaché of the American Embassy in China from 1945 to 1947, was so impressed by Liao’s drawings that in 1946 she extended her invitation to Liao to come to the United States. But Liao turned down the offer due to his wife’s illness. See Liao (1990), Huang Mengtian (1981:62). Wilma Fairbank, however, gives a slightly different account:

The Embassy’s cultural relation’s program extended invitations for creative Chinese in various fields to spend a year in America. I favored inviting a cartoonist for 1946–47. By the time invitations were extended, I believe both Liao and Zhang [Guangyu] had gone to Hong Kong. Ye [Qianyu] was invited and accepted, spending that year with his (then) wife [dancer Dai Ailian, 1916–] chiefly in New York, I believe (Fairbank 1991).

In her earlier work about her experience in China, Fairbank briefly talked about Ye Qianyu’s trip to the United States but made no mention of Liao Bingxiong and Zhang Guangyu. See Fairbank (1976:106).

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This was a troubled time. China had just concluded a bitter eight-year war (the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–45, known in China as the War of Resistance against Japan). Victory notwithstanding, the country's nightmare continued when the Nationalists and the Communists openly resumed their old rivalry, plunging the country into a civil war (1945–49).³ By late 1945, it became distressingly clear that the newly restored stability and confidence were eroding rapidly. The initial mood of exhilaration soon gave way to widespread dissatisfaction and anger. Beset by rampant inflation and endemic corruption, the Nationalist government became increasingly mired in chaos and confusion. The peasantry's impoverishment received no remedy from the central authorities. As the government foundered in political disarray, the measures to suppress criticism and dissension intensified, leaving intellectuals totally disillusioned. The air was tense and full of protest. Liao Bingxiong's *The Cat Kingdom*, which indicted the government's ineptitude, corruption, and oppression, was such a protest.

What Liao Bingxiong did was not an isolated incident but part of a widespread, albeit uncoordinated, campaign by cartoonists to use their art as a weapon in attacking the government. Largely unchronicled by scholars, this campaign and its political ramifications deserve careful attention and consideration. Liao's drawings showed that indignation about the Guomindang after the Sino-Japanese War was not expressed only in the printed words or student demonstrations on the street (well documented by Suzanne Pepper in her book, *Civil War in China* [1978]) but also in the form of a pictorial attack. Postwar cartoon shows, such as *The Cat Kingdom*, raise empirical and theoretical questions concerning the role of cartoons in China's turbulent political world, as well as the relationship between images and public opinion. This article argues that cartoons are a key ingredient in modern Chinese journalism because they mirror society, convey emotions that other materials do not, and illuminate aspects of history that are often unexplored by documentary evidence. And, more important, because they shape popular sentiments, cartoons are an effective tool of persuasion. The uniqueness and significance of cartoons as important sources lie not only in their depictions of events but also in their allegorical and symbolic interpretation of the problems of the day. The images that the cartoonists created were politically motivated in that the choice of a visual language—setting, figure, gesture, color—was designed both to air the artist's view and to influence contemporary perceptions of the government. Images generate power and help shape events. Chinese cartoonists were thus both artists and opinion makers. When the battle for public opinion after the war became in part a struggle for mastery of images, cartoons became an essential element in the unfolding political drama in modern China.

³ The social and political background of the civil war has been exhaustively explored in Pepper (1978).

The choice of cartoons as a political tool by Chinese artists was not entirely accidental. The cartoon is a unique visual art which combines biting images and humorous contents to make a strong commentary. As a rule, the cartoonist makes use of distortion and exaggeration and reduces complex situations to simple images, treating a theme with a touch of immediacy. A cartoon can mask a forceful intent behind an innocuous facade, hence it is an ideal art of deception. A good cartoon, of course, entails fine technique and vivid presentation of material; but artistry is only secondary to a cartoon's main purpose. It is the idea that takes center stage. Drawn with economy of line, a good cartoon does more than making viewers laugh or cry: It inspires them to think. "To draw a cartoon," advised Feng Zikai (1898–1975), one of China's foremost cartoonists in the twentieth century, "you must first have ideas" (Feng 1948:37). "I don't believe drawing has much to do with the success of a cartoon," echoed John McCutcheon (1950:203), the long-time cartoonist of the *Chicago Tribune*. "The cartoon differs from any other picture in that the idea alone is the essential requirement, whether it is meant to inform, reform or solely to amuse."

Cartoons are influential because they can be produced in large quantities and are capable of reaching a large audience. Their reliance on pictorial representation renders them extremely effective because they are comprehensible even to those who cannot read, thus performing a function unmatched by the printed word. In the 1870s, cartoonist Thomas Nast's dogged crusade caused political boss William Marcy Tweed, before he and his corrupt Tammany Ring were driven from power in New York City, to lament: "I don't care what they print about me, most of my constituents can't read anyway—but them damn pictures!" (Hoff 1976:77).

Chinese cartoonists hoped to produce similar results despite the relative novelty of their art. Inspired by the West and Japan at the turn of the century, Chinese cartoons (*manhua*) thrived in the 1930s in such major cities as Shanghai.⁴ The growing interest in cartoons developed at the same time as the rise of modern press. To vie for readers, newspapers introduced appealing layouts and illustrations. As material progress created curiosity and an increasingly acquisitive urban middle class demanded new avenues of excitement, cartoons became more commercialized, offering a convenient escape from daily chores. In the 1920s and 1930s, not only were the works of Honoré Daumier, George Grosz, Miguel Covarrubias, and David Low introduced from the West; but native magazines, such as Shanghai's *Modern Cartoons* (*Shidai manhua*), also enjoyed considerable popularity.⁵ Young artists learned the

⁴ Cartoonist Feng Zikai first used the term *manhua* (cartoon) in May 1925, when his "Zikai's Cartoons" (*Zikai manhua*) appeared in *Wenxue zhoubao* (Literary Weekly). See Feng (1931), especially Zheng Zhenduo's preface.

⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, popular literary magazines, such as *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany), *Lunyu* (Analects), *Yuzhou feng* (Cosmic Wind), regularly printed works by Daumier,

ropes from foreign masters: Zhang Guangyu (1900–64) learned from Covarrubias, Cai Ruohong (1910–) from Grosz, and Te Wei (1915–) from Low. Each later developed a distinct style by blending Western with Chinese techniques.

Cartoons made even greater strides during the War of Resistance when patriotic cartoonists, such as Ye Qianyu (1907–) and Zhang Leping (1910–92), used the art to mobilize the Chinese masses to fight against the Japanese invasion.⁶ Ye and Zhang formed the cartoon propaganda corps, staging their works in the streets and near the front to galvanize public support and boost morale for the war cause. But if cartoons during the War of Resistance were predictably patriotic and anti-imperialistic, postwar pieces were intensely political and anti-government. This change reflected a natural shift of focus from external to internal affairs: Now that the invader had been defeated, how should China embark on the enormous task of recovery? Are there ways to reconcile the longstanding differences between the Nationalists and the Communists? What the cartoonists saw, however, greatly disturbed and disappointed them; the Nationalists were rapidly losing their mandate to rule and the country was spiraling downward into chaos.

IMAGES

Despite their success in preserving a sovereign China, the Nationalists emerged badly wounded from the Sino-Japanese War. The war had weakened their army, bankrupted the economy, and forced them to flee westward from coastal cities, their main sources of financial support. But the Nationalist government's troubles and, ultimately, its undoing stemmed largely from its flawed political system and inept leadership. The military and authoritarian nature of the Guomindang and Jiang Jieshi's preoccupation with "one faith, one party, and one will" (Eastman 1984:89) denied any genuine political reform which would allow the party to become more receptive to public needs.⁷ China's problems—continued government mismanagement of the economy (failing to control skyrocketing inflation and stabilize the currency), an impoverished peasantry burdened with debt, corruption and incompetent leadership in the military, and perennial intraparty factional fightings—worsened after the war. Moreover, Jiang Jieshi, buoyed by the recent victory over Japan and confident of America's continued support, decided to wage an unpopular civil war against the Communists. Such a decision quickly alienated a large segment of the urban population, especially students, intellec-

Grosz, Covarrubias, and Low. See, for example, *Dongfang zazhi*, 21:19 (October 10, 1924); *Lunyu*, 20 (July 1, 1933); *Yuzhou feng*, 2 (October 1, 1935). For a brief history of Chinese cartoons, see Bi and Huang (1986).

⁶ For a detailed discussion of Chinese wartime cartoons, see Hung (forthcoming).

⁷ See Lloyd E. Eastman's analysis in Eastman (1984). For a discussion of the earlier Nanjing decade, see Eastman (1974).

tuals, and businessmen. Disillusionment, fear, despair, and anger gripped the entire nation. Much of the agony of this period was reflected vividly in the works of Chinese cartoonists, fueling further opposition to the government.

Predictably, the government's corruption was a perennial theme in postwar cartoons. Liao Bingxiong's *The Cat Kingdom* was the quintessential piece on this subject. Composed of five sets of works and totaling more than one hundred pieces, *The Cat Kingdom* took Liao six months to complete (from September 1945 to February 1946). It was an artistic tour de force blended with unmistakable anger and frustration. Liao was relentless in lashing out at the Guomindang government, but he did it indirectly and ingeniously. In lieu of a human world, Liao, a self-taught artist and from humble background (Liao 1990), used cats and mice to portray a most gloomy and oppressive existence under the Guomindang rule. Rather than being deadly enemies, cat and mouse have become good friends and collaborators, helping each other to perpetuate evil deeds. In "Mouse Bribery" (Shu hui, Plate 1), a cat bearing the Nationalist emblem is lavishly plied with fish. In return he lets the mice's smuggling activities continue unchecked. The plump cat reappears in another incarnation as a judge, presiding over a dispute between two mice ("Cat Judge" [Mao pan], Plate 2). Flanked by fierce-looking guards and sitting in front of a desk littered with fish bones and inscribed with "just and wise," the cat angrily hands down his predictable verdict: the one capable of showering the court with fish emerges triumphant. Reminiscent of Honoré Daumier's "Man of Justice" (1848), Liao's "Cat Judge" reminds his readers that in a corrupt system, justice rests not on the principle of fairness and reason but on how much money one has in one's pocket. As Liao saw it, law was definitely on the side of the rich and powerful.

The Cat Kingdom is a consummate piece of political art which never raises the topic of politics. Liao's anger found its best expression in the grotesque world of animals. Such an artistic device is, of course, by no means new. The nineteenth-century French cartoonist, Jean-Ignace-Isidore Gérard (known as Grandville), was particularly noted for his use of half-human, half-animal characters to decry social follies and to attack the regime of King Louis-Philippe. But Liao's approach and message were thoroughly Chinese. The court room scene, its ironic depiction, and its somber setting brought to mind the traditional Chinese story illustration and pointed clearly to a target at home. Liao's skillful use of black-and-white contrast accentuates the horror and the cruelty of the legal system under a discredited government.

The real business of government officials, Liao Bingxiong lamented, was not addressing social ills or the anticipation of public wants but guarding privilege and perpetuating the existing machinery. The intentionally cynical description of the just and wise in Liao's "Cat Judge" resonated in a large number of other works questioning the leadership of the Guomindang. Zhang Guangyu's 1945 cartoon series, *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou manji*), is a case in

point (Zhang Guangyu 1983: preface). Like Liao Bingxiong's *The Cat Kingdom*, Zhang's carefully executed *Journey to the West* won wide acclaim when it was first staged in Chongqing in 1945. Although Liao issued separate forays, Zhang employed a story format to recount the government's failings, a technique he learned from the centuries-old Chinese tradition of storytelling. Totalling sixty color pictures and based on the famous Ming novel, *Journal to the West* (*Xiyou ji*), Zhang's version portrays the well-known pilgrimage undertaken by Tripitaka, Monkey, Pigsy, and Sandy. This technique of pouring new wine into old bottles was a familiar one. But Zhang's genius lay in his reliance on some of the most beloved fictional characters in Chinese popular novels to address a sensitive subject. Instead of monsters and gods, the four pilgrims now encounter bribery, spying, economic collapse, and government demoralization on their legendary journey to the West. In Plate 3, Pigsy is forced to give gold to a guard of the Kingdom of Paper Money in order to gain safe passage for the group. Zhang's masterful use of colors added depth and tone to his subjects, leading the reader's eye through comically distorted scenes. Of course, both Liao and Zhang in their works were not asking viewers to examine the animal kingdom nor the realm of fables but the land they (Liao and Zhang) already inhabited.

Although Liao and Zhang used fictional characters to criticize the government, Ding Cong (commonly known as Xiao Ding [Little Ding], 1916–) adopted a more realistic but no less biting approach. Ding's cartoon worlds were often populated by readily recognizable real people. His piece, "A Public Servant," (Gongpu, 1946, Plate 4), which graced the cover of the popular Shanghai magazine, *Weekly* (*Zhoubao*), reiterated a similar charge against a regime going morally and legally astray.⁸ The cartoon shows a government official, accompanied by a furred and bejeweled woman, sitting atop a car carried by an enervated man underneath. Instead of serving the people, the official abuses his power by reaping financial gains from the poor. He is greedy and self-aggrandizing. His corpulent frame stands not for honesty or law but for exploitation and chicanery. Arrogance written all over his face, he is completely indifferent to the fate of the deprived, which makes his behavior even more abhorrent.

Ding Cong produced some of his best works in denouncing the Guomindang after the Sino-Japanese War. He had a keen sense of the ridiculous, but he was deadly serious in approach. His line, executed with a forceful pen, was fluid and firm. Unlike Liao Bingxiong and Zhang Guangyu, Ding rarely employed colors or large areas of shading, preferring to leave the articulated contour to do the work. He achieved his bite by concentrating on facial expression, a technique that he learned from such Western artists as George Grosz and Käthe Kollwitz (the latter a radical German printmaker). Ding

⁸ *Zhoubao* (Weekly), 23 (February 9, 1946). See also Ding (1989).

always liked to play on contradictions. His unique method—the juxtaposition of images between oppressor and downtrodden, rich and poor, power abuser and victim—conjures up the image of a society in moral decline. His repeated portrayal of a bull-necked, greedy, and lustful Guomintang official became a much-hated symbol. Similar to Joseph Keppler’s business tycoons (“The Bosses of the Senate,” 1889) and George Grosz’s bigoted capitalists (“The Face of the Ruling Class,” 1921), Ding’s obese figure was intended to induce suspicion and contempt among his viewers toward the rich and the powerful.

Corruption bred distrust of the government, but a crumbling economy had a more direct bearing on the people’s livelihood. Nothing was more tragic than ordinary hard-working citizens who were no longer capable of feeding themselves. They were victims of economic peril. The situation was so bad that not even those in respected professions were immune from harsh realities. Liao Bingxiong’s “A Professor’s Meal” (*Jiaoshou zhi can*, 1945, Plate 5) depicts a professor’s family leading a life of abject poverty. Dressed in tatters and with empty bowls, the emaciated teacher and his family are eating his Western book to fill their empty stomachs.⁹ Sculptural in its effect, the cartoon bore an imprint of Covarrubias. But in contrast to the light-hearted style of the Mexican artist, Liao presented a distressing sight. The anguished looks of the family members (especially the children) tell a sad story. It must be especially excruciating and embarrassing for intellectuals, China’s traditional guardians of cultural truth, to be in a situation in which they were unable to put food on the table. In an age of runaway inflation, knowledge meant neither prestige nor financial security but starvation and disgrace. “A Professor’s Meal” reflected vividly the widespread disappointment among intellectuals at China’s future. Their loss of confidence in the Guomintang’s ability to govern spelled further trouble for the party. Carefully drawn with force and intensity, Liao’s piece combined bold imagination with uncommon design, a characteristic of the artist unequalled among his peers with the exception of Feng Zikai.¹⁰ Again, the dark shading did the job by capturing the degradation of a Chinese family.

This bleak picture of destitution was captured by Zhang Leping with a different image and in a different context. Instead of intellectuals or elites, Zhang’s subject was the urban unfortunates. He depicted city woes and tribulations of the people with a sharp eye in his famous comic strip, “The Vagrant Life of San Mao” (*San Mao liulangji*) (Zhang Leping 1984). A patriot and formerly deputy captain of the Cartoon Propaganda Corps during the war, Zhang was a humanist with an unassuming temperament (Zhang Leping 1989). His work lacked the savagery commonly associated with political cartoons. He preferred a gentler approach, believing that sharp satire and unyielding attack

⁹ Liao Bingxiong, “Jiaoshou zhi can” (Professor’s Meal), *Ren shi jian* (This Human World), 6 (August 20, 1947), cover. See also Liao (1984). The artist redrew the cartoon several times.

¹⁰ For an analysis of Feng Zikai’s cartoons, see Hung (1990).

were less effective in enlightening his readers about society's foibles. Such a lack of radicalism, however, did not diminish Zhang's forcefulness. On the contrary, his approach enhanced his status as a shrewd and persuasive social commentator precisely because it was unpretentious.

Zhang had created the character of San Mao (literally, Three Hairs) in 1935 (Bi and Huang 1986:258), but it did not gain widespread popularity until after the war when the cartoonist modified its earlier humorous style with strong social overtones. Unlike his earlier incarnation as a mischievous street urchin, the postwar San Mao is an unfortunate poor boy who lives a miserable life in Shanghai. Plagued by constant hunger and threatened by the evil elements in society, he suffers numerous misfortunes and is frequently bullied. He tries desperately to eke out a precarious existence in a world trapped in poverty and disease. The crumbling economy and the widening gap between the rich and the poor unfold before his eyes. In "Two Worlds" (Liangge shijie, 1947, Plate 6), for instance, Zhang Leping depicts two contrasting life styles: While the rich boy enjoys ice cream in a heated, lace-curtained home in a frigid winter night, San Mao and his friend shiver outside in cold. The artist's compassion for the poor and the downtrodden is clearly evident in this work. In a world of uncertainties, San Mao seems to have no idea of what tomorrow will bring. He is engaging in a futile struggle against overwhelming odds. Poverty notwithstanding, however, San Mao is never soulless. On many an occasion, he glares at his oppressor (city thug, heartless boss, and so on) with a defiant look. He appears dignified, despite his small frame and tattered clothes.

On the surface, there was little political message in Zhang's drawings'; but the recurrent images of wrenching poverty, urban lawlessness, and human tragedies in Zhang's cartoons conveyed a society hurtling toward dissolution. To many Chinese, such social ills masked even more serious political problems which thus demanded immediate attention. Moreover, in a time of crisis, art and politics were so intertwined that any drawing on social themes almost invariably carried political overtones. Zhang Leping might lack the sarcastic tone of a Liao Bingxiong or a Ding Cong, but his San Mao drawings nevertheless raised many more troubling questions for the authorities. What caused these human sufferings? Why did they persist unchecked? Who was responsible? Were there remedies? The San Mao comic strip gained an instant national following when it reappeared in Shanghai's influential newspaper, *Dagong bao*, in 1947. Readers greeted the fictional urchin with an outpouring of sympathy. He left an indelible image of the little guy enduring and prevailing in the face of every conceivable tyranny.¹¹ If Ding Cong's overweight Guomindang officials were the symbol of evil and oppression, Zhang Leping's San Mao represented one of their many victims. These two memorable yet

¹¹ See Zhang Leping (1957, 1989). Zhang's comic strip became so popular that it later was turned into a film in 1948 bearing the same title.

contrasting images continued to cast a lingering shadow on the Guomindang rule.

Jiang Jieshi's decision to launch a civil war against the Communists in late 1945 further alienated him from the Chinese people. The fateful move provoked immediate strong protest from the public, especially from intellectuals, students, and artists. Understandably, there was little appetite for another war after a devastating eight-year conflict with Japan that had claimed millions of lives, uprooted countless families, and ruined China's industry. What the country needed, many war-weary intellectuals argued, was not renewed hostility but political healing between the Nationalists and the Communists and, more important, time for reconstruction and needed reform. A civil war could once again turn China into a hellish land.

To Kong Ping, Jiang Jieshi's decision to rekindle the civil war is tantamount to a course of self-destruction ("Watch Yourself" [Dangxin ziji], 1946, Plate 7). Kong draws a picture of Jiang lighting the fuse of "Central China," while sitting atop a mammoth bomb of "All-Out Civil War." Left-wing artist Mi Gu's (Zhu Wushi, 1918–86) cartoon calls on the Chinese people to stop the war machine ("Citizens, Let's Turn Around the Cannon" [Gongminmen, ba paokou fanzhan qu], 1946, Plate 8). Such an opposition, according to the artist, contradicted the official policy and infuriated the government. Hua Junwu's (1915–) reproach was even more explicit. In his famous piece "Sharpening the Knife to Continue Killing" (Mo hao dao zai sha, 1947, Plate 9), Hua, a veteran Communist cartoonist, portrayed Jiang as a man driven by the evil intention of renewing the slaughter of Chinese people behind the shield of a peace plan.

The anger directed at the Guomindang was also aimed at the United States. America's role in its continued military and financial support of the Jiang Jieshi regime after the Sino-Japanese War was widely perceived by the Chinese public as a supporter of the government's repressive policy and the decision about civil war. General George C. Marshall's abortive attempt in 1946 to bring forth a coalition government between the Communists and the Nationalists added suspicion to the notion that Washington was interfering in China's internal affairs to protect its own interests. The negative image of the United States as an accomplice was visible in Chinese cartoons. Understandably, strong condemnation came largely from the left-wing circles. In "The Killing Smoke Screen" (Sharen de yanmu, 1946, Plate 10), Zhang Ding (1917–), a Communist cartoonist and the editor of *Northeast Cartoons* (*Dongbei manhua*), drew Jiang Jieshi flying in a plane with an American soldier, who is holding mediation flags. However, the plane is not on a lifesaving mission. On the contrary, it rains down bombs through a cloud of peace.¹² But criticisms also came from independent-minded artists, such as

¹² Zhang Ding used a pen name, Guan Cheng, to publish this piece. See *Dongbei huabao*, 6 (November 1, 1946), no page number. See also Zhang Ding (1985:57).

Wang Letian (1917–). The Americans, in Wang’s eyes, did not send much-needed food but plenty of munitions in the name of relief, to the great disappointment of the poverty-stricken Chinese (“Are These Our Food Aids?” [Zheshi gei women chi de?], Plate 11).

“A good caricature,” said a nineteenth-century Western artist, “is only fully appreciated by those who have been its victims” (Hess and Kaplan 1975:47). Facing mounting attack, the government officials moved to prohibit any criticism of the Guomintang policies. They prevented anything being said that departed from the official line. The Publication Law of 1937, harsher than its predecessor, the Publication Law of 1930, lengthened the list of forbidden and restricted subjects (Ting 1974:18–19). Newspapers and magazines had to be scrutinized by censors before they could be published; seditious literature, such as subjects related to Communism, was suppressed; and violated editors were jailed (Shi 1985; Li *et al.* 1959). “Even the storytellers have to choose their words carefully,” Edgar Snow (1935) remarked in an earlier article. “Since some of their tales, though hundreds of years old, are still pregnant with symbolic meaning in the midst of the oppression and disunity of present-day China.” The rules were so strict that, as Israel Epstein recalled, “correspondents could not mention that any Chungking [Chongqing] street was dirty” (MacKinnon and Friesen 1987:108). The combination of confiscations and bans resulted in the riddling of publications with blank space—known in those days derisively as skylights (*tianchuang*)—when the authorities removed the original stories.¹³ Such a measure did not win the government any friends, and predictably there were “increasing irritations” between the government and journalists, admitted Dong Xianguang (Hollington Tong, 1887–1971), Vice Minister of Information in charge of censorship and public relations.¹⁴ Chinese cartoonists wasted no time in lashing out against these rules. Ding Cong’s “Portrait of a ‘Model Citizen’” (‘Liangmin’ suxiang, 1945, Plate 12) displayed the artist’s displeasure. This drawing, which ran as the cover for *Weekly*, ridiculed the Guomintang, indicating that its notion of an ideal citizen must be someone whose mind has been thoroughly inspected, whose eyes cannot see, whose lips are sealed, and who can be easily bribed. But nothing was more dreaded than the Guomintang’s secret police, especially the notorious Blue Shirts under the command of Dai Li (1897–1946) (Eastman 1974: ch.2). Ding Cong’s “Omnipresence” (Wu suo bu zai, 1946, Plate 13) describes how people live a life of fear under constant harassment and arrest. Ding drew Jiang Jieshi’s secret police as a colossal monster eavesdropping behind people’s back. The shadowy figure with an enlarged head is half-concealed, looming large at the background while a man and a woman are

¹³ See, for example, *Zhoubao*, 19 (January 12, 1946), 6; *Bitan* (Sketches), 1 (September 1, 1941), 42–43.

¹⁴ See Tong (n.d.:252). It is now widely agreed among scholars that the Guomintang’s harsh censorship policies further undermined people’s confidence in its rule.

sitting gingerly and separately on the couch to avoid getting into trouble. The figure's accusing eyes send a shudder through viewers. "[In these days,] the secret police and the people live 'inseparable together as body and shadow (*xing-ying bu li*),' " Ding remarked sarcastically.¹⁵ In a similar vein, Liao Bingxiong's "Under Close Surveillance" (Quan shi, Plate 14)—another part of *The Cat Kingdom* series—portrays the government's notorious spying network on campus. Behind the wall lurks a monstrous dog with chains in his hands; he is constantly looking for victims. The symbol of the dog, as folklorist Wolfram Eberhard (1986:80–82) informs us, has varied connotations in different parts of China. The animal in Liao's piece undoubtedly meant a running dog (*zougou*)—a servile follower of the government's order. The nocturnal scene and his sharp claws add an eerie feeling to the drawing. Any murmur of criticism would bring years in prison. Others simply disappeared for good. And for some, it meant violent death. The assassination of the prominent poet, Wen Yiduo (1899–1946), in Kunming in the summer of 1946 was a chilly reminder that the Guomindang would go to any length to silence its critics.

AESTHETIC AND A MASS ART

But to say that postwar Chinese cartoons were a political art was not to say that they were devoid of artistic value, the Chinese cartoonists insisted. They believed that to view cartoons merely as historical products with ephemeral value was to deny their legitimate place in contemporary art. Surely, art speaks its own language; even political art has its own stylistic impulses and aesthetic concerns. In principle, a piece of art inevitably raises the fundamental question of the tension between form and content. Few Chinese cartoonists would have disagreed with Kant's formula that a work of art exhibits "purposiveness without purpose" (Abrams 1977:27). Although there was a conviction among Chinese cartoonists that the works of a serious artist in a troubled era must accurately reflect the problems of the day, they also believed that artists must be in constant pursuit of the ideal of pure beauty in their works and the quality of artworks could not be judged exclusively by their contents nor their utility without considering their beauty, style, and method of presentation. "Content and style are the two most vital ingredients of a cartoon," stated art critic Huang Mao (1947:52–53). "If the ideas behind a cartoon are its brain, then technique [drawing] is its hand." To Liao Bingxiong and Ding Cong, cartooning was an artistic activity with an element of irreducible playfulness in it. They argued that the creative process possessed an element of freedom unrelated to extrinsic factors, and they wished to assert the primacy of individual vision and style over their work. A genuine artist, Liao con-

¹⁵ See Ding Cong's cartoon, "Xing-yin bu li" (Inseparable as Body and Shadow), in Ding (1984:24, also 1989).

tended, must be a seeker of aesthetic beauty, not just a preacher of social and political ideals (Liao 1990). Such an argument rested on an assumption that the cartoon, like other arts, embodied timeless quality and yielded universal appeal.

Liao Bingxiong's works showed signs of distinctive aesthetic personality. His unique blend of fantasy and reality demonstrated his technical virtuosity, and his skillful use of color and tone reflected his acute awareness of expression. Although Liao never let technique overshadow the idea of his work, he realized that the aesthetic appeal of his work and how he presented it would determine its outcome. Like Zhang Guangyu, Liao argued that the pictorial element carried the bulk of the message and could have the most dramatic impact on the audience when executed correctly (Huang Mao 1947:64–65). Liao's *The Cat Kingdom* was testimony to such a claim. It was, to some degree, an aesthetic statement scrupulously and intelligently put together. Though a series in conception, each piece of *The Cat Kingdom* was a fresh beginning rich in visual effect. The combination of shifting colors, Covarrubias-like geometric shapes, and exaggerated figures yielded spectacular results and made him one of the most innovative cartoonists of his generation. Liao's approach was unconventional, and his art is revelatory to the growing tensions between established norms and unorthodox imagination.

Liao Bingxiong's and his colleagues' quest for aesthetic beauty was associated closely with their desire to create a distinctive Chinese art. This came against the backdrop of a strong Western presence. To be sure, there is no question that Chinese cartoonists were profoundly influenced by Western techniques. Use of a pen (rather than the traditional brush) and drawings rich in black and white contrast were already quite apparent in the works of such early cartoonists as Shen Bochen (1889–1920). The Western devices to show perspective, such as figures decreasing in scale as they recede into the background, were commonly used by Te Wei and others. Perhaps the most visible Western impact is in the area of figure drawing. In general, despite its long tradition of figure subjects, Chinese painting is weak in subtle facial and bodily expression, largely because it approached the human body in a way different from Western artists. While Renaissance painters seemed to believe that the human body held the secrets to the universe, their Chinese counterparts viewed the body merely as a small, hence less significant, part in an all encompassing and impersonal natural world. This long-held artistic concept eroded rapidly when Chinese cartoonists opened their eyes to the West. Daumier's rich repertoire of figure drawings and Kollwitz's acute grasp of pose and gesture became instant models to be emulated¹⁶; and Liao Bingxiong and Ding Cong were two of the most successful students.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the influence of such Western artists as Daumier and Kollwitz in China, see Hung (forthcoming).

The late 1930s, however, saw a move away from an emphasis on foreign influence to cultivating a native form of art. Such a move stemmed in part from the War of Resistance, which spurred an unprecedented wave of nationalism in the country and rekindled an interest in the glories of the Chinese past, and in part from the Chinese cartoonists' realization that unless they successfully developed a distinct personality of their own, their works would never be fully accepted by the Chinese. "Chinese cartoons must be Sincized," appealed Huang Mao (1940, 1989). Liao Bingxiong was equally vocal in proposing an art form different from the West. He criticized budding artists for blindly copying the style and composition of such Western masters as Covarrubias and Low while belittling their own roots (Liao 1990). Liao, of course, showed no aversion to Western influence, for he himself was its beneficiary. What he had in mind was the creation of a truly great and original Chinese art by mixing Western influence with native elements. His cartoon of the Chinese professor eating a Western book can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the two worlds.

But what exactly constituted this Chinese quality in art was left undefined. Huang Mao, however, offered his suggestion. To create a genuine national art, he proposed, artists must attempt to adopt the Western use of perspective and of human anatomy into Chinese traditional brush-and-ink painting (Huang Mao 1947:64). On the other hand, Liao Bingxiong encouraged his colleagues to learn from the nation's artistic traditions, especially the rich and colorful folk art. Liao's own works clearly drew on popular sources and imagery for their appeal. *The Cat Kingdom* displayed the unmistakable influence of Chinese folk art. As a child growing up in Guangzhou, Liao was fascinated by Cantonese folktales and *muyu shu*, a type of popular Cantonese songs (Liao 1984: Chronological Table; Liao 1990). He was particularly impressed by the unassuming spirit and great vitality exuded in the common people's artifacts, such as New Year pictures and paper crafts. And his style and content conveyed a sense of brightness and simplicity which bore a close resemblance to the local traditions. Liao also had a knack for adorning his works, especially titles, with local rhymes and idioms, using Cantonese dialects to drive home familiar messages. To him, the very presence of folk themes gave Chinese cartoons their unique flavor. Liao was not alone in urging such a move. His idea was echoed by other cartoonists as well. Ding Cong's use of traditional handscroll for his well-known piece, "Social Phenomena" (Xianxiang tu, 1944), which again portrays the bleak life under the Guomindang and Zhang Guangyu's blending of Western techniques with Chinese traditional decorative art in his works, especially his *Journey to the West*, are some of the better known examples.

The efforts of the Chinese cartoonists to develop a new native pictorial language and to achieve an independent status for their art fell in line with the search by modern Chinese intellectuals for a genuine cultural form indepen-

dent of the West since the May Fourth era.¹⁷ Like their May Fourth predecessors, the cartoonists' move was prompted by the rejection of the antique artistic style and the desire to be liberated from China's tradition. Like satire, the cartoon is by its very nature a deviation from approved norms; and cartoonists were always veering toward the edge of these norms from the time that they first appeared on the art scene in the early decades of this century. The potential for conflict with established art circles became apparent as soon as the young cartoonists began to show their work and attempted to redefine the conception of art. Traditional-style artists had some harsh words for the young cartoonists. Newcomers trying to force their way into art circles were annoying, if not threatening. To the traditional-style artists, cartoonists were artistically inferior and socially marginal. The conservatives looked upon them as unwelcome intruders who not only borrowed arbitrarily from the West but also willfully challenged fixed and established standards of good and bad in art. They dismissed the cartoon as "lowbrow," "vulgar," and too "plebeian" as an art form. At best, the cartoon was a form of doodling (*manbi*), which lacked any substantial content and, said one derisively, "not even worthy of being hung on the wall" (Xinbo 1941). These traditionalists regarded cartoonists as shoddy artists who indulged in crass commercialism and lacked creativity of their own. To them, cartoons were nothing more than tasteless advertisement art (*guanggao hua*), devoid of any genuine artistic value (Zhang Guangyu 1941). One traditional-style painter even went so far as to condemn cartoonists as nothing more than the "scum of art" (*yishu de bailei*) (Zhu Xingyi 1935).

The condescension of the traditional-style artists for cartoons caused a reaction by cartoonists whose response signified a fierce opposition to the established art circles. This kind of charge, the cartoonists said, revealed nothing but the traditional-style artists' deep-rooted bias against cartoons and their total ignorance of the spirit of the times. The cartoonists claimed that their craft was not a lesser medium but a wonderful way to express life in art. Although the word *man* in the singular form could mean romantic, as in the term *langman* (romantic), the term *manhua* (cartoon) meant something entirely different. This term, Lu Shaofei (1903–) contended, denoted spontaneity and playfulness, a kind of free-flow drawing which demanded mastery of a sophisticated technique on the artist's part (Lu 1937, 1989). A good cartoon, Lu added, could easily display a level of artistic adroitness equal, if not superior, to any other polished art. "Looking at cartoons is like sipping good wine or enjoying a cigarette, it brings a sense of excitement," Huang Miaozi (1913–) echoed (1936).

Aesthetic pursuit notwithstanding, cartoonists had a strong aversion to the idea that an artist should be preoccupied with the musings of individual

¹⁷ For a discussion of new intellectual climate of the early decades of twentieth-century China, see Chow (1960) and Lin (1978).

artistic quest. To do so, many argued, would render art incomprehensible to the general public. The young cartoonists had never fully addressed the tension between art as a pure form and as a practical response to contemporary societal torments. The exigencies of the time called not for intellectual debate but instant commitment. For Liao Bingxiong and his colleagues, cartooning was at once a public and private undertaking. In times of upheaval and as committed artists, they overlooked the tension between the two and came down heavily on the art's public role. To them, cartoons were the best combination of politics and art.

The relevancy of their art made cartoons one of the dominant shapers of the time, cartoonists claimed. As new artists, they were eager to establish a novel art form different from the past. Despite differences in style, the majority of young artists endeavored to free art from classicism, so there was an inherent opposition to the establishment in their work. According to them, traditional-style artists¹⁸ were eccentric and grounded in the established literati painting tradition, incapable of reflecting contemporary ills or offering any guidance to China's future. Traditional landscape and flower-and-bird paintings, the cartoonists argued, remained hopelessly out of touch with reality. The traditionalists' subject matter was too esoteric to be understood by the uneducated; and their self-proclaimed role as the arbiter of artistic taste was ground for repudiation. The traditional painters' excessive emphasis on high art left them insensitive to changes, cartoonists added. "Among all kinds of intellectuals," Huang Mao stated bluntly, "traditional-style painters are probably the one group who remains the most detached from the people." Even worse, Huang Mao continued, old-fashioned artists regarded themselves as talented scholars (*ming shi*) who cast a contemptuous look at the people and "indulg[e] in constant self-admiration in their ivory towers" (Huang Mao 1949:3–4). Many said that good art could only come from direct, personal observation and meaningful works must carry a set of new values, not a return to the old. Artists must "open their eyes to see the real society," one cartoonist insisted (Huang Miaozi 1935:61). To Liao Bingxiong and Ding Cong, cartooning was more a public than a solitary exercise involving a public dimension far beyond one's private space and individual interest. Such a conviction to bring art to a mass audience resembled a Prometheus who was determined to bring fire from the avaricious few to many.¹⁹

The nature and unique development of the cartoon also made it more likely to identify with the mass audience. Like so much modernist art, Chinese cartoons were both a product of the modern era and a shaper of modern taste. Originated as an illustrated art in newspapers at the turn of the century,

¹⁸ For a discussion of traditional Chinese art, see Murck (1976).

¹⁹ Chinese cartoonists used the image of Prometheus in a number of different ways. For example, in Liao Bingxiong's "Jin zhi Puluomixiushi" (Today's Prometheus, 1945), he used the image to ridicule the rich and the powerful. See Liao (1945).

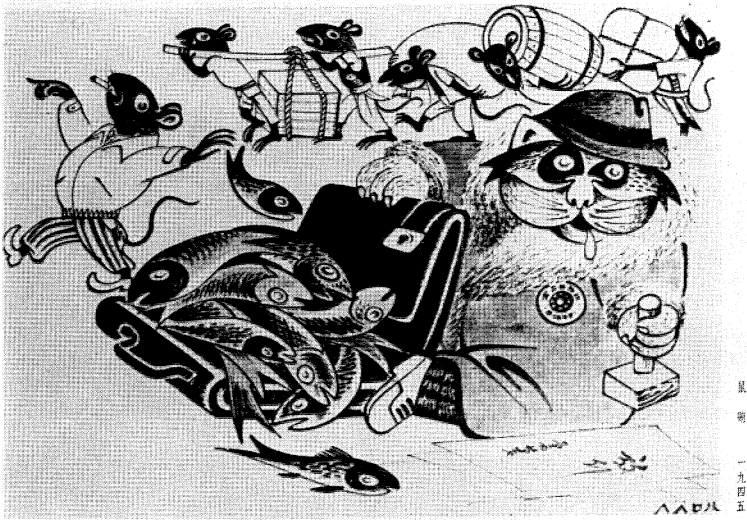


PLATE 1. Liao Bingxiong, "Mouse Bribery." The characters on the document being stamped read, "Passed." Source: Liao (1984).



猫判 1945

PLATE 2. Liao Bingxiong, "Cat Judge." The sign at the top reads, "a bright mirror." This traditionally indicates perspicuousness in judgment. The characters on the front of the desk say, "just and wise." Source: Liao (1984).



PLATE 3. Zhang Guangyu, "Journey to the West." Piggy is forced to give gold to a guard of the Kingdom of Paper Money. Source: Zhang Guangyu (1983:ch.6, p.6).



作聽丁 僕公

PLATE 4. Ding Cong, "A Public Servant." Source: *Zhoubao* 23 (February 9, 1946), cover.

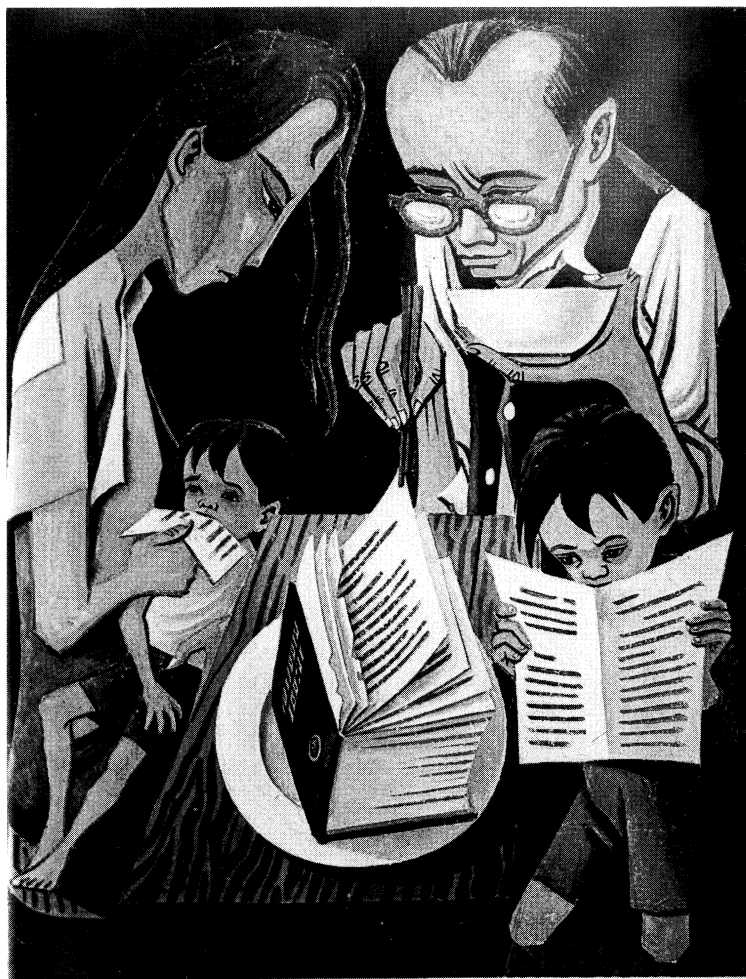
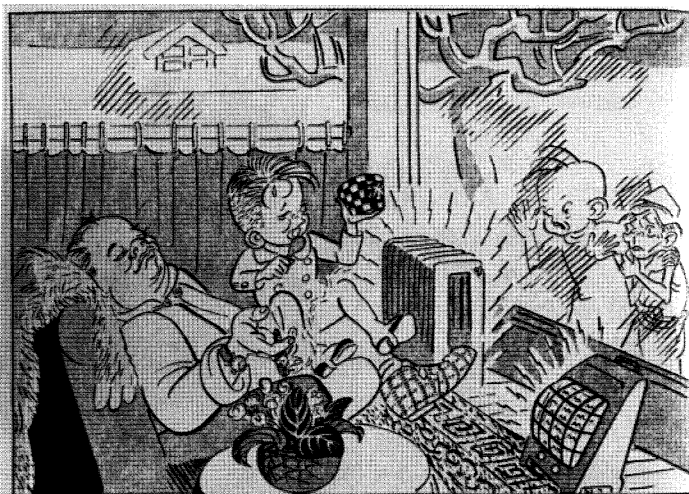


PLATE 5. Liao Bingxiong, "A Professor's Meal." Source: Liao (1984).



两个世界

PLATE 6. Zhang Leping, "Two Worlds." Source: Zhang Leping (1984:99).



PLATE 7. Kong Ping, "Watch Yourself." The characters on the bomb say, "all-out civil war"; those on the fuse read, "Central China." Source: *Xiaoxi* (News), no. 12 (May 16, 1946), 178.



PLATE 8. Mi Gu, "Citizens, Let's Turn Around the Cannon." Source: *Wencui* (The Articles' Digest), 1:43 (August 15, 1946), 4.

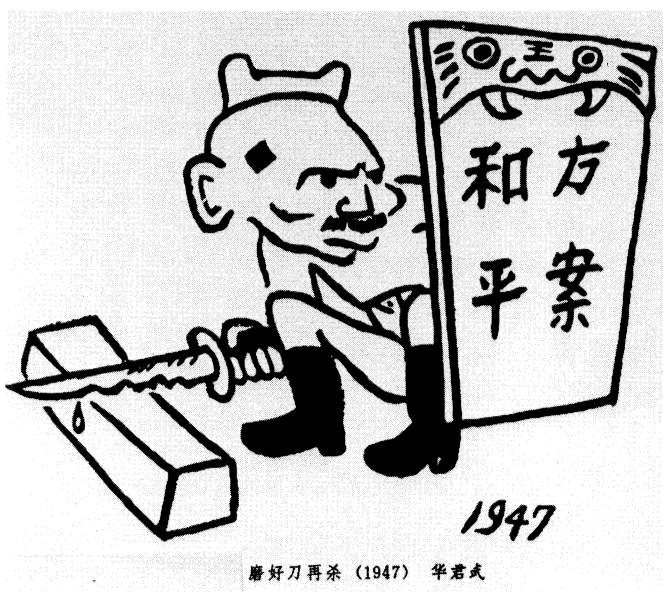


PLATE 9. Hua Junwu, "Sharpening the Knife to Continue Killing." The characters on the shield read, "peace plan." Source: Bi and Huang (1986: Plate 278).



PLATE 10. Zhang Ding (Guan Cheng), "The Killing Smoke Screen." The American soldier holds two flags which read, "mediation." The clouds are marked, "peace," and the characters near the ground read, "peaceful people." Source: *Dongbei manhua*, 6 (November 1, 1946).

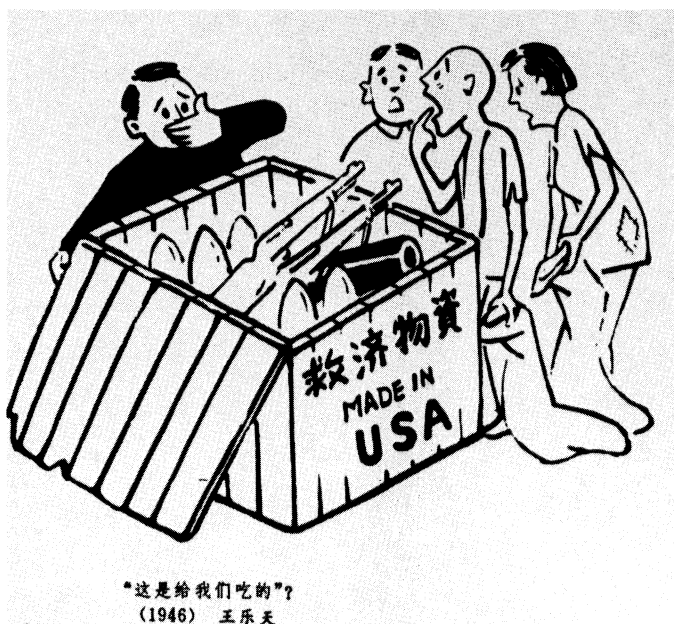


PLATE 11. Wang Letian, "Are These Our Food Aids?" The crate is marked, "relief materials." Source: Bi and Huang (1986: Plate 290).

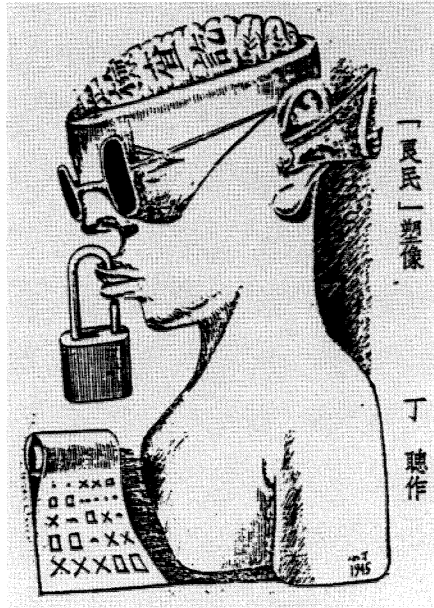


PLATE 12. Ding Cong, "Portrait of a 'Model Citizen.'" The characters on the brain read, "checked." Source: *Zhoubao*, no. 15 (December 15, 1945), cover.

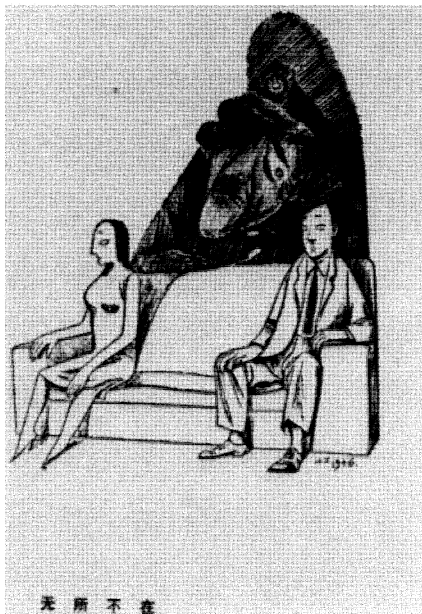


PLATE 13. Ding Cong, "Omnipresence." Source: Ding (1984:25).



PLATE 14. Liao Bingxiong, "Under Close Surveillance." Source: Liao (1984).

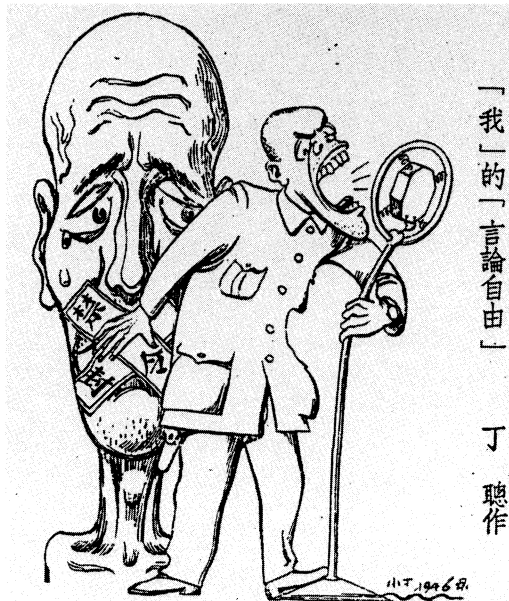


PLATE 15. Ding Cong, "My 'Freedom of Speech.'" The characters on the man's mouth read, "banned." Source: *Zhoubao*, nos. 49–50 (August 24, 1946), cover.

cartoons embodied a lowbrow nature rarely associated with a decorous, aristocratic style; they targeted a mass audience, not a literate few. The reliance on new means of communication—newspapers and magazines—also made the cartoons broader in appeal, wider in circulation, and more popular in nature. The cartoonists believed that cartoons were well liked by the public, not only because they were a simple art but, more important, because they also mirrored and commented on society, conveying the spirit of the people with directness and vividness. Art thus became an integral, not extraneous, part of life. And by appealing to the masses, postwar cartoons legitimized popular sentiment as a yardstick of aesthetic judgment.

INFLUENCE

Cartoons, of course, were not the only form of popular medium through which frustration and discontentment about the government were aired. Chinese artists and writers tried other means, such as spoken drama, as well and with success. Dramatist Chen Baichen's (1908–) highly acclaimed comedy play, *The Chart of Official Promotion (Shengguan tu)*, effectively satirized corruption in the government (Chen 1981, 1989). Yet the visual art remained the most powerful and entertaining way to reach mass audiences. In comparison with a writer, an artist has an easier task in communicating his feeling more freely because he can work through line, color, and facial expression. No written word seems adequate to encompass the forcefulness and emotional range of the cartoon. In postwar China, political cartoons were barometers of public opinion, contributing to the creation of public perception about the government and helping to shape the course of history.

That art can provide an important channel for popular opinion was recently given convincing treatment by Thomas Crow in his study of the salon as a crucial art force in shaping the public mind in eighteenth-century Paris (Crow 1985). This was explored more theoretically by Jürgen Habermas, who argues that art has a role in the formation of what he called a “public sphere,” which he defines as “a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” (Habermas 1989a:231, 1989b). But what exactly is public opinion? To Rousseau, this term meant the “opinion of others in society.” Rousseau, however, viewed public opinion more as, in the words of Keith Baker, “the collective expression of the moral and social values of a people” and less as an expression of political will (Baker 1987:232). Habermas, on the other hand, saw public opinion as the views shared by people who participate in the rational-critical debate on issues of public concern (Habermas 1989b: especially ch.4). Public opinion is therefore different from mere opinion (prejudice, arbitrary views) because of its suggestion of a reasoning populace. The notion of public opinion and public sphere, according to Habermas, served as a foundation for democracy in the development of a number of institutions that facilitate extensive open discussion about public

affairs. That discussion can be critical of the state. The rise and expansion of public opinion, especially the press, as a rival force to royal authority in pre-revolutionary France is a case in point.²⁰ Such a condition, however, did not exist in postwar China. The domination of an authoritarian government, such as the Guomindang, made the expansion of civic power and the establishment of a nonpartisan political force extremely difficult, if not impossible. Neither the modern Chinese press nor the cartoon, an important component of modern journalism, constituted an independent, institutional challenge to the authorities.

But to say that cartoons posed no institutional challenge to the government is not to deny their impact on society. Although it constituted no assertion of civic power against the state, postwar Chinese cartooning—a part of what Habermas would call “media of the public sphere” (Habermas 1989a:231)—can be viewed as popular opinion in action because of the heated discussions concerning state affairs generated and the public emotions stirred. In the past, the study of politics has largely focused on power relationships in the highest spheres of government. Politics seemed to happen only within the structure of government or of parties. But this article argues that politics is also about feelings, opinions, and images. Cartoonists created political images which offer a new avenue to the study of political culture and created a contentious and explosive public opinion which can hardly be overlooked. Biting drawings, such as Liao’s Bingxiong’s “Mouse Bribery,” epitomized widespread public distrust of the government; and Zhang Leping’s “Two Worlds” pointed to the deepening economic crisis in the country. For historians looking for answers for the rapid collapse of the Guomindang regime in the late 1940s, cartoons contribute a fresh assessment of this tumultuous period.

But what effect did this postwar cartoon activity really have on the people or on the government? What was the diffusion of cartoons? Can we measure the influence of this particular brand of visual arts in a time of political upheaval in China? Although the precise way in which cartoons influence society is still not clearly understood and we have no exact means of measuring the extent of public opinion, an analysis of postwar cartoon images and their impact can shed important light on the public perception of the government in postwar China. True, postwar cartoons produced no dramatic downfall of a Boss Tweed in China. Nor was there a Louis Raemaekers, the Dutch artist whose anti-German cartoons were credited with helping to swing American opinion to the side of the Allies during the First World War. But Chinese cartoons did have a considerable impact on the political climate of the time. Like Mexican cartoons, which, according to Victor Alba, strongly influenced the political life of Mexico in the period immediately prior to the Mexican Revolution (Alba 1967), postwar Chinese cartoons sparked a strong repercus-

²⁰ See Habermas (1989b:181–95). For a detailed historical analysis of the press in pre-revolutionary France, see Censer and Popkin (1987); see also Ozouf (1988).

sion in China's political arena. They fueled opposition to a government mired in political malaise. Critical pictorial images galvanized popular discontentment and grievances against Jiang Jieshi and his policies and ultimately hastened his demise.

"Traditionally," argues W. A. Coupe (1986:9), "the cartoonist's function has been a negative one." Chinese postwar political cartoons fell into the same category. Notwithstanding the argument by many that humor is an essential ingredient of the cartoon (Press 1981:12; Kemnitz 1973:82–83), Chinese political drawings were surprisingly devoid of humorous content, containing instead barbed commentary on contemporary scenes. Far from playing the role of amused observers, Chinese cartoonists were social and political critics who wielded powerful brushes, manipulating public opinion through their art. Each work seemed a devastating statement. At times the cartoonists appeared painfully pessimistic, affirming no faith that the nation's nightmare would soon be over, a gloomy outlook which reflected their repeatedly dashed hopes for a rejuvenated China and their growing anxiety about the uncertain future.

Despite their frustration, the cartoonists' voices were loud and bitter; and their drawings revealed valuable information about their attitudes and those of the people they tried to reach. In his article, "On a Theory of Political Caricature," Lawrence Streicher (1967: especially, 444) suggests that to have a better theoretical understanding of political caricature, one must have a clear understanding of the audiences. Streicher's point underscores the importance of the cartoon as a public art, an art which takes very seriously the issue of the interaction between a visual form and its audience. This certainly was central to the understanding of the impact of Chinese cartoons. Although the notion of the distribution of cartoon materials in the late 1940s remains vague due to the lack of documentary evidence, the enormous interest in postwar cartoons, such as the enthusiastic response received by *The Cat Kingdom* and *Journey to the West*, suggests their widespread impact and precludes the assumption that their audience is passive.

To avoid censors, who paid more attention to the printed material but less to the exhibition, the cartoonists decided, in Ding Cong's words, to "bring drawings directly to the viewers."²¹ Both individual exhibitions, such as Liao Bingxiong's *The Cat Kingdom* and Zhang Guangyu's *Journey to the West*, and collective exhibitions, such as the joint effort by Ye Qianyu, Liao Bingxiong, Ding Cong, Zhang Guangyu, and others mounted in Chongqing in March 1945 at the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association, were shown. The collective show was subsequently held in other locations, including Chengdu (Bi and Huang 1986:180–2). All of these works reiterated the charge that the present political system was flawed and that the continuing dictatorship of the Guomindang threatened to undermine the fragile democracy and to plunge

²¹ See Ding Cong's preface to Zhang Guangyu (1983). See also Huang Mengtian (1981:60).

the country into chaos, and they were all warmly embraced by the general public.²² The cartoonists also published their works in newspapers and magazines to reach a wider audience: Zhang Leping in the influential newspaper, *Dagong bao*, and Ding Cong, in *Weekly*. Publications with regular cartoons as their features, such as *Weekly* and *Dagong bao*, won wide readership. *Weekly* became so popular that readers snapped it up as soon as it hit the stands.²³ Many editions had to be reprinted to meet the increasing demand. Ding Cong's cartoons in *Weekly* became a major attraction, commanding a wide audience, as evidenced in the abundant enthusiastic letters he received from his readers (Bi and Huang 1986:240).

Still, under the watchful eye of the government censorship, cartoonists had to tiptoe on a fine line. To circumvent censorship, they camouflaged their real intent. Liao Bingxiong used cats and mice, while Zhang Guangyu resorted to a traditional story. Layers of meanings were masked behind the nonetheless unambiguous images. The juxtaposition of reality and fantasy made the cartoon shows a resounding success and had the practical effect of keeping censorship at bay. The shows drew mixed audiences with no distinction in socioeconomic or cultural lines.²⁴ "The line waiting to see the joint cartoon show at the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association was long and had to turn many corners," according to one eyewitness account (Huang Mengtian 1981:60). Guo Moruo (1892–1978), the prominent left-wing writer, responded enthusiastically after visiting Liao Bingxiong's *The Cat Kingdom* show in Chongqing, lauding the artist's unusual achievement (Huang Mengtian 1981:62). As a Communist, Guo's reaction was expected, and his comment could have very well carried an ulterior motive. But the cartoons also won applause from many independent-minded intellectuals, including such respected writers as Ye Shaojun (Ye Shengtao, 1894–1988). Ye endorsed Ding Cong's "Social Phenomena" with a passionate poem, which includes the lines: "Do not misread the laughter in these drawings/Embedded in it is a bitter sense of sorrow" (Bi and Huang 1986:240–1).

Liao Bingxiong's bitter and satiric tones eventually got him in trouble. Under pressure, his plans for *The Cat Kingdom* show were canceled in Guangzhou in July 1946 and in Shanghai in late 1946. Ding Cong met the

²² See, for example, Ding Cong's preface to Zhang Guangyu (1983).

²³ *Zhoubao* (Weekly) was edited by writers Tang Tao (1913–92) and Ke Ling (1909–) and began publication on September 8, 1945. Because of its popularity, many issues of the magazine went through more than one printing. For example, the first issue went through at least three printings; the tenth (November 7, 1945) had two; and the last (August 24, 1946), at least three. Editors Tang Tao and Ke Ling were obviously proud of the magazine's success, although they gave no figure of its circulation. See *Zhoubao*, 49–50 (August 24, 1946), 2. See also Tang (1989), Ke (1986: especially 103, 105; 1989).

²⁴ According to Wilma Fairbank (1991), both Liao Bingxiong's and Zhang Guangyu's show "drew the admiration of crowds and not, as far as I knew, drastic attacks by officials." Other sources indicate that audiences came from all walks of life. See Huang Mengtian (1981:60) and Ye (1985:182; 1989).

same fate. He fled to Hong Kong from Chongqing in 1947 to escape persecution. Ke Ling, the editor of *Weekly*, was summoned by the Guomindang authorities for questioning in late 1945 (Ke 1986:110–1). As criticism from the journal mounted, the Guomindang finally shut down not only the *Weekly* in August 1946 but also *Democracy* (*Minzhu*), another popular magazine critical of the government, in October of the same year, and others.²⁵ Closing down magazines, including cartoon publications, by the Guomindang was certainly not new. In the 1930s, such popular magazines as *Independent Cartoons* (*Duli manhua*) were banned because of their allegedly critical stand against the government.²⁶ The public reaction then was rather mute. The similar move by the government in 1946, however, triggered a widespread protest from a large number of writers and artists who were sympathetic to the magazines, indicating the increasing discontentment among the populace and the growing influence of the pictorial language.²⁷ In the closing issue of the *Weekly*, Ding Cong again let his cartoon, “‘My’ ‘Freedom of Speech’” (‘Wo’ de ‘yanlun ziyou,’ 1946, Plate 15) do the talking. While a bureaucrat harangues in front of a microphone, a common man has his mouth sealed by the ban order. The juxtaposition of the two images is striking. The ferocious look on the government official’s face indicates the despotic and illegitimate nature of the prohibition, and the head of an emaciated body adds one more chapter to the notorious record of the government’s intellectual repression. Ding’s picture alluded to a familiar Chinese saying, “While the magistrates are free to burn down houses, the common people are prohibited even to light lamps” (*zhi xu zhouguan fanghuo, bu xu baixing diandeng*). His sure line proclaimed yet another jeremiad about the catastrophe looming ahead.

The significance and influence of postwar Chinese political cartoons must be understood in the larger context of the development of public opinion in modern China. The rise of Chinese cartoons opened a new mode of representing political ideas in China. Cartoons were at once a means of political expression and testimony to prevailing ideas. Like the Mexican cartoonists before the revolution of 1910–17 who portrayed political and economic leaders as monsters (Alba 1967) and the German cartoonists during the Revolution of 1848 who spoke openly about the future of their nation (Coupe 1967), Chinese cartoonists were intensely political. They cultivated compelling symbols to lash out at the establishment. While corpulent frames with vicious looks stood for the wicked public figures and avaricious merchants, little San Mao represented the deprived and the victimized. Moreover, colossal shadows reminded people of the Guomindang repression. Together they showed that popular protest would not go away by government decree, even when

²⁵ The magazine, *Minzhu* (Democracy), was edited by the noted literary historian, Zheng Zhenduo (1898–1958). The last issue (vol. 2: nos. 3–4) was published on October 31, 1946.

²⁶ For a list of banned journals in 1936, see Zhang Jinglu (1959:177–82, especially 180).

²⁷ See *Zhoubao*, 49–50 (August 24, 1946), 4–8.

enforced by a policy of fear and intimidation. Images create dramatic effect. In the French Revolution, the image of Bastille became a dominant symbol of the transition from Old Regime's despotism to the new era of liberty (Reichardt 1989:226). During the Second World War, Daniel Fitzpatrick's tumbling swastika brought home the terrifying image of a nation caught in the destructive path of the Nazi juggernaut (Fitzpatrick 1953). Likewise, China's postwar cartoons documented the unfolding political crisis and crippling economy with graphic directness. Viewers saw a government confused and in deep trouble and what authority it did have quickly evaporating.

The enthusiasm that these drawings generated pointed not to a group of passive consumers of popular culture but to viewers capable of voicing their own concerns, even if indirectly by flocking to the cartoon shows or by writing favorable letters to *Weekly*. Cartoons, therefore, became a channel for venting public feelings and a forum for discussing politics in the China of the 1940s. Chinese cartoonists saw the cartoons as more than vehicles of entertainment or mere chronicles of the events of the day. The practitioners of this type of visual protest displayed sophisticated mastery of technique and placed a high value on their art as effective vehicle of persuasion. They urged that cartoons be enlisted directly in exposing the ills of the government, so they rendered the political message accessible and comprehensible. The cartoonists' drawings captured vividly both the growing alienation of intellectuals in society and the widening gap between the leadership and the people. For such artists as Liao Bingxiong and Ding Cong, the Guomindang was a party of futility. Such a prevailing disillusionment eventually dealt a deadly blow to the party in 1949.

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